



Stephen Porges: Active listening in times of crisis

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Stephen W. Porges, Ph.D., is Distinguished University Scientist at Indiana University, where he directs the Trauma Research Center within the Kinsey Institute. He holds the position of Professor of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina and Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Maryland. He served as president of both the Society for Psychophysiological Research and the Federation of Associations in Behavioral & Brain Sciences and is a former recipient of a National Institute of Mental Health Research Scientist Development Award. He has published more than 250 peer-reviewed scientific papers across several disciplines including anesthesiology, critical care medicine, ergonomics, exercise physiology, gerontology, neurology, obstetrics, pediatrics, psychiatry, psychology, space medicine, and substance abuse. In 1994 he proposed the Polyvagal Theory, a theory that links the evolution of the mammalian autonomic nervous system to social behavior and emphasizes the importance of physiological state in the expression of behavioral problems and psychiatric disorders.

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Relational Implicit* project (<http://relationalimplicit.com>).

Serge Prengel (00:00):

Steve, I'd like to share with you an idea which is to invite therapists to volunteer their time to train people into forms of better listening and quality connection.

Stephen Porges (00:16):

This is an important tool for people to learn because, as we have evolved in our culture, our ability to listen to others to connect has been greatly reduced. We moved from a culture that historically was synchronous, meaning that, if I wanted to talk to you, I was in front of you, to a culture that is asynchronous. Meaning that I talk to you now and someone will listen later. So you don't get that interaction. The interesting part is that our nervous system has evolved to be in synchronous interactions, in which a behavior of others was something that we, our nervous system, needed for prediction. So we want the expectancy of a reciprocal relationship. It is what our nervous system's craving.

(01:06):

And if that got violated, meaning if a person turned away, or gaze averted, while we're talking, we get this massive visceral shift. Because that meant that person was not with us, embodied, sharing that moment. So it's very important for us to relearn our own intuitive skillset, and the intuitive skillset is to basically attend to people. When we're doing this virtually, which will be the portal that we'll be using for the next, let's say couple of months, as our main social or portal, we need to convey as much as we can to the person we're speaking to or interacting with: that we are there.

(01:47):

We are listening to them, we are connected with them. We care. Because we are going to have to, within this modality, create a sense of trust. We need to know what our nervous system craves, and

understanding that we also have to know what the nervous system literally detests. It detests that violation of expectancy of the person turning away. I coined a term that I call "biological rudeness." We know when someone has violated our biological expectation. We used to call it being dismissive, or people insulting us. But we start to learn over time that a lot of people are so mobilized, they can't recruit that capacity to be embodied while listening to someone else.

Serge Prengel (02:37):

Thank you, Steve.

Stephen Porges (02:39):

You're welcome, Serge.