

## **What is the Safe and Sound Protocol?**

The Safe and Sound Protocol (SSP) is a listening therapy designed to rebalance your nervous system and reduce stress. Using specially filtered music, SSP can improve your emotional regulation and resilience, decrease sensory sensitivities, and increase capacity for social connection. When your nervous system is in a chronic state of defense, it's difficult to change thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The SSP helps regulate your nervous system, which changes how you respond to life's challenges, how you engage in therapy, and how you connect to yourself, others, and the world around you. The SSP opens up possibilities for growth, healing, and wellbeing through your relationships.

Developed by neuroscientist Dr. Stephen Porges, the SSP is a five-hour, research-based application of polyvagal theory. Polyvagal theory offers a new understanding of how the autonomic nervous system not only keeps you alive by regulating your breathing, heart rate, and digestion, but also profoundly affects your emotional and relational functioning. When your nervous system perceives safety, it signals to the body and brain that it's okay to rest, digest, and connect. This is called the ventral vagal state (calm, socially engaged, safe). However, when your autonomic nervous system perceives any kind of threat, your body shifts into survival mode and activates the sympathetic nervous system (fight/flight, anxious, irritable, on edge), or dorsal vagal state (frozen, shutdown, numb, disconnected).

If you have tried everything and nothing has worked, it could be because your nervous system is frequently in a fight, flight or freeze response. The SSP is designed to help your body shift out of this survival state and orient towards healing, balance, calm, and connectedness. You can become more emotionally and physiologically regulated. The SSP helps people experience a felt sense of safety and peace. It is a practical tool to help you move from surviving to thriving.

## **Who does it help?**

The SSP is a research-based therapy showing significant results in the following areas:

- Anxiety
- Trauma-related challenges
- Social and emotional difficulties
- Auditory and other sensory sensitivities
- Sleep difficulties
- Stressors that impact social engagement
- Internal agitation, irritability, and reactivity
- Those with physical conditions exacerbated by stress

## **What is the SSP process?**

First, we will explore the patterns of your individual nervous system. We'll consider how your nervous system has adapted as a result of your life experiences. This will help you recognize how the SSP is affecting you. We will discuss polyvagal theory as it applies to the SSP and your own symptoms. You will complete several assessments both before and after the SSP in order to measure its impact. We will also go over the mechanics of how to use the app, when and where to listen, what to expect, and answer any questions that you have.

Participating in the SSP seems remarkably simple: you'll listen to specially filtered music through headphones for a certain amount of time each session, as we track the effects on your physiological state. The SSP is a powerful tool, and people are often surprised how much impact they can experience from what seems to be "just music." The SSP is not DIY therapy; listening while in the presence of a trusted, attuned person contributes to its efficacy, minimizing adverse effects. The songs on the SSP playlist may be familiar, but the special filtration means the music may sound odd at times, with changes in volume or direction. We will attend to any shifts in you as you listen. To maximize the benefit of the SSP, keep an open mind, stay engaged, and communicate honestly about your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and overall experience. Notify me of any discomfort during or after listening. In your first listening session, you may listen anywhere from 2-30 minutes; we will be looking for the "just right" amount for your nervous system. This may change from day to day and our treatment plan will be dynamic and flexible. The SSP is not a treatment to "push through." Your job is to patiently and compassionately respond to your body's cues as your nervous system gets a workout!

Some people may complete some listening between sessions. In that case, we will develop a plan to create a supportive environment, which increases your sense of safety. Listening in the presence of a trusted family member, a friend, or a pet is vital to ensure the safety and effectiveness of SSP. Co-regulation with a person or pet while focusing on auditory cues of safety creates a positive feedback loop. You are always free to listen less than recommended, but do not listen longer than the time suggested. Even if most of the SSP is administered remotely, we will listen in-session at the beginning of hour 3 and during hour 5, as these can be particularly impactful moments. Changes are often seen immediately but may gradually unfold over the course of two months following the completion of SSP, as your nervous system integrates and engages with the new information that is now available.

The SSP can be woven into the work we are already doing in therapy. For some people, particularly in cases of trauma, I recommend working more closely together throughout the five-hour program. We may complete a section of the SSP in session together and then utilize EMDR, somatic interventions, or psychotherapy in response to your body's cues. We will prioritize grounding and mindfulness strategies to ensure you return to a safe and calm state post-SSP.

## **What is covered by the SSP package?**

The fee to access to the SSP program is distinct from the psychotherapy session rate. This one-time charge includes the psychoeducation, assessments, and preparatory work, access to the Unyte app on your personal phone, access to the SSP Connect & Core programs, administration of one round of SSP Core in-session and/or remotely, between-session monitoring, consultation, and support via text, phone call or email, and post-SSP assessment and follow-up. This bundled fee allows us to be flexible in the pacing and administration of SSP. That way, we can prioritize what works best for your needs without the pressure to complete the SSP in a certain time frame. We can adjust the duration of each listening time within session and outside of session to ensure the program is titrated safely. A limited number of sliding-scale packages are available.