

Rest & Restore vs. Safe & Sound Protocol

Two Gentle, Music-Based Ways to Support Your Child's Nervous System

Both protocols grow out of Polyvagal Theory, Dr. Stephen Porges's model of how a child's autonomic nervous system moves between three states: fight-or-flight (sympathetic), safe-and-social (ventral vagal), and rest-and-restore (dorsal vagal).⁵ SSP and RRP are gentle, provider-guided listening therapies that use specially composed or filtered music to work with different branches of this system — helping your child's body feel safe, connect, and recover.⁴

Safe and Sound Protocol (SSP)

TARGETS: VENTRAL VAGAL — the "Safe & Social" pathway

What it is

Now a 15-hour, three-phase program (Connect, Core, Balance) of specially filtered music, delivered gradually by a trained provider; developed by Dr. Stephen Porges.^{3,7}

How it helps kids

Calms the nervous system's danger-detector ("neuroception") so a child's body feels safer — opening the door to connection, listening, and learning.³

Often used for

Sound sensitivity, anxiety, social/communication challenges, trouble focusing, and preparing the body for other therapies.³

What you may notice

More eye contact, calmer body language, more willingness to engage, and better tolerance of everyday sounds.³

Rest and Restore Protocol (RRP)

TARGETS: DORSAL VAGAL — the "Rest & Restore" pathway

What it is

A 10-session instrumental listening program, co-created by Dr. Stephen Porges and Anthony Gorry, that gently guides the body toward physiological balance.¹

How it helps kids

Supports the body's ability to slow down, digest, sleep deeply, and recover after stress, illness, or big transitions.^{1,2}

Often used for

Chronic stress or fatigue, sleep struggles, digestive/gut issues, and emotional overwhelm.¹

What you may notice

Deeper sleep, easier digestion, a calmer "settled" body, and smoother emotional recovery.¹

The Restorative Side of the Dorsal Vagal Response

It's easy to think of the dorsal vagal pathway only as the "shutdown" response that appears under extreme threat — but this same pathway also runs the body's everyday healing systems, and RRP works with its healthy side.^{5,6}

- Rest & digest — powers calm digestion and metabolic recovery after meals and activity.⁵
- Deep restoration — enables the true stillness of deep sleep, naps, and physical rest.⁵
- Calm stillness without fear — the same relaxed, low-arousal state behind cuddling, quiet play, and settling in for a story — stillness, not collapse.⁶
- Energy conservation for healing — lets the body pause and recover after illness, big efforts, or emotional stretches.^{1,5}
- The "exhale" after growth — gives new feelings of safety time to settle in and anchor once a child has been active or challenged.²

Prepared by Mary McKone — BrainWorks Integrative Services, Inc. | For parent education only; not a substitute for individualized clinical guidance. Please consult your child's provider before starting a listening protocol.

1. Unyte / Integrated Listening Systems, "Rest and Restore Protocol," integratedlistening.com/products/rest-and-restore-protocol • 2. Unyte, "Program Differences: SSP, RRP, ILS," integratedlistening.com/products/program-differences • 3. Unyte Support, "What is the Safe and Sound Protocol (SSP)?" support.unyte.com/what-is-the-safe-and-sound-protocol-ssp

4. SSP Yoda, "The Difference Between SSP and RRP," sspyoda.com/blog/the-difference-between-ssp-and-rrp • 5. Providence, "Polyvagal Theory 101: A Beginner's Guide," [providence.org \(Polyvagal Theory 101 PDF\)](https://providence.org/Polyvagal%20Theory%20101%20PDF) • 6. Impact Learning, "Polyvagal Theory," [impactlearning.co.za \(Polyvagal Theory slides\)](https://impactlearning.co.za/Polyvagal%20Theory%20slides) • 7. "SSP Three Pathways: Connect, Core & Balance," SSP Three Pathways overview (PDF)