

28th Euro Congress on

Psychiatrists and Psychologists

July 05-06, 2018 | Vienna, Austria

Implications of the polyvagal-theory for coaching and therapy and a new concept for the activation of the social engagement system

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Counseling, coaching and short-term-therapy have become more and more popular in Germany. The problems, wishes and requirements of the clients/patients are varying in a wide range as well as their personalities, fates and experiences. For the coach/therapist it is challenging to build up a trustful client-coach-relationship in several hours. The polyvagal-theory describes the three stages of the autonomous system. These are the freeze state (dorsal vagus complex), the fight/flight state (sympathetic nervous system) and the social engagement system SES (ventral vagus complex). Clients/patients often remain in a pre-dominant stress mode. This stress state is sustained by the preferred perception of danger-implying cues, a negative belief system and distrust. Clients/patients who suffer from trauma or long-term stress tend to be passive in the first period of treatment. Especially persons with autism or depression have a limited expression in mimic and body-language. The missing reciprocity is demanding for the coach/therapist and impedes the therapeutic relation. The change from the freeze state to the fight/flight state due to a successful process can cause negative emotions (anger, fury, hate) and the wish to escape the situation. Although the change to this mode is natural because of the hierarchical structure of the autonomous nervous system, it makes the process difficult. The SES state is the most effective for a successful coaching/therapy process which is based on a positive social interaction, the feeling of safety and the re-learning accompanied by positive emotions. A method has been developed which activates the SES state as a kind of a mental warming up before the coaching session. The goal of the technique is a reduction of the arousal and the support of the communication between client and coach. The state can be reached quite quickly by safety mediating instructions and embodiment techniques which activate the SES related five brain nerves.

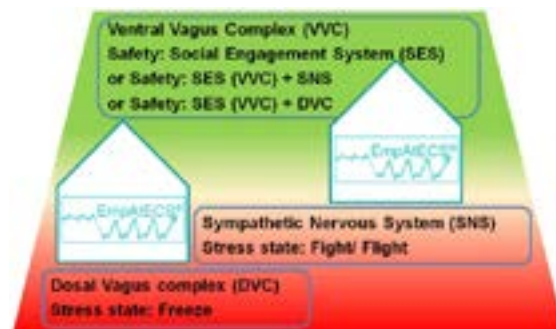


Fig. 1: The mental warming up method EmpAtECS® (empowerment- attachment-emotion- communication- self-regulation) for changing the psychological states.

Biography

Verena Hein is professionally qualified as a Personal Coach (2006 Institut für Lernsysteme, ILS), Hypno-Coach (2007 Dr. B. Migge Institut Westfalen-Lippe), Therapist for Dolphin Assisted Therapy (2012 B. Weitzmann, Benidorm, Spain) and Non-medical Psychotherapist (2017 Germany). She graduated with a BSc Psychology (2014 University of Hagen, Germany) and studies presently at the University of Hagen (MSc Psychology). She works in her own company, the Coaching Practice 4academy, since 2010 as Personal and Business Coach and Non-Medical Psychotherapist. In her first profession, she was a Scientist (1988 Diplom-Kristallograph, University Leipzig Germany), and works as a Technical Coordinator for global projects in reliability of microelectronics. She uses her experience in the industry to develop and to adapt coaching concepts for engineering offices and knowledge workers. Her special topics of interest are the management of complexity, techniques to encourage creativity, stress and anxiety and burnout prevention.

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