



The SEEDS Cycle

A tool for understanding the connections between what happens outside of us and inside of us — and how we respond. “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

The four parts of the cycle

S	Sensations Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. Heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, temperature. Tense or relaxed? Heavy or light? What else?
E	Emotions When you feel that set of sensations, what do you call it? What does it tell you about your needs vs. wants, your values and your boundaries?
E	Explanations The stories we attach: “I am...” “He is...” “She is...” “We are...” “They are...” “This is...”
DS	Do & Say How we respond. Helpful or harmful? Skilled or unskilled? Intention vs. impact?

Offramps: where cycles change

For cycles that need to change, there is an offramp at each part of the cycle.

Sensations offramps

Self-soothing · new experiences (with a sense of control) · mindful movement · improved attachments.

Emotions offramps

Deepen your practice of emotionally healthy spirituality · clarify your needs vs. wants · clarify your values and boundaries.

Explanations offramps

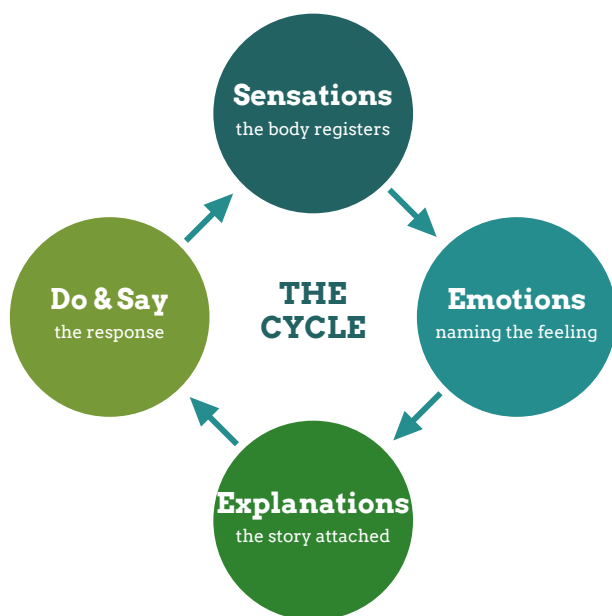
Deepen your understanding of your faith and theology · Cognitive Behavioral Therapy · Acceptance and Commitment Therapy · Dialectical Behavior Therapy.

Do & Say offramps

Change your habits (see the Things-to-Try menus at Restored.Life) — and track your efforts and results.

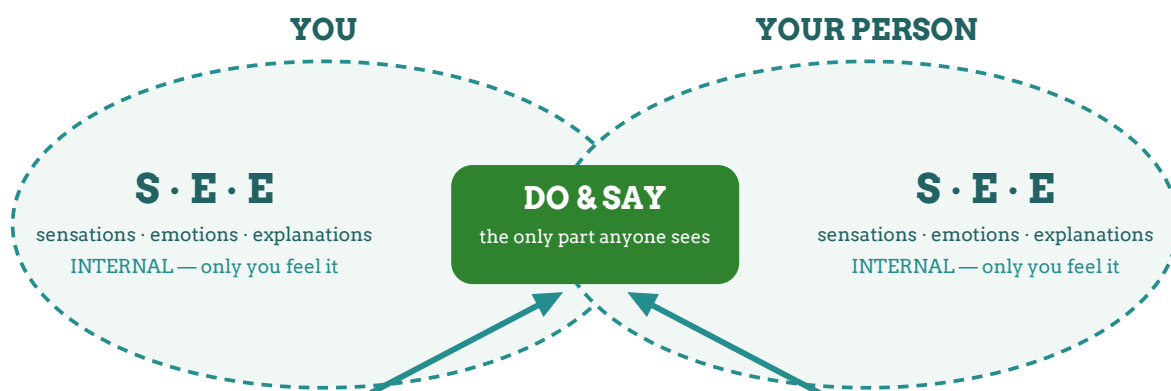
The SEEDS Cycle at a glance

One person, one moment: the body registers, the feeling gets a name, the story gets attached, and the response comes out — which becomes the next thing you (and everyone around you) must respond to.



The infinity loop: how two cycles interact

Two or more SEEDS Cycles relating to each other make an infinity loop. Your Sensations, Emotions, and Explanations are INTERNAL — known only to you. Only your Do & Say is visible. So in any two-person loop, each person knows their own full SEEDS but only the other person's D&S — the other person's S-E-E is a blindspot.



Each of you sees only the other's Do & Say — the other person's S · E · E is a blindspot.

Most relational damage is manufactured in that blindspot: we write our own (usually uncharitable) story about what we cannot see, and respond to the story. Making the two blindspots visible to each other, on purpose, in safety, is much of what couples counseling does. (Our version of the EFT “infinity loop” — see also the EFT negative-cycle diagram and the “demon dialogues” in Sue Johnson’s *Hold Me Tight*.)



Story follows state: the polyvagal layer

Why the cycle runs the way it does. This page summarizes the integration of polyvagal theory with the EFT cycle developed by Camille Scent, Ed.S., LPC, LMFT (ICEEFT), drawing on Stephen Porges (polyvagal theory) and Deb Dana, LCSW (the “ladder” metaphor and the phrase “story follows state”). We summarize their work with thanks — it is not our own.

Almost entirely outside your awareness, your nervous system constantly scans your surroundings, your body, and especially your relationships for cues of safety and cues of danger (Porges calls this neuroception). What it detects sets your autonomic state — and Deb Dana pictures those states as a ladder:

VENTRAL VAGAL — safety (“our home”)

Settled, open, connected. The ONLY state where you can send AND receive cues of safety.

Looks like: Calm · curious · able to listen · warm tone · “we’re okay”

SYMPATHETIC — mobilized (fight / flight)

Threat detected. The body readies for action before you’ve thought a word.

Looks like: Raised voice · pursuing · defending · pounding heart · the urge to move

DORSAL VAGAL — shutdown

Threat feels overwhelming or inescapable. The body de-activates to survive.

Looks like: Numb · quiet · spacing out · withdrawing · “I’m done” collapse

“Story follows state.” Your autonomic state colors everything — the Sensations you feel, the Emotions you name, the Explanation your mind writes, and what you Do & Say. The story your mind builds is a survival story designed to fit the state your body is already in, which is exactly why it feels so compelling and so impossible to argue with in the moment. When your spouse seems “unreasonable” or acts like they didn’t hear you, it is usually because their nervous system has dropped so far into mobilization or shutdown that their capacity to reason or listen has genuinely been compromised — flooding, or shutting down.

This is why we regulate the body first: you cannot reason your way out of a state your body is stuck in — you have to help the body feel safe first. Slow breathing, grounding, warm safe contact, and unhurried presence are how two nervous systems climb back up the ladder toward the one state where connection is even possible.

We are embodied souls — fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) — so it is no surprise to a Christian that safety, trust, and even our ability to hear one another are carried in the body God gave us. (Polyvagal theory is a clinically useful map; some of its finer neurophysiological claims are still debated among researchers, so we hold the mechanism lightly and the pastoral point firmly.)

Learn more: Deb Dana, *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy* (Norton, 2018); S. W. Porges, “The Polyvagal Perspective,” *Biological Psychology* 74(2), 2007. Integration credit: Camille Scent, *Polyvagal Perspectives on Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy* (ICEEFT handout).