FREE RESOURCE · TIM.P SESSION 6

The polyvagal ladder

Much of what we call behaviour is the body's automatic response to feeling safe, or not. Children and adults move up and down this ladder all day.

SAFE & CONNECTED

Ventral vagal

YOU MIGHT SEE

Calm, curious, playful, able to listen and learn

WHAT HELPS

Connect, play, talk things through. The best time for conversations and repair.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

Sympathetic

YOU MIGHT SEE

Anxious, angry, restless, shouting, running off

WHAT HELPS

Slow down, soften your voice, fewer words. Stay close, offer movement or space.

SHUT DOWN

Dorsal vagal

YOU MIGHT SEE

Withdrawn, numb, far away, 'can't be bothered'

WHAT HELPS

Gentle, warm presence. Don't push for talk. Small, soothing steps back up.

↕ WE MOVE UP AND DOWN IN RESPONSE TO FELT SAFETY. YOUR CALM HELPS THEM CLIMB.

Adapted for TIM.P from Porges (1994, 2011) and Dana (2018)