

## POLYVAGAL-INFORMED PARENTING:

(Audio Transcript)

Welcome to our latest Neurobiology of Peaceful Parenting Challenge! This challenge in three short videos will give you quick tips on what we can learn from Polyvagal Theory to help us raise more resilient children. Are you ready?

You may be wondering, what does a complex sounding term like Polyvagal Theory have to do with parenting? Polyvagal Theory was proposed by Dr. Stephen Porges. Basically, Dr. Porges suggests that we need to view all human experience through the lens of safety and the corresponding lens of connection. He's not the first person to make this point, but he is probably the first person to give us the neurological underpinnings for why this is so important.

Here's the simple thing to remember, and you already know this intuitively. When humans of any age feel safe and connected, we're able to engage calmly, respond to challenges flexibly, and come up with good solutions to the bumps that we encounter in life. However, when we feel threatened, stressed, or overwhelmed, our bodies activate defensive nervous system states like fight, flight, or freeze, to protect ourselves.

So what does this mean for how we respond to our children? Well, by definition, children are little people in a very big world. They depend on adults for safety. They are not in charge of their own lives, so they often feel less able to get their needs met. They often feel pushed around. (I wonder why they feel that way?) So they often feel vulnerable, stressed, overwhelmed, and of course their nervous systems are immature, so they feel that more than adults would feel it even if we suffered the same indignities that they feel on a daily basis.

When you add to that the normal challenges of everyday life, like a quarrel with a sibling or their friend is mean or feeling like no one understands why they need that thing they want or need so badly, or being yelled at by their parents, you can see that their nervous systems must often feel overwhelmed or stressed or threatened. If you have a child who's neurodivergent or just highly sensitive or deeply feeling, this tendency is magnified.

You can see why children might not feel safe and connected enough to be that emotionally generous person we want them to be when they're interacting with their sibling or to be that calm, cooperative person that we want them to be at bedtime.

Polyvagal Theory tells us that humans, including children, need lots of warm engagement with other humans to feel safe. That feeling of safety then creates more warm feelings of engagement. That warm engagement deepens the sense of safety, in a virtuous cycle.

That feeling of safety for children, it comes from feeling warmly accepted, exactly as they are, with all of their inconvenient, big emotions, with all of their immaturity, with all of their impulse control challenges. It comes from feeling seen as who they are, appreciated as who they are, that we're not trying to make them into somebody else. It comes from feeling safe that they're with us, that we're in their corner, that we'll respond to them. Responsive parenting remember is one of the most important factors in how kids do emotionally. Responsive parenting is what makes children feel safe.

So that feeling of safety is what allows kids to rise to the occasion when things are hard, to respond flexibly to a situation that's hard for them. It's what allows them to tolerate disappointment and frustration when things don't go their way and to recover more quickly when things go wrong. In other words, it's what allows them to become more resilient.

So your challenge for today is to notice your child's experience. See it from their point of view. Any time your child is having a hard time, is struggling, ask yourself, how safe and connected does my child feel right now? What support does my child need to feel safe and connected right now?

In our next video, we'll discuss how this lens of safety that we're now looking through changes everything we thought we knew about discipline. And in video number three, we'll talk about co-regulation and other simple but very powerful strategies that you can use every day in your home to help your child feel safe, so they can grow a more resilient nervous system. Thanks! I'll see you in the next video.