

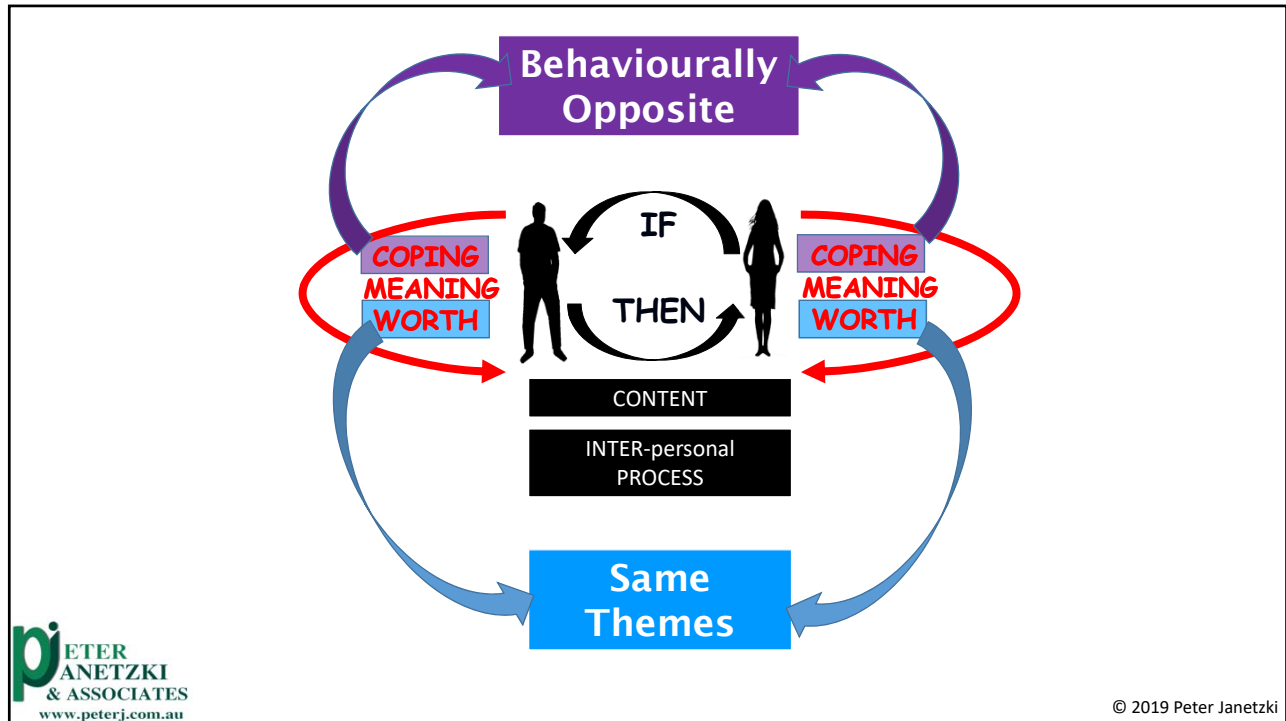


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**Neuroscience for Couples**  
**Utilising Polyvagal Theory**

**Peter Janetzki**  
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CCAA (Clin), PACFA Reg, MIACN (Cert).

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## The Dynamics are the Counsellors Responsibility

In couples therapy, it is imperative that I, as the counsellor, manage the dynamics within my room.

When couples trigger each other, and either overshoot and/or undershoot the window, they move to a compromised environment which reinforces their unhealthy patterns of avoidance and defence.

It is our job as couples therapists to maintain an enriched environment within our room so that together our clients experience, learn & practice self regulation that leads to healthy patterns of approach i.e. robust conversation.

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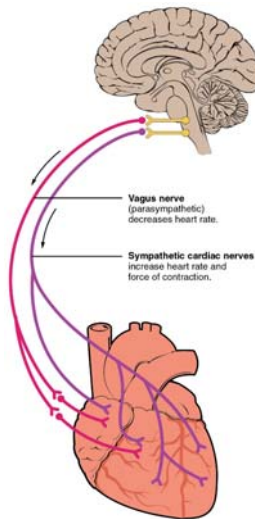
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# THE CRITICAL NATURE OF THE POLYVAGAL SYSTEM

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## The Polyvagal System - Stephen Porges



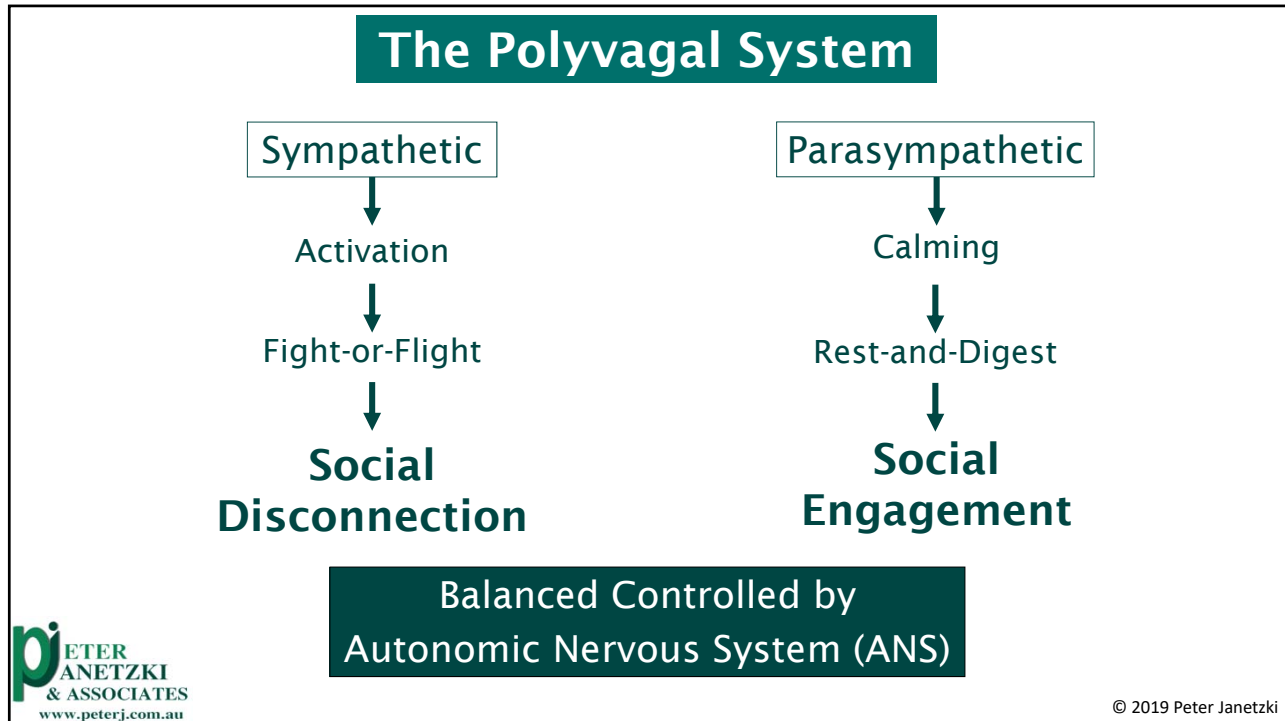
**The Vagus Nerve** - three parts all working simultaneously

**Ventral Vagal System** - is part of the Parasympathetic Nervous System - Social Engagement - Frontal Cortex (**Smart Brain**)

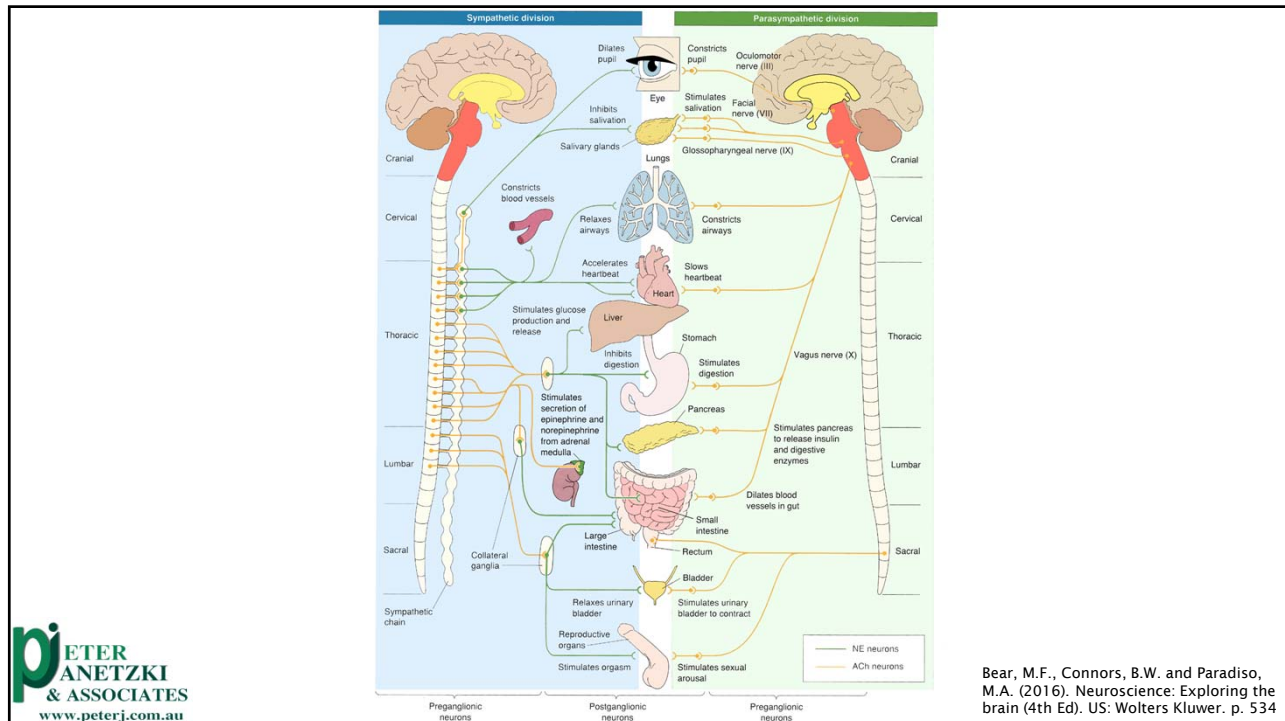
**Sympathetic Nervous System** - Fight/Flight - Limbic System (**Impulsive Brain**)

**Dorsal Vagal System** - is part of the Parasympathetic Nervous System - Freeze/Immobility & Social Disconnection - Brain Stem (**Survival Brain**)

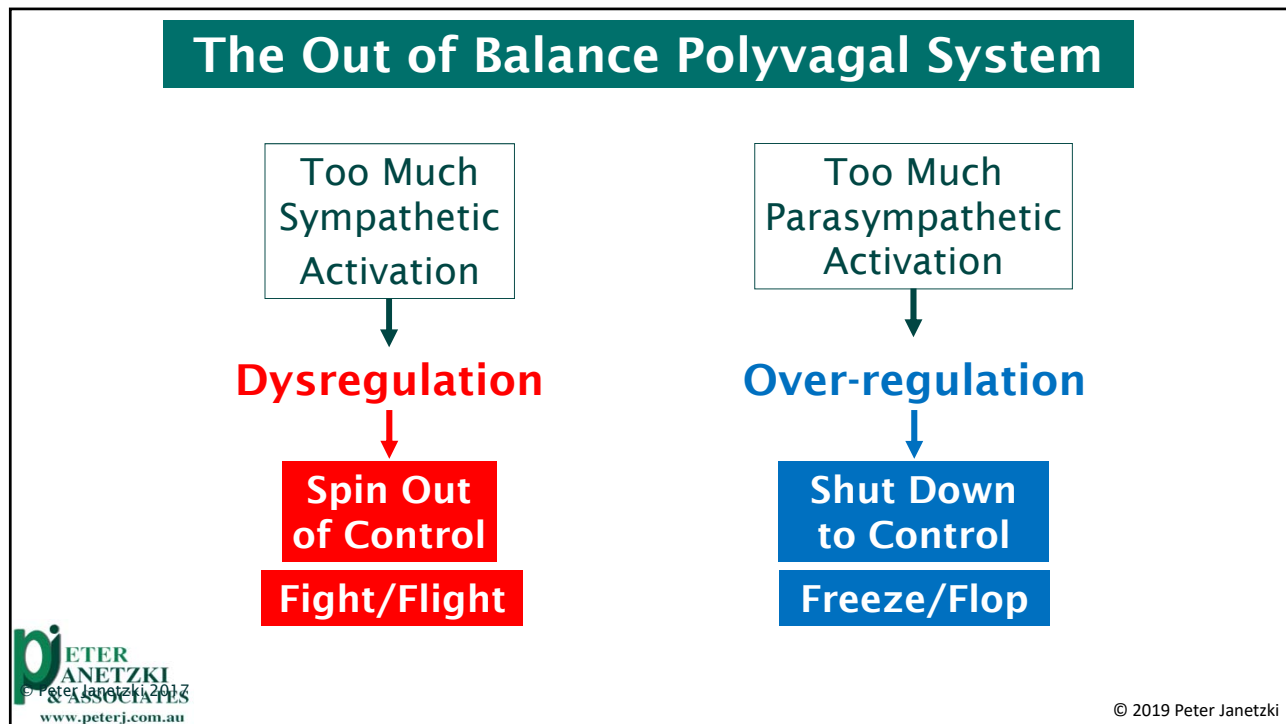
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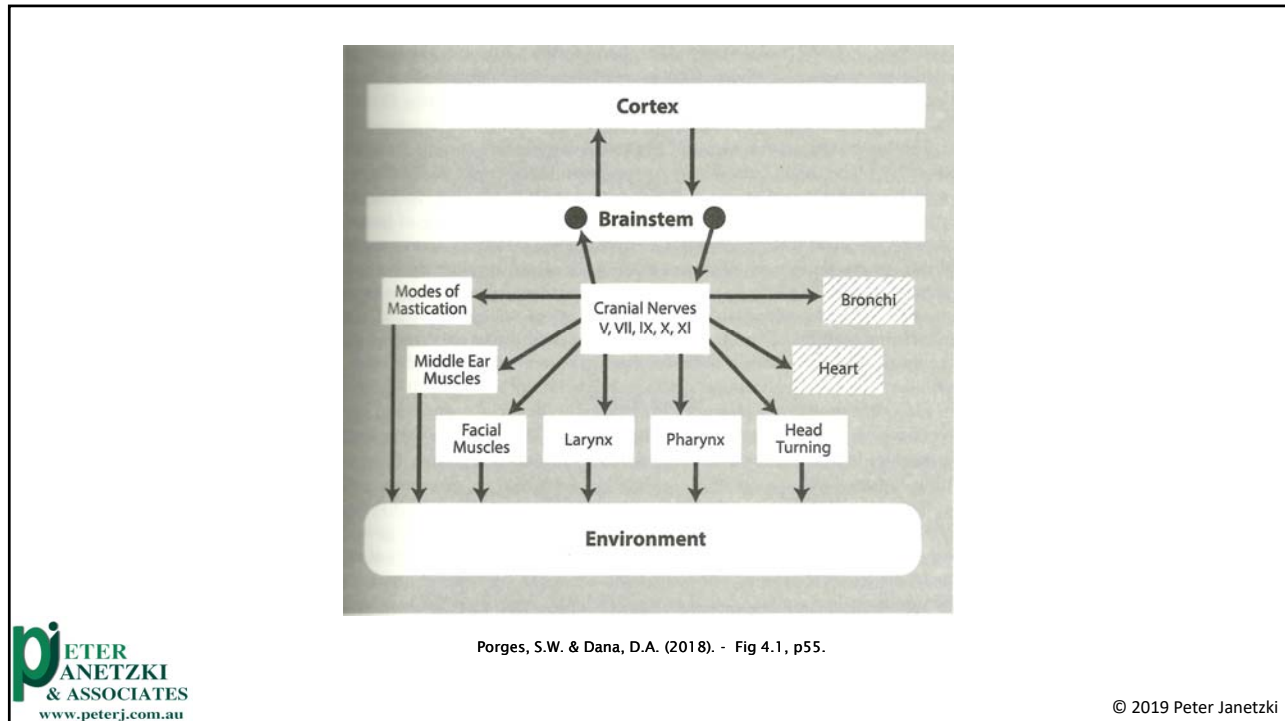
## Neuroception: A Subconscious System for Detecting Threats and Safety at a Glance

- **Neuroception** is the process of perception & evaluation
- **Neuroception** is how neural circuits distinguish whether situations or people are safe, dangerous or life threatening
- This **rapid response hardware and software integration** takes place in the primitive parts of our brain that work at a subconscious level
- **Our neuroception** determines our response of immobilization, mobilization, and social engagement/communication

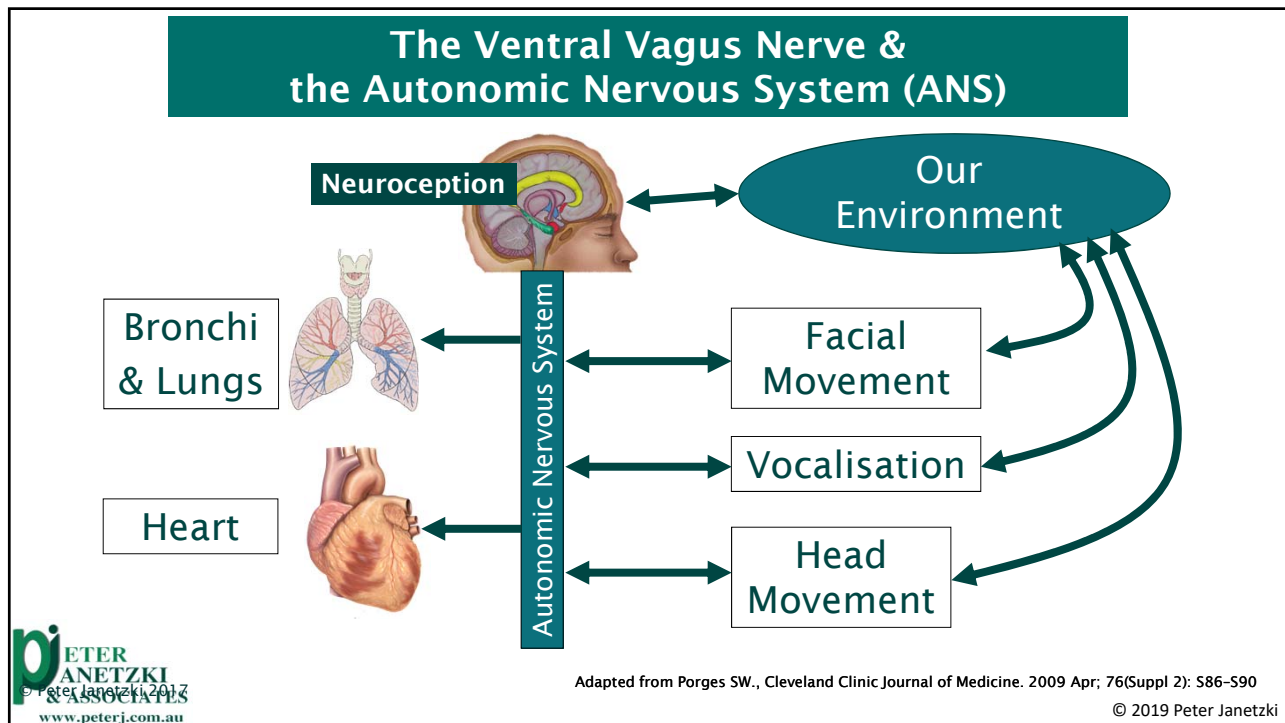
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<http://stephenporges.com/index.php/component/content/article/5-popular-articles/20-neuroception-a-subconscious-system-for-detecting-threats-and-safety>

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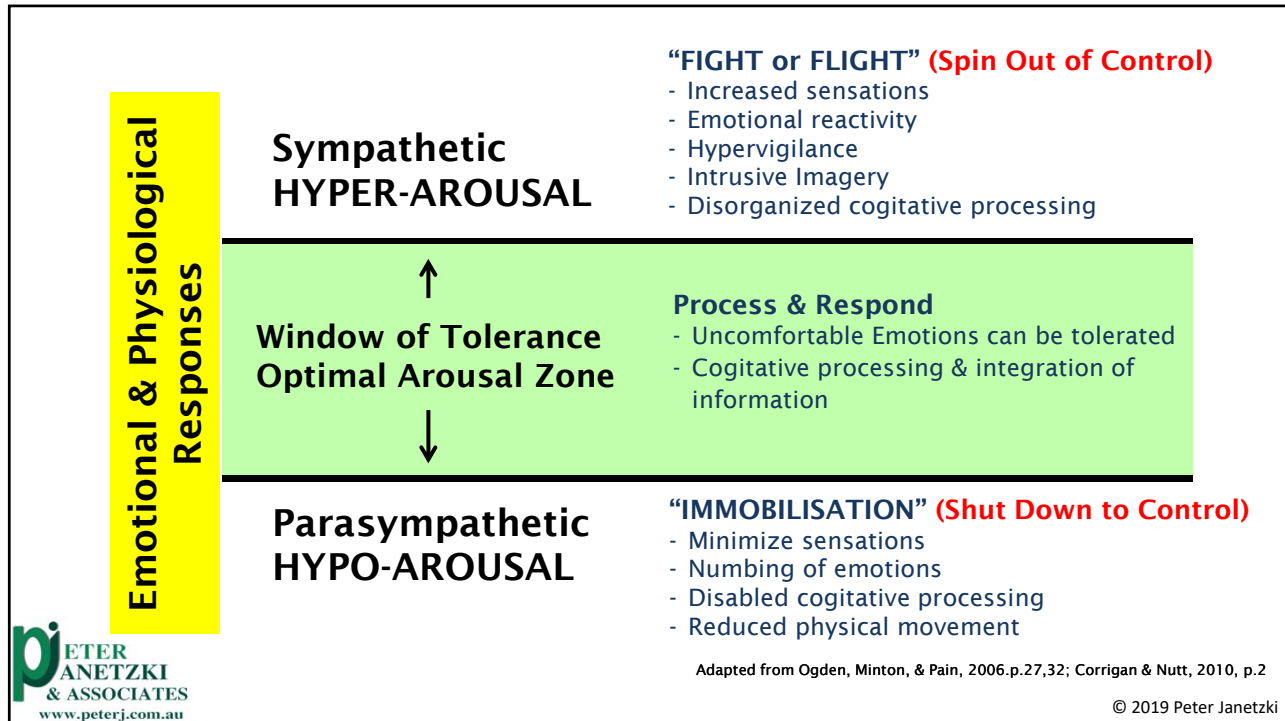


## The Shadow Side of Neuroception

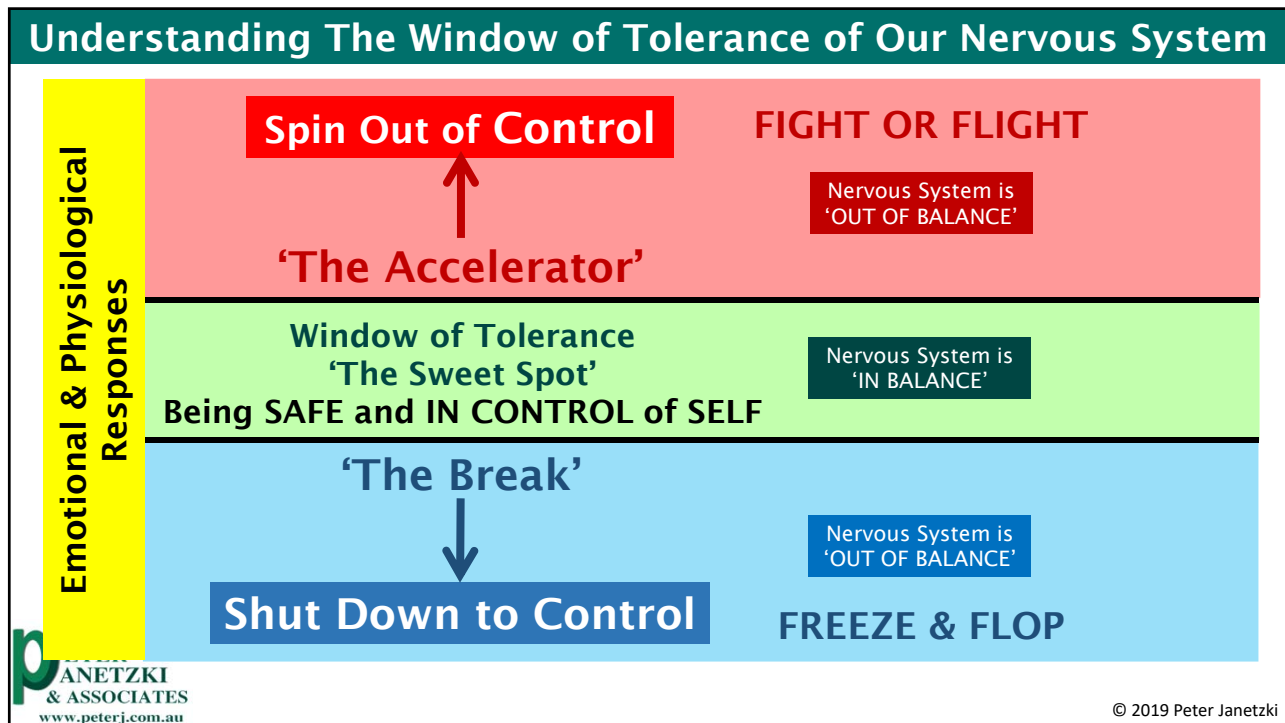
How my neuroception is perceiving the world has a direct impact on my physiology (heart and lungs) and my physiology says that my neuroception is right – but what if it is wrong?



## THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE



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## Understanding The Window of Tolerance of Our Nervous System

Emotional & Physiological Responses

### ‘The Accelerator’




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**Window of Tolerance  
‘The Sweet Spot’  
Being SAFE and IN CONTROL of SELF**

Nervous System is  
‘IN BALANCE’

---

### ‘The Break’





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## Integration

<http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/mindfulnessmatters/2012/10/integration-is-better-than-rigidity-or-chaos.html>

“Integration...a place between chaos and rigidity where we can be spacious, reflective, and clear in our perceptions. We are neither impulsive, nor guarded. Openness is a good way to describe integration. We become open to experience, able to tolerate more, and less prone to fall back on our defenses. The world feels less threatening because we are more accurate at judging threats. We have fewer false alarms. We can move through the world with more ease when we are integrated because we are not expending resources recovering from chaos or holding up rigidity.”

Dan Siegal



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**Processed by the 'Insula Cortex' Brain Stem Area Regulating the ANS**

**Subdiaphragmatic**

**"Sensory Nerve" 80% vagal fibres "Visceral"**

**Bottom Up Approach**

Ach acetylcholine  
NE Norepinephrine

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Picture: Bear, M.F., Connors, B.W. and Paradiso, M.A. (2016).

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## Insula Cortex

Located in the lateral sulcus, this brain region separates the frontal, parietal, and temporal lobes of the brain. The insular cortex is situated inside of the Sylvian fissure.

**Frontal Lobe**

**Parietal Lobe**

**Occipital Lobe**

**Temporal Lobe**

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## Insula Cortex

Though the insula plays a significant role in pain perception, social engagement, empathy, emotions, and numerous other vital functions, it is far from the only brain region that contributes to these functions.

Most research points to a strong connection between the insula and the limbic system. A number of structures in the insula either connect to or send signals to portions of the limbic system, suggesting a key relationship between the two.

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**Simultaneous Bottom Up Approach**

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# Every Conflict Ends in Either US

## Turning Away From One Another



## Turning Towards Each Another





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## Understanding Emotional Flooding

Emotional & Physiological Responses

**Spin Out of Control**      **FIGHT OR FLIGHT**

Nervous System is 'OUT OF BALANCE'


**'The Accelerator'**      ♥ 100 BPM

**'The Sweet Spot'**

**'The Break'**      ♥ 100 BPM

Nervous System is 'OUT OF BALANCE'

**Shut Down to Control**      **FREEZE & FLOP**



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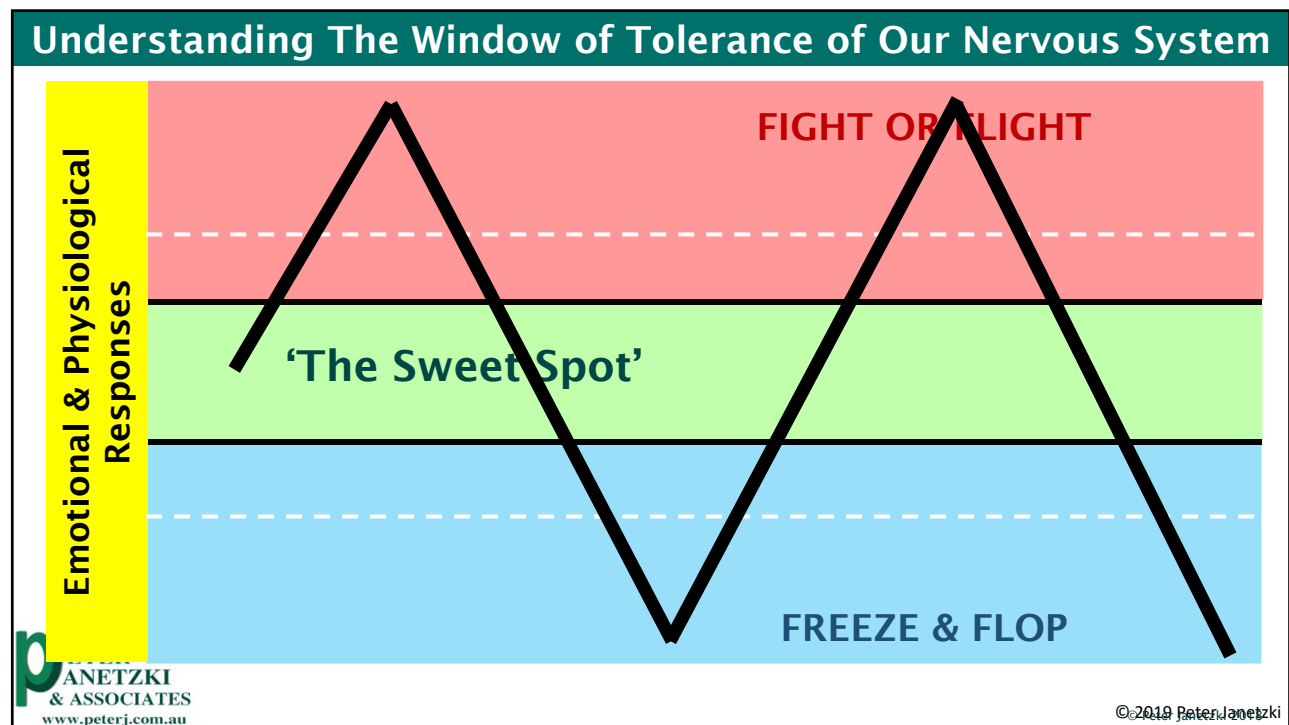
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# 'OXYTOCIN'

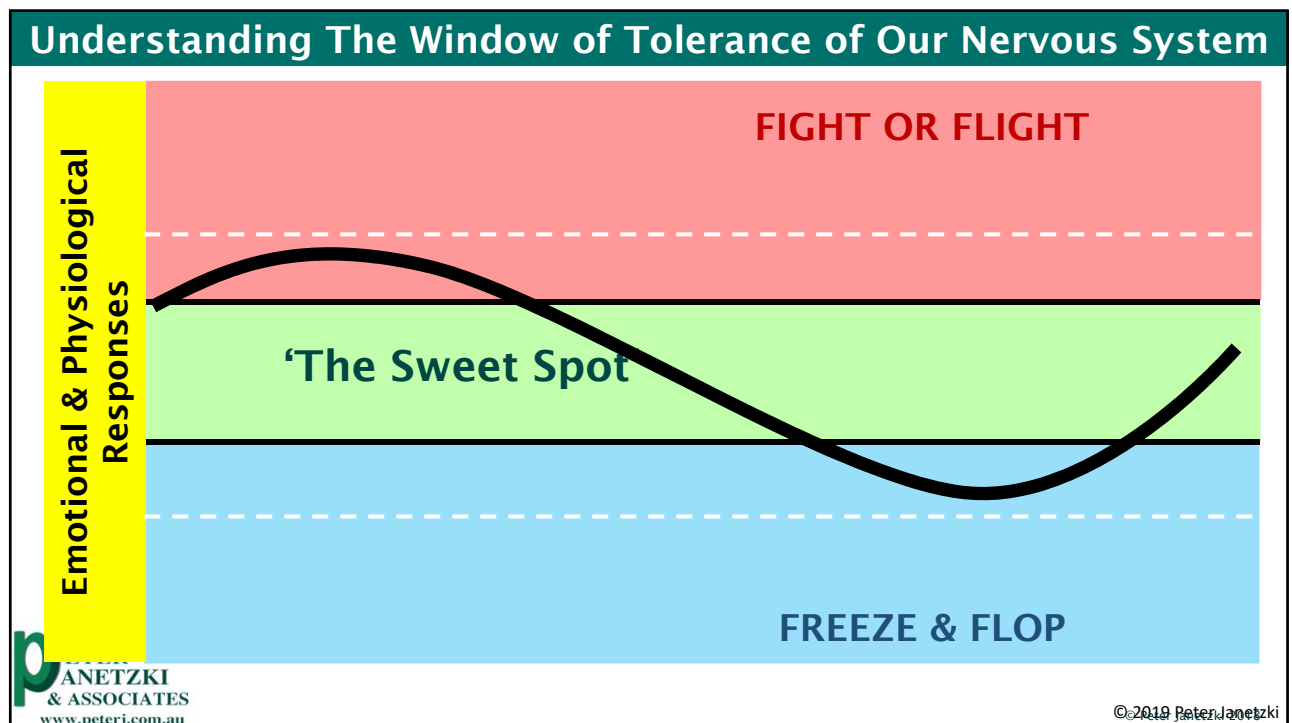
## The LOVE drug

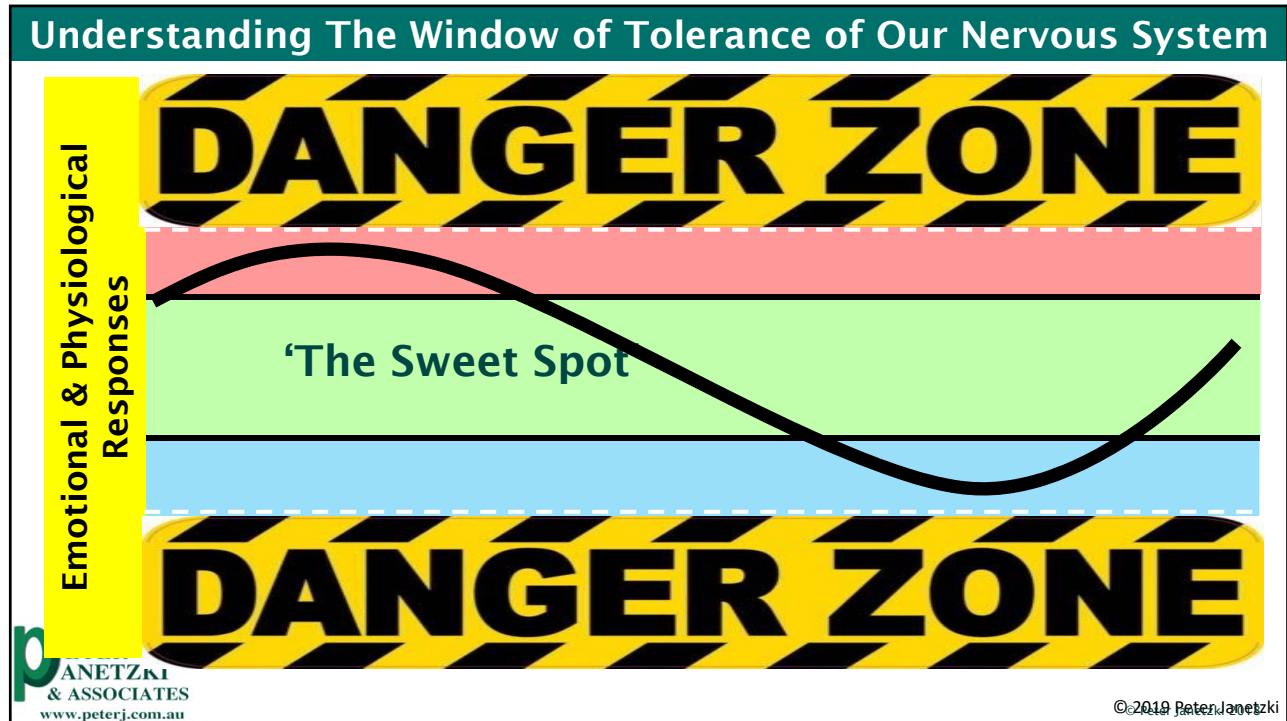
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# ROBUST CONVERSATION





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**Tool #1**

**Come up with a list of  
'RULES for FAIR &  
SMART CONFLICT'**

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## Tool #2

**Learn to MANAGE MY  
OWN EMOTIONAL  
RESPONSES**

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## Tool #3

**SLOW DOWN and take  
time to determine what  
the real issue is!  
And stop taking  
everything PERSONALLY!**

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## Tool #4

**Meet face to face at a time that is good for both of you!**



## Tool #5

**Make it about the relationship and NOT winning or surviving. So affirm the relationship and the other person.**



## Tool #6

**Make observations  
rather than  
accusations!**



## Tool #7

**Seek to understand  
the other before  
trying to be  
understood!**



## Tool #8

**Be willing to ask for forgiveness and to give forgiveness!**

**Always work at**

**Turning  
Towards  
Each  
Other**





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