07 / Flight and Fight

The flight and fight system is the **sympathetic** branch of the autonomic nervous system.

The flight and fight system is important for **optimizing the body for evasion or aggression**. It repurposes resources because some functions are not necessary during moments of danger. For example, chewing is not necessary when in danger, so saliva is not produced and the mouth goes dry. The body needs to stay at a higher level of energy, so breathing becomes shallow and heart rate increases. These changes are **intended to be temporary**, for small bursts when in times of danger.

When in the flight/fight state, we lose our social engagement with others:

- increase in distance when in flight
- Invasion of space when in fight
- removal of eye contact or aggressive eye contact
- flat facial affect with wider eyes
- muscles tense in preparation for survival
- ears attune to sounds of danger and not vocal prosody
- voice becomes more monotone and rushed

**The world is:** dangerous, threatening, out of control

**Thoughts become:** concrete, evaluative, focused on the past or the future

**Feelings of:** danger, tenseness, anxiety, anger

**Able to:** mobilize, escape, avoid, use aggression

**Unable to:** self-regulate, provide co-regulation opportunities, think critically, weigh options, be empathetic