POLYVAGAL AKADEMIE

PVI INTERNATIONAL GATHERING — POSTER SESSION
Navigating Conflict with a Resilient Nervous System
SEPT 22 – 24, 2026 · IN-PERSON & ONLINE

A VISUAL-CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

When Theory Speaks to the Body — Bringing *Polyvagal Theory* to life through *imagery and embodied language*.

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↳ *Six key concepts of Polyvagal Theory — the map on which everything else unfolds.*

Autonomic Hierarchy
"The hierarchy reveals itself especially in crisis."

Vagal Brake
"Without it: overdriven, or lethargic."

Mixed States
"Protection and engagement, held at once."

Neuro-ception
"Your body checks the situation, quietly."

Co-Regulation
"No intervention holds without rhythm of attunement."

Safe-Enough Spaces
"Community as the ground for connection in safety."

↳ *Four perspectives on the book and its practice — from foundational idea to embodied toolkit.*

A THE BOOK — IN ONE BREATH

The Physiology of Connectedness is a comprehensive learning book for therapists, educators, and social practitioners. In eight chapters, it moves from the neurophysiology of the autonomic nervous system through interoceptive self-awareness to therapeutic, somatic, and community-oriented practice.

Each chapter combines conceptual depth, original illustrations and an *embodied language* that renders neurobiological processes perceivable and practically navigable.

> *A practice-informed rather than purely theory-led epistemology.*

Where most accounts stay either neurobiological or therapeutic, this book moves continuously between both registers — and outward into educational and community practice. It is a book for people who work with other nervous systems, not just with theories about them.

B WHY THIS MATTERS IN CONFLICT

When the nervous system perceives threat, the social engagement system recedes. What looks like "a conflict" is often the body's protective response. A polyvagal-informed practice asks a different first question:

> *Not "who is right?" — but "whose nervous system is in protection right now?"*

Recognising the autonomic signature beneath behaviour changes what is possible: escalation can be interrupted, defence met with co-regulation, rupture turned toward repair.

The shift is small but consequential: when we read protective physiology rather than personality, the conversation changes shape. Defence is not opposition. Withdrawal is not absence. Each is information about what the nervous system can hold right now.

C MIXED STATES — THE GRAMMAR OF CONFLICT

Conflict rarely arrives as clean fight, flight, or freeze. It arrives as someone trying to stay in contact *while* protecting themselves at the same time — a *mixed state*.

The book develops two families: *defensive* mixtures (mobilisation under threat, contact-with-protection) and *regenerative* mixtures (active engagement held by safety, play, intimacy).

> *Holding ambivalence is increasingly described as the core of resilience.*

Mixed states are the everyday norm, not the exception — a sign of a nervous system that has learned to combine impulses rather than collapse into one. The work is not to eliminate the protective layer but to keep it in conversation with the engaging one.

D FROM THE EMBODIED TOOLKIT

01 RESONANCE BREATHING
Engaging the vagal brake — slowing the exhale to widen the regulatory window.

02 SELF-HAVENING
The healing power of touch as somatic anchor.

03 MOVEMENT THAT REGULATES
From gentle rhythm to discharge — rhythm restores agency.

04 CO-REGULATION AS CRAFT
Pacing, gaze, prosody — the relational micro-grammar of safety.

Each tool works because it speaks the body's language first — rhythm, contact, breath, pace. None replaces the others; together they form a toolkit for moving between concept and lived practice.

↳ *From concept to practice — four invitations to take with you.*

TRY IT NOW · 30 SECONDS

A micro check-in with your own nervous system.

Can you sense...

— an easy breath out, longer than the in-breath?

— your feet on the ground, your seat in the chair?

— any curiosity about who is near you right now?

Yes to all three: your ventral-vagal system is online. If not — just notice. The noticing itself is the practice.

WHEN CONFLICT ARISES

A three-step pocket map.

01 · PAUSE — Lengthen the exhale. The vagal brake responds within a single breath.

02 · NOTICE — Not "who is right?" — but "whose nervous system is in protection right now? Mine? Theirs? The field's?"

03 · BRIDGE — Before words: pacing, prosody, gaze. Connection precedes content.

THE TWO FACES OF MIXED STATES

Conflict reveals which one is in charge.

DEFENSIVE
contact under protection: smiling while frozen · over-functioning to keep the peace · helping from depletion.

REGENERATIVE
engagement held by safety: playful disagreement · focused calm in difficulty · intimacy without merger.

Resilience is not the absence of mixed states. It is the capacity to recognise which one is at work — and to shift.

ACCOUNTABILITY SPACES

Beyond "safe space" — toward staying in.

A safe-enough space is not one where conflict is avoided. It is one where the nervous systems present can stay regulated enough to engage with what is difficult.

Accountability spaces hold both: the safety to be honest, and the structure to remain in contact when honesty becomes uncomfortable.

Safety is not the goal. It is the precondition for the work.

↳ *The full arc — from neurophysiology to community. The book in eight chapters.*

THE 8 CHAPTERS

From physiology to community — how the book builds the ground for navigating conflict.

01 The autonomic nervous system — and how it stands up for our well-being.
02 Reading signals — how we feel and interpret bodily state.
03 Mixed states — the dynamic regulatory field of the ANS.
04 Therapeutic application — Deb Dana's conversation with the nervous system.
05 Embodied safety — somatic approaches in dialogue with Polyvagal Theory.
06 Safe-enough spaces — polyvagal insights for communal life.
07 The embodied toolkit — resonance, movement, self-havening.
08 From survival to resilience — repair and post-traumatic growth.

INSIDE THE BOOK

Three of the book's original figures — from the autonomic system to safe-enough community.

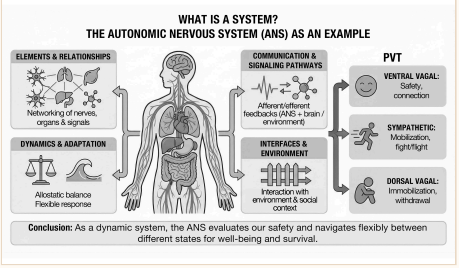

FIG. 1 *What is a system? — the ANS as an example.*

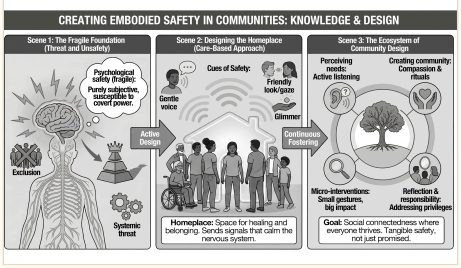

FIG. 11 *Creating embodied safety in communities.*

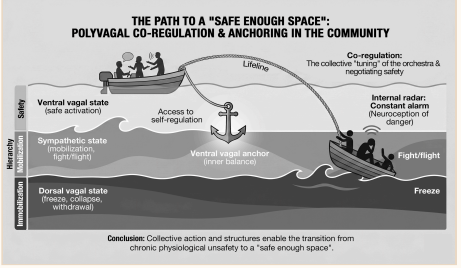

FIG. 12 *The way to the »safe-enough space«.*

Sustainable navigation through conflict cannot be achieved by cognitive reframing alone. It requires that the *physiological conditions* for social engagement be restored — through co-regulation, embodied language, and the active shaping of institutional contexts that are *safe enough* to carry connection.

Talk to us THE CO-AUTHORS ARE ON SITE · POSTER SESSION · 2026

TAKE IT WITH YOU · LISTEN

Resonance Breathing