

Summary of Increased Vulnerability

	Sympathetic Reactions	Parasympathetic Reactions
What kinds of early nurturing experiences tend to lead to these reactions?	Inconsistent caregiving, lack of face-to-face attunement with caregivers, lack of safety, abuse or neglect	
What kinds of life experiences make this reaction most likely?	Threat with the possibility of successful defense or escape	Threat with helplessness—no perceived chance of defense or escape
How does the autonomic nervous system (ANS) respond?	Sympathetic nervous system is activated, leads to physical arousal	Parasympathetic nervous system is activated, slows down physical arousal
Which brain structures are most powerful in this survival response?	Basolateral nucleus of amygdala, hippocampus, locus coeruleus	Central nucleus of amygdala, dorsal nucleus of vagus nerve
Which chemical messengers carry this survival response?	Norepinephrine, adrenaline, dopamine	ACh, CRH, ACTH, cortisol, ACh, GABA, endorphins, enkephalin, serotonin
How does this reaction affect heart rate and blood pressure?	Heart rate and blood pressure rise, body heats up	Heart rate and blood pressure fall, body cools
How about breathing?	Rapid, shallow breathing	Slow, shallow breathing
What effects does it have on memory?	Intrusive memories, flashbacks, past “invades” the present (Hypermnnesia)	Loss of memory of the incident, or generalized memory loss (Amnesia)
What effects does it have on thoughts?	Rapid thinking, impulsive decisions	Confusion, trouble thinking or making decisions
What effects does it have on feelings?	High levels of fear, anxiety, excitement, or aggression; wild, unstable emotions	Numbing, depression, grief, hopelessness, feeling paralyzed or “not there”
What are the strongest survival impulses?	Fight and/or run away	Not move, escape inside, tune out, shut down
What if the stress or threat keeps on coming, or keeps coming back?	All these arousal reactions wear themselves out; the body goes into dissociation	These dissociation reactions are overpowered; the body goes into arousal