



WAIMH 2026
19TH WORLD CONGRESS | TORONTO, CANADA

Polyvagal Parenting

for Clinicians Supporting Child-
Caregiver Coregulation

Paul North and Lydia So

www.polyvagalparenting.com



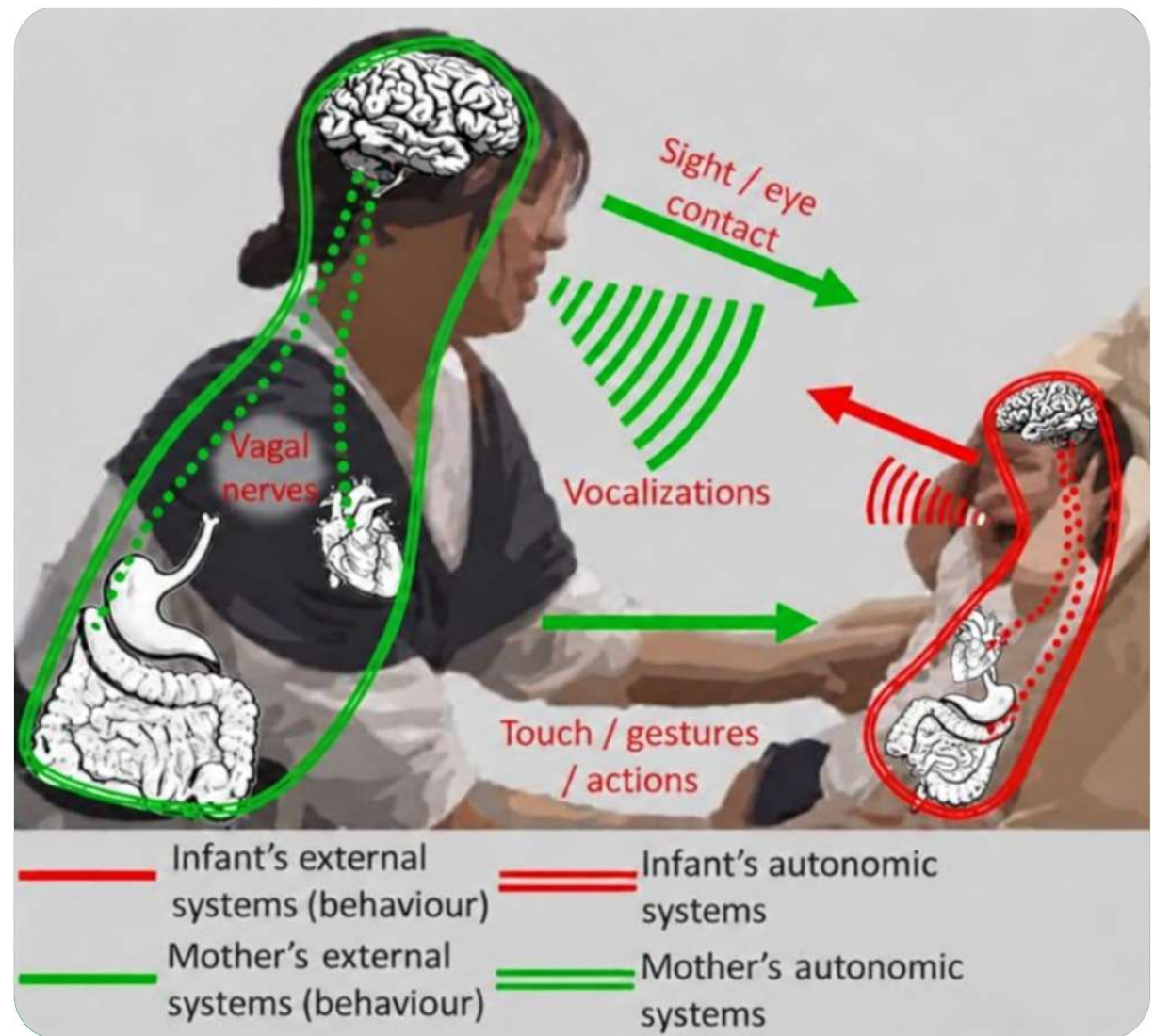


Outline

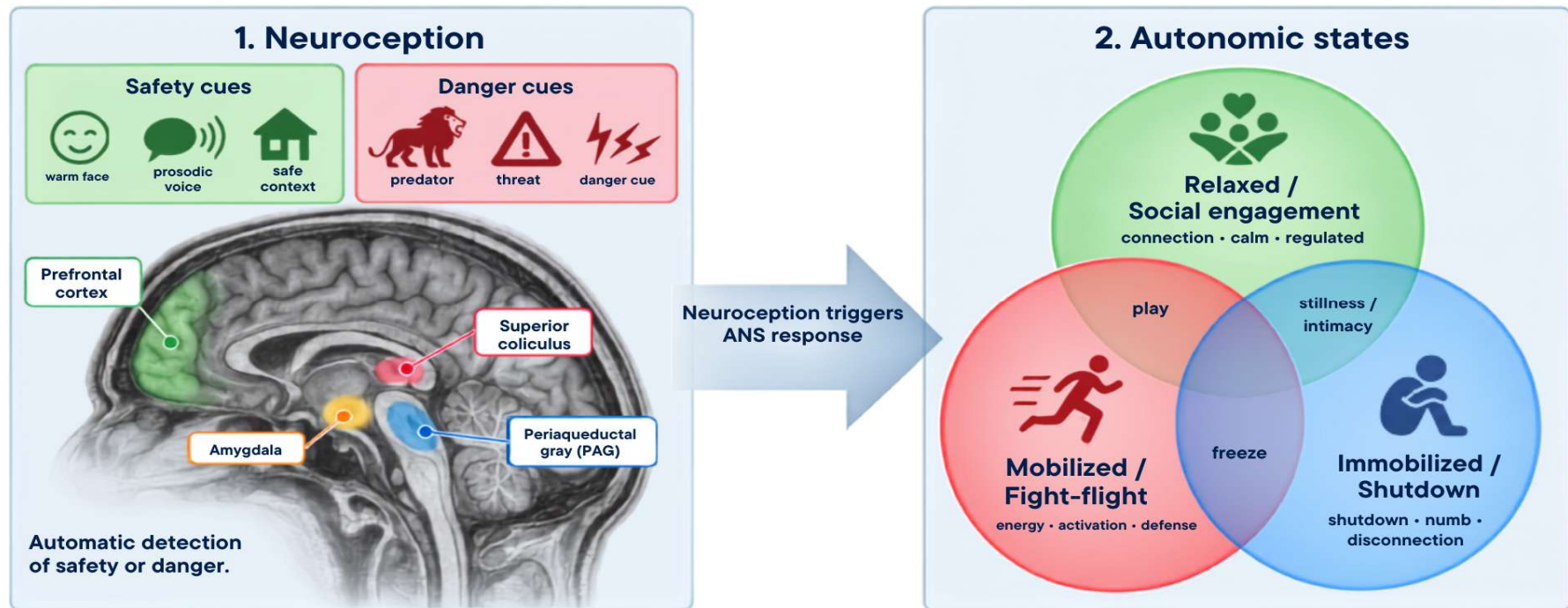
1. Polyvagal theory as a framework for coregulation
2. Clinical application
3. Case study

Polyvagal Theory

- Developed by Stephen W. Porges
- Offers a neurobiological lens for understanding relationships
- Proposes that the body's autonomic states are the physiological substrate of relational behaviours



Adapted from Diaz-Rojas F, Matsunaga M, Myowa M. Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews 2025



Autonomic States

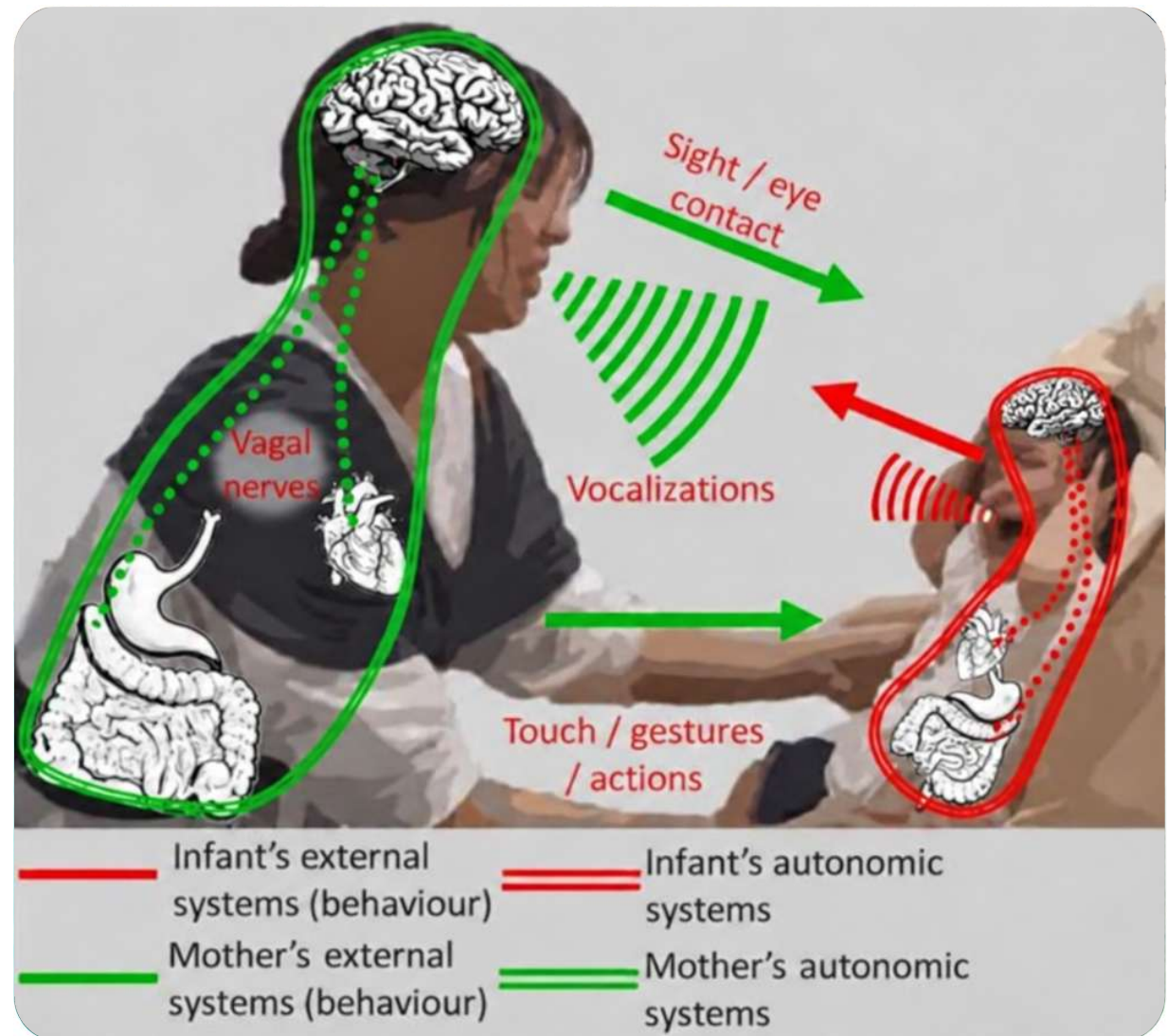
Automatic responses

Allows an individual to respond to cues of threat or safety

Primary goal of keeping the body safe

Coregulation

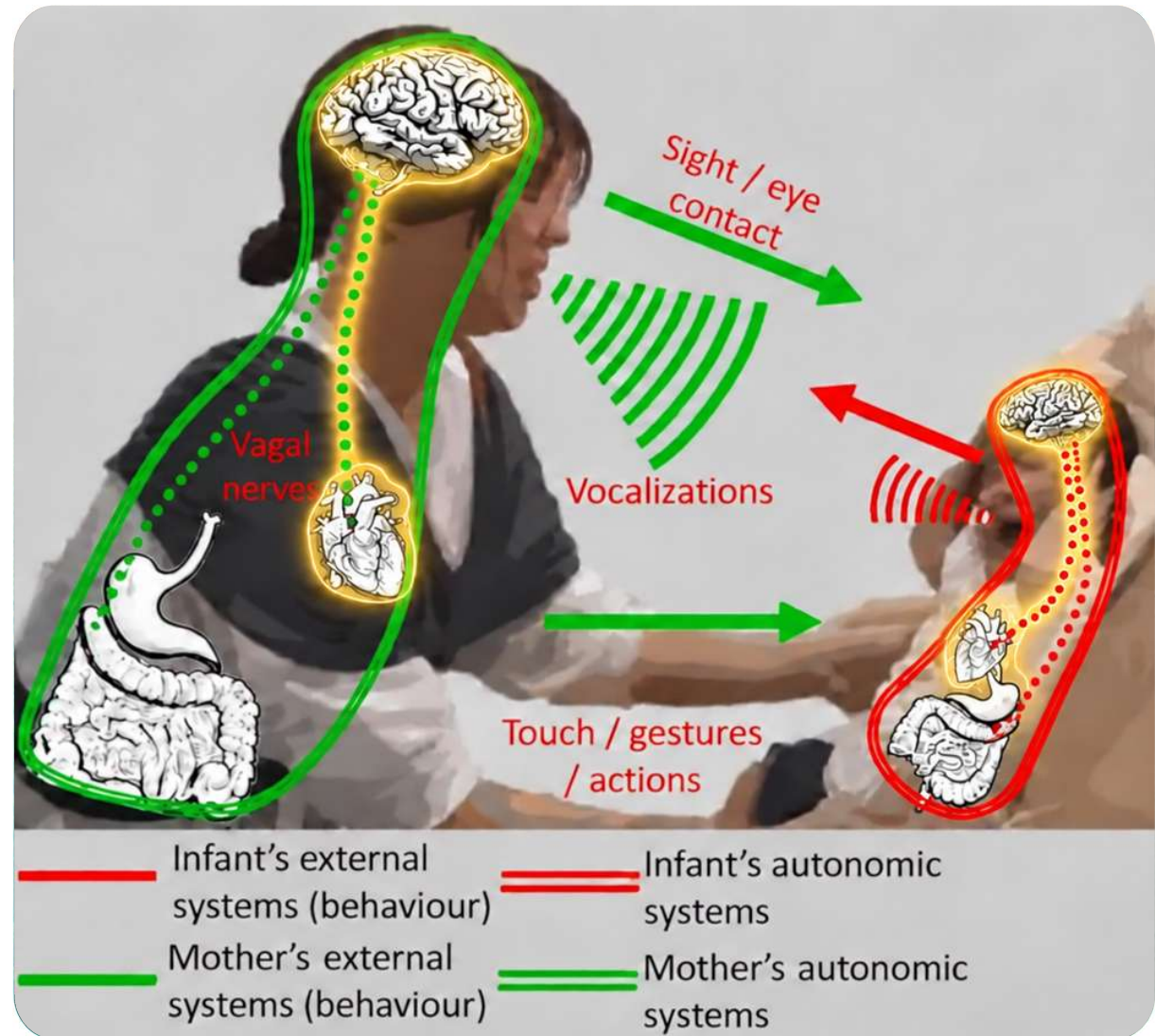
- How the autonomic state of one person influences the state of another
- Mother's autonomic nervous system
- Infant's autonomic nervous system



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Coregulation

- How the autonomic state of one person influences the state of another
- Mother's autonomic nervous system
- Infant's autonomic nervous system
- Face heart connection
 - Determine cues of threat/safety in another



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Clinical application

How can polyvagal theory help the families I'm working with?

How to use polyvagal theory when working with families



- First – say to parents, ‘It’s not your fault.’
- Am I safe?
- You can’t think your way into safety.
- Use your polyvagal voice.
- Involve both parents.
- Practice during the easy moments first.
- Connect before you correct or direct.

Jacob

- 5-year-old boy, older of two children living with his brother and both parents.
- Undiagnosed neurodivergence and exposure to a trauma event at age 4.
- Parents brought him to therapy due to challenging behaviors especially when transitioning from one situation to another.
- Jacob had school refusal.
- Behaviors of concern included aggression e.g., kicking and hitting.

Jacob's visit to the OT

Jacob is meeting his new occupational therapist for the second time.

'I don't want to go!'

Emily crouched down – soft face, polyvagal voice and encouraged a deep slow breath which she did with him.

Arms lowered, frown disappeared – mirrored Emily's smile.

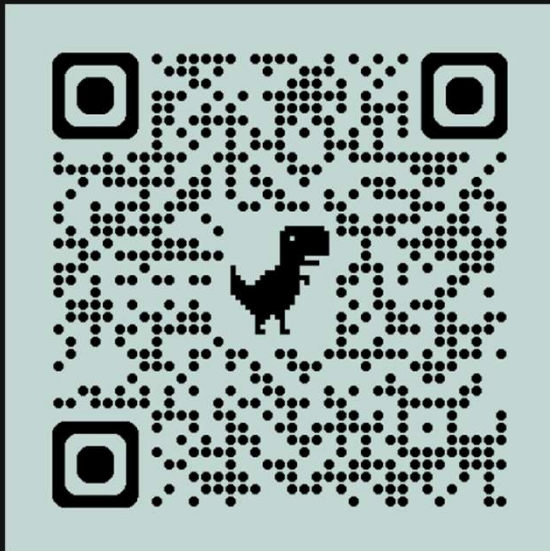
Jacob recovers and leans into hug her saying, "OK mummy, I'm ready to go now."

A simple tool to use with families.

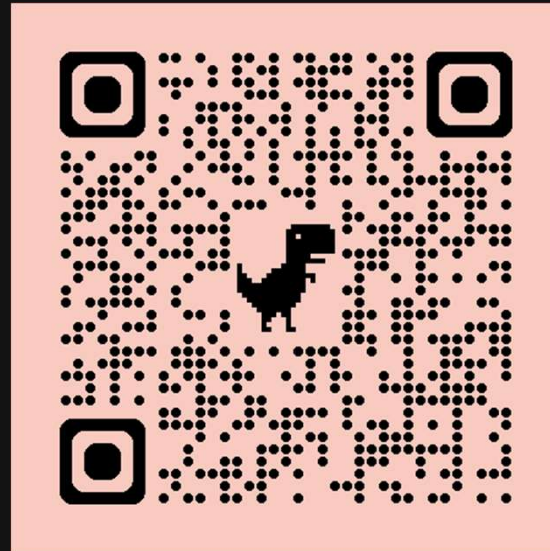
Hum drop

Thank you

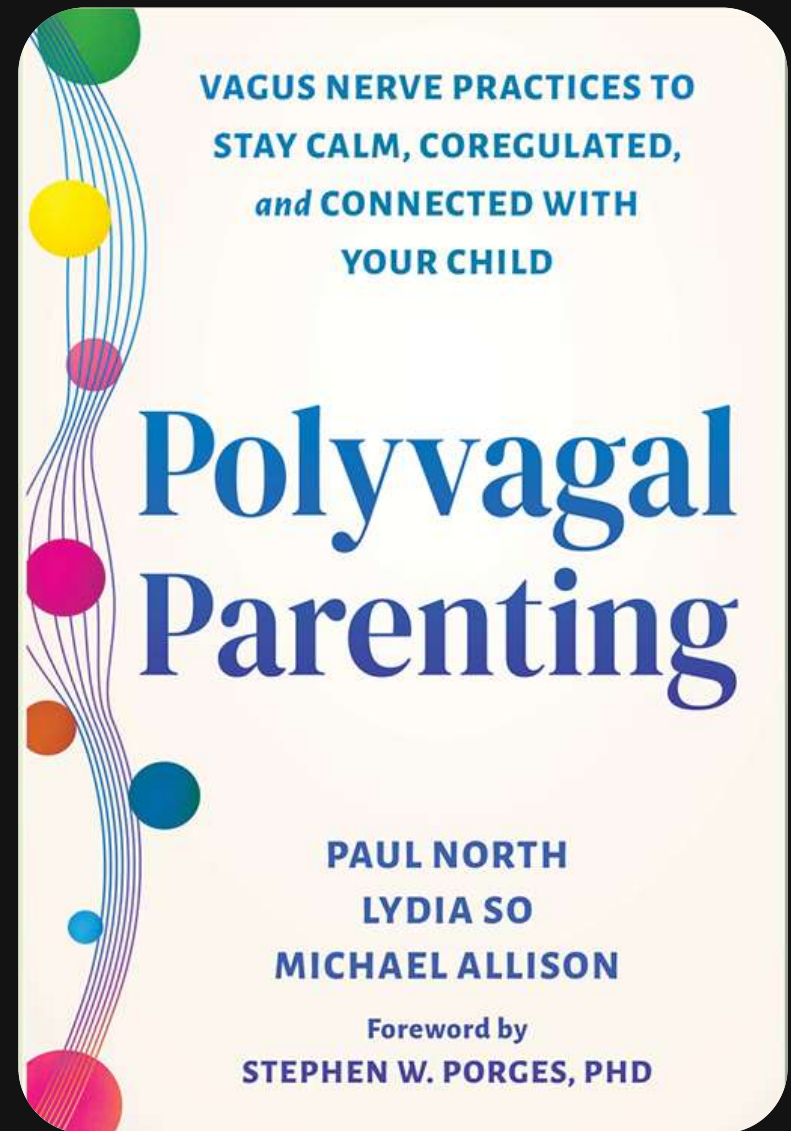
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Book event tonight



Slides



STEPHEN W. PORGES, PHD