

Re-Integrating into Civilian Life: Why Lower Brain Development and Restoring the Nervous System's Flexibility are Often the Missing Pieces of the Puzzle

Incomplete lower brain development and an inflexible nervous system may explain why some veterans experience far more difficulty re-integrating back into civilian life than others. Here's why that's so.

LOWER BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

- Ideally, we complete our lower brain development during the first year of life by doing specific movements.
- When that development is complete, we acquire automatic brain functions that we then need for just about everything we'll be asked to do for the rest of our life.
- This lower brain development also allows the higher centers of the brain to now dominate, which means that we're no longer biologically wired to be in a hypervigilant, survival state all the time.
- However, if we didn't complete that development back then (and so, we're missing some or many basic brain functions), our higher centers of the brain now need to figure out ways to compensate.
- Sometimes, those compensations are effective, and we may not even be aware that our brain is working harder than intended.
- But as more and more demands are made on our brain, there becomes a greater probability that our original compensations may no longer be effective.
- And since such underdevelopment also means that our brain is still biologically wired to be in a perpetual hypervigilant, survival state, those greater demands may now be triggering more and more survival reactions.
- Yet, we can go back and complete our lower brain development at any age, which means we can finally acquire those basic brain functions and no longer be in a hypervigilant state of survival.

A FLEXIBLE NERVOUS SYSTEM

- When our nervous system assesses a threat (true or imagined), we're supposed to first respond by engaging in a protective response that's reflective of a fight, flight, or freeze reaction.
- But we're not supposed to stay in this protection mode. We're supposed to return to connection mode, since that's where we can be calm, creative, joyful—and much more.
- However, without such flexibility, we can become stuck in survival mode.
- Yet, it's possible to restore our nervous system's flexibility by doing specific movements and actions that address three main components of a flexible nervous system: replenish, resolve, and repair.
- Each of these components are intertwined and work concurrently with each other, so addressing just one component (or even two) will not result in the flexibility that's needed to quickly bounce back to connection mode.
- Additionally, our nervous system makes a risk assessment in less than 1/10 of a second, so we don't ever have a conscious say in whether such assessments are even correct.
- But as soon as that threat assessment is made, there's an initial, physiological response where some part of our body "braces" for that impending danger.
- That's why approaches for resolving threats must first communicate to the body—not to the mind—that we are safe.
- That's why telling someone to calm down or relax or giving assurances that everything is fine is not effective.
- Instead, approaches for restoring the nervous system's flexibility need to focus on proven ways that create a visceral feeling of safety.

- Part of the repair component of a flexible nervous system sometimes happens in “real time,” after we have said or done something that inadvertently created a disconnect with someone else.
- But, again, that repair must resonate on a visceral level, which is why just saying “sorry” is rarely effective.
- Another part of that repair component of a flexible nervous system can also help rewire what has been stored in the brain as unresolved stress (i.e., trauma).
- But, once again, such approaches are not focused on just talking about whatever happened.
- Rather, effective repair actions jar and change prior circuitry of however that stressful situation was originally stored.
- It is possible to teach anyone how to regain their nervous system's flexibility.

The Brain Highways program makes it possible for veterans to complete their lower brain development and restore their nervous system's flexibility right in their own home. In the family program, spouses and kids also participate since parents and kids are continuously reading each other's nervous system.

To note: The Brain Highways program is only intended to widen the possibilities and options to help others, rather than replace whatever anyone may already be doing to move forward.