

I am Safe

Social Engagement ON

My Brain

- I can plan, organize and solve tricky problems
- I recover quickly from disappointments
- I can switch tasks easily
- My memory works great
- I can be creative
- I can be flexible

My Life View

- I enjoy being in the world
- My attitude toward life is open
 - I can expand and explore
 - New places, experiences, and things are exciting to me
 - I can take risks
 - I like myself
 - I am strong/smart
 - I am valuable

*I am
'grounded'*

*I can learn
and
thrive!*

My Interactions

- I am happy to connect
- I get your humor and jokes
- I can easily tell if you're lying
- I read faces accurately and approach with openness and optimism
- I can be around people who are upset, angry, or anxious and tell if their upset is because of me or something else
- I can summon and develop empathy

My Awareness

- I am present
- I am comfortable with my body's sensations
- I can connect with my feelings, body, surroundings, and others
- I am open to bonding with others
- I am prepared to gradually share information about myself, as I want to

I am Threatened

Social Engagement - OFF

I must **FIGHT** or **ESCAPE**

My Brain

- My instincts have shifted all systems to “survive/protect-mode” without my permission
- My sympathetic nervous system is dominant
- I can no longer reason or remember well
- My emotional brain (limbic) is in charge where stored memories with strong emotions get ‘triggered’ and replayed
- Sometimes I can’t separate past events from present
- Planning and imagining realistic outcomes are out of reach
- I cannot make or discuss good choices



My Life View

I am *angry* about something...

I feel invincible

or

I am *scared* right now...I feel vulnerable

or

I am worried or *anxious*...

I feel vulnerable

I am not safe

*I cannot
Focus/learn*

My Interactions

- I am not interested in social interactions
- I now read blank faces as angry/threatening
- Unless you appear non-threatening (you are quiet, small, at a safe distance), I assume you are a danger
- If others move too quickly, I assume they are coming for me and I will respond by defending myself
- If I am not allowed to move, I will have to move in other ways (swinging a chair, getting under a desk, wriggling, fidgeting with things)

My Awareness

- I am easily startled
- My stomach or head might hurt
- I am only focused on getting away or getting rid of the threat
- I am in survival-mode
- My senses are on high alert
- I am scanning the environment for threat (body language, vocal tones, the direction of the threat, an escape route)

Biology of Fight/Flight to a Threat/Stressor

Sight & Sound

(direct to thalamus, sent to cortex or amygdala)

Smell & Touch

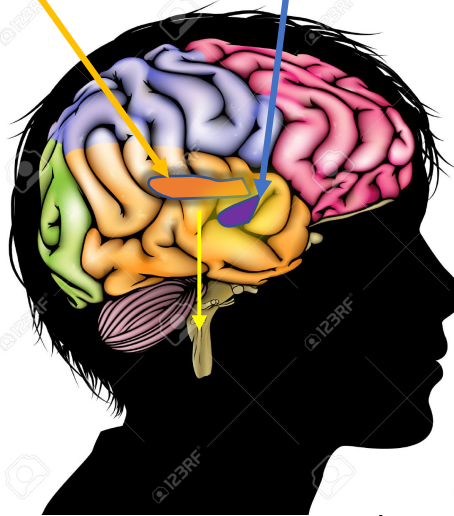
(bypass the thalamus/direct to amygdala)

My Eyes

- My eyes narrow and eyebrows change position
- My pupils dilate, causing my vision to change
- I have "tunnel vision"
- I'm looking around to locate danger

My Body

- My nervous system has released chemical messengers to help me survive by running or fighting
- I am full of adrenaline (energy)
- My heart is racing
- Blood has been directed to my big muscles for more power
- My breathing is fast and shallow
- I am ready to move
- I need to defend myself
- My face get red
- I feel hot and start to sweat
- My mouth is dry
- Smells gets intense- I can smell stress-sweat on others
- My skin is paler because my blood is being used to support my increased senses and muscle needs.



My Hearing

- My middle ear muscles change
- I am focused on listening for threat cues
- I can no longer hear all frequencies, mostly just the low ones
- Because of the muscle changes in my middle ears, I cannot hear everything you are saying
- I cannot process what you are saying at my normal speed, if at all
- I cannot ignore the background noise of busy places
- My hearing feels more sensitive and everything feels louder

If the threat continues:

I can barely sleep. If I do, it's not very deep or restoring.
My appetite is turned off and digestion reduced.
My immune system is reduced, so I get sick easy.

Fight

I become argumentative. I speak loudly. I am aggressive. I have a lot of energy in my hands and legs. I get "strong." I must get bigger to try and scare away the threat. I raise my arms, stand up tall, move forward, make lots of hand gesture. I am physically engaged (throwing, punching, hitting, kicking. I find it hard to stop until the thing that I find threatening is dealt with.

Flight

I become avoidant. I can't stay put. I want to get away. I try to distract you or change the subject. I speak loudly/shout more, or my voice become very quiet. I have a lot of energy in my legs. I get 'strong.' I physically disengage – moving slowly, walking or running away. I find it hard to stop until the thing that I find threatening is dealt with.

I am Threatened I have NO Resources

Social Engagement – OFF
My **life/survival** is at RISK

I am functioning from the oldest part of my brain now, the brainstem; which I share with reptiles. This is an unmyelinated part of the brain, so it is very slow and resistant to change, managed by the dorsal-vagus nerve. It works to just keep the basic things working: heart rate, digestion, defecation, and the sexual act.

My Life View

My Brain

- Thinking brain and emotions are offline
- I find it almost impossible to speak, think, plan, organize, or make choices
- I am exclusively focused on surviving by not moving and shutting down (I'm trying to disappear)
- My memory doesn't work right
- I leave my mind/body
- My body is here, but my head isn't

- I need to be invisible
- I am stuck
- I must take care of MYSELF
- I need to be in control of the little I have left
- There is no hope
- It's all my fault

I am barely alive!



Nothing is safe

*My mind spins,
repeating
hopeless scenarios*

My Interactions

- I can't do interactions/eye contact is very hard
- I don't feel safe around people
- I feel vulnerable
- Isolation makes me feel safe
- This is all very hard – I just want to stay in my safe place (home/bed) all day
- Closeness is terrifying
- Your emotions make me really uncomfortable
- I desperately need to feel some sense of control
- I may seek your attention in odd ways
- I may do unsafe things to try and feel alive

My Awareness

- I don't want to be noticed
- I feel alone
- I am numb
- I don't feel pain anymore
- I am on the outside, looking in
- I am starving for love, but too afraid of the cost
- I know what's going on in my head, but have no connection to my body