

POLYVAGAL THEORY*

SHUT DOWN

THE FREEZE RESPONSE (DORSAL VAGAL SYSTEM)

If we can't fight or flee, we move into freeze.
We don't feel able to defend ourselves.
We feel hopeless or powerless.
We immobilise and withdraw. We disconnect & dissociate.
Heart rate reduces. Muscle tone reduces. Facial expressions reduce.
Awareness of others and ability to connect with others reduces.

THREAT OR DANGER

THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE (SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM)

Our bodies mobilise, in order to address the threat.
Blood pressure increases & we breathe more rapidly, sending oxygen to vital organs & muscles. Digestion is reduced.
We are in survival mode. Reduced ability to co-regulate.
The prefrontal cortex is no longer fully "online", reducing complex reasoning. Social behaviours are reduced.
Less able to hear and process human voices.

SAFETY

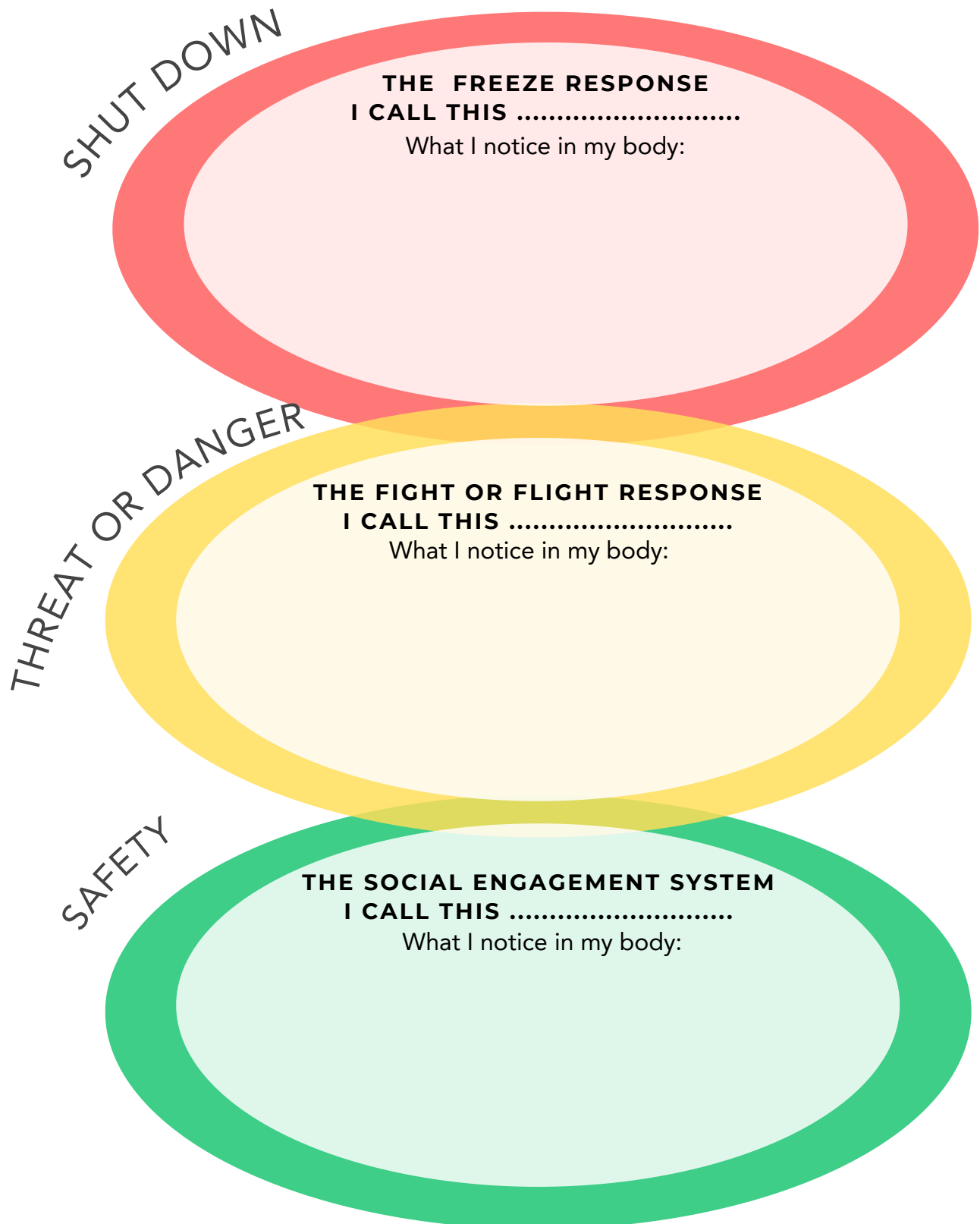
THE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SYSTEM (VENTRAL VAGAL PATHWAY)

We can rest and digest, feed and breed.
We feel a connection with others.
We feel safe. Our bodies feel calm. We can have fun & feel joy.
We can think creatively & analytically. We're present.
We can show compassion and co-regulate others.
Our brain and body function optimally.

Note: There are times when we are in one of these systems. At other times we experience a mix of two systems at the same time.

*Adapted from Porges & Porges (2023)

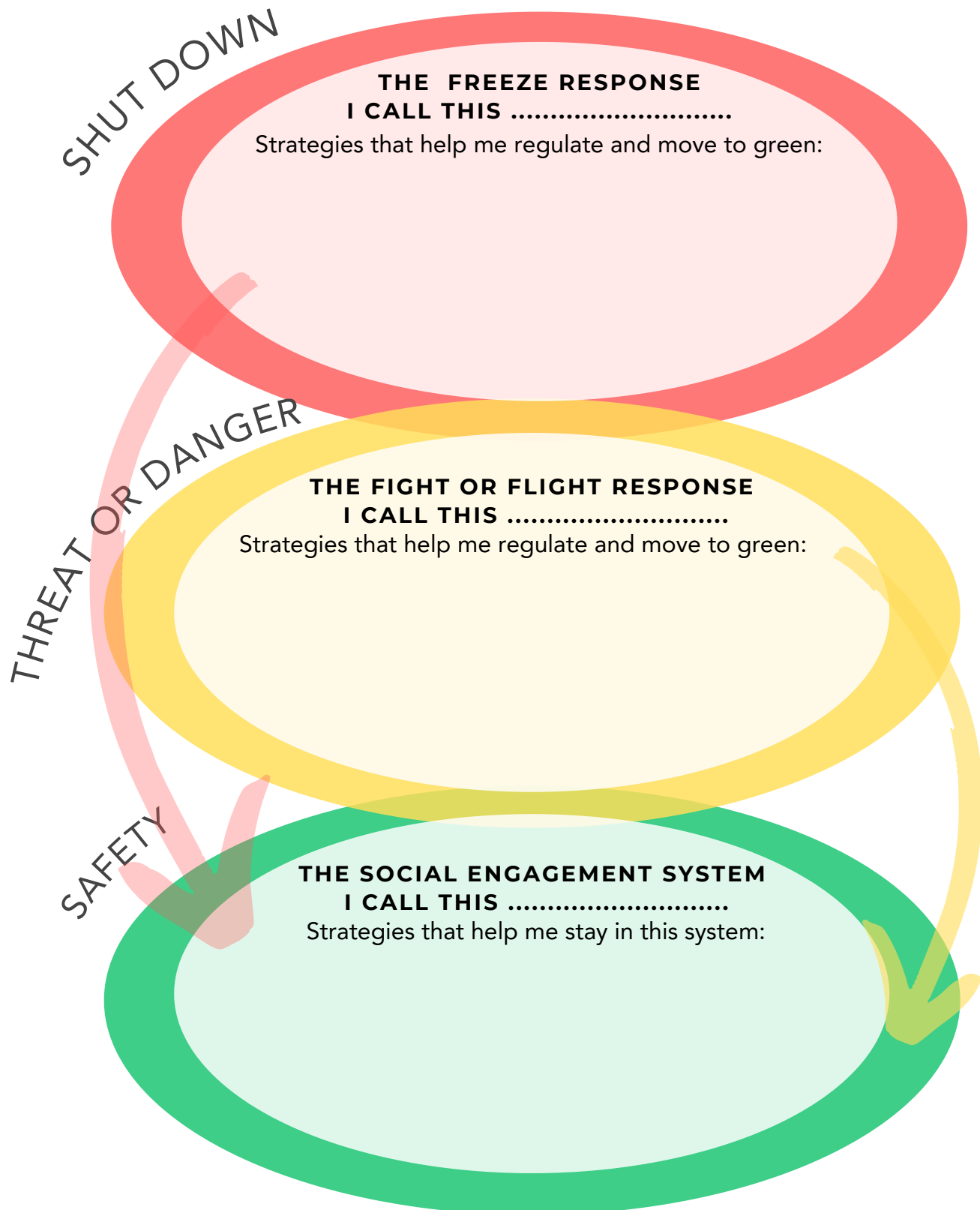
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