The Polyvagal Theory

**Regulated Nervous System**

- Arousal Level: Hyperarousal
- Safety Level: Danger

**Dominant ANS System**

**Sympathetic System:**

- Fight-Flight
- Dissociated rage or Panic

**Parasympathetic System**

**Smart Ventral Vagal**

- Social Engagement System
- Rest and digest

**Primitive Dorsal Vagal**

- Immobility – “Freeze”
- Dissociated Collapse

The older vagal branch (Dorsal Vagal) shuts down behavior (Freeze mode) when a life threat is perceived thus disengaging the social engagement system. The newer vagal branch (Ventral Vagal) mediates affective intensity within an optimal arousal zone, which allows for the social engagement system to remain active. Affective experience at edge of the optimal arousal zone might provoked an “early scene.” Successful completion of the redecision process requires mediation of affect by the “smart” vagal system i.e. the ventral vagal. During the redecision process, the client’s “smart” vagas mediates affect associated with the “early scene” as the client’s middle prefrontal cortex mediates integration of the affect within a coherent narrative. The therapist assists the client’s affect regulation by maintaining contact with the client throughout the process. In other words, the client’s affect regulation at the edge of the optimal range of arousal range (co-regulated by the therapist) allows the client to organize information and energy associated with the early scene in a fashion consistent with an I’m OK You’re OK frame of reference. The redecision provides the client with a flexible, adaptive, coherent I’m OK You’re OK organization of experience for use in future transactions with others. The redecision and anchoring processes might allow the client to myelinate neural pathways within this I’m OK You’re OK frame of reference. This mylenation may expand the client’s optimal range of arousal allowing for future exposure to early scenes to be independently mediated into coherent narratives.