



TRANSFORMING TRAUMA PROJECT



A partnership program between the
Australian Childhood Foundation and the Department of Education

Transforming Trauma Tasmania Showcase 2012

A practical resource reflecting the work of Tasmanian schools involved in the Transforming Adolescent Trauma project. Compiled by The Department of Education Learning Services and the Australian Childhood Foundation.

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Introduction:

This resource booklet is a culmination of the work of DOE sites across Tasmania and the Australian Childhood Foundation as part of the Transforming Adolescent Trauma Community Grants Project.

It includes project outlines from school's research projects and provides an insight into the strategies that were implemented into these schools in order to support young people who have experienced abuse related trauma and have found engaging in the educational environment difficult.

Also included for your further information is an example of a project discussion paper and newsletter to encourage your interest and participation in the Transforming Trauma project in 2013.

The development of this resource has been possible through the hard work of the Northern and Southern Transforming Trauma Advisory groups and education professionals who have been involved in the project across the state. Many named within the project briefs included and also the unnamed who have worked consistently and tirelessly due to their enthusiasm for the Transforming Trauma project and their unwavering commitment to young people who have experienced abuse related trauma and have felt disengaged from their education and their educational community.

Transforming Trauma Tasmania

The aim of the Transforming Trauma project is to enhance the capacity of secondary schools to meet the needs of young people who have experienced trauma, significant disruption and disadvantage. The project provides ongoing professional learning opportunities, support for action research projects, establishment of a Trauma Network and specific case consultation processes that aim to build the capacity of schools to better identify, understand and respond to those young people at risk of, or disengaged from the education system.

Thirteen schools were part of the original project funding submission. These schools were:

Prospect, Queechy, Brooks and Scottsdale High, Jordan River Learning Federation: Middle School & Senior School, Ed Zone, Woodbridge, Timsbury Rd, Taroona, Montrose Bay, Kingston, Huonville, Geeveston and Cosgrove High Schools. As the project has progressed into 2012 many schools who were not on the original proposal have requested to participate. Through our Train the Trainer sessions school support staff have been able to offer 2 hour sessions to these schools increasing the interest in the project across non project schools.

Transforming Trauma was launched in Hobart on 27th May 2011, by Paul O'Halloran MP. The keynote speaker forum included: Joe Tucci, CEO Australian Childhood Foundation, Mark Byrne, CEO, Children & Youth Services, Dept. of Health and Human Services, David Hamlett, Principal Taroona High School, Amanda Beams, Manager School Support, LSSE and Rebecca Erith and Kylie Gibbs, CREATE Young Consultant and CREATE State Coordinator. (121 people rsvped and 98 attended).

The program elements for 2012 included:

- A series of professional development sessions specifically for school psychologists and social workers.
- A series of professional development sessions for secondary school staff including some sessions for whole staff groups.
- A series of professional development sessions for support services and government agencies involved in case management with adolescents ie: Child protection, Police, CAMHS, AOD services etc

Provision of supporting resources to enable ongoing capacity building including:

- Dedicated web pages at www.childhood.org.au and Share Point (DoE)
- The development of a 2 hour professional development package for continued use for whole staff groups and a one day Train the Trainer session in each region to support staff to implement the package in schools
- Online discussion papers
- Newsletters
- Supported research projects in participating schools applying knowledge gained through PD sessions
- Trauma networks in North and South led by the Learning Services Advisory group in each region
- A showcase to be held annually to reflect outcomes and promote participation.

In 2011 we began the process of offering two day training sessions to school support staff in order to enable the information to be shared amongst the school communities they work within. These sessions were very well attended and received, thus enabling school support staff to focus collectively on trauma, its impacts on young people and their learning as well as engagement in the school sector. Following these sessions, in early 2012 school support staff were offered a 'Train the Trainer' session in order to provide the schools they work within a two hour 'Transforming Trauma' training session for all school staff. 87 school support staff participated in these Train the Trainer sessions.

Schools and staff involved in last year's program have provided some rich feedback:

- I have really gained a better understanding of how to work with and support students who are dealing with trauma. I think it has helped improve my practice.
(Teacher Middle campus)
- I thought it was great that all the staff were there. We often have to deal with the really tough kids who won't get into class, and we don't really know what we are doing. It feels better being able to talk to teachers about trauma. We are all talking about it in the staff room.
(Teacher Assistant Middle campus)
- The most recent Trauma training has clearly generated the capacity for our high school to offer a highly traumatised young boy the opportunity to access secondary schooling. With the knowledge gleaned from the workshop key staff now have the confidence and skills to embrace this challenge and provide an environment that significantly increases the likelihood of a successful transition. Without this training the provision of such a program would not even have been considered.
(Senior School Psychologist- Learning Services South)
- Particularly useful were the calming strategies that TT taught us, it has meant we have included these as part of our program at our school; students have made their own shields and frequently make use of the mandala colouring in sheets.
(Senior Social Worker – Learning Services South)
- I thought the transforming trauma workshops were fantastic and they should become far more widely available - they are not only pertinent to those students suffering from trauma. The professional learning around the brain and the function of its different parts and the part they play in behavioural traits is relevant to all teachers. We have many teachers assigned to working with difficult students who are literally working in the dark. They need some of the strategies we were introduced to and need more understanding about students' reactions to ways of being treated. Once again we realise how important relationships and empathy are. Some behaviour management strategies and school policies can exacerbate the problems.
I personally have found the knowledge I gained invaluable. I have found myself advising other teachers of strategies and activities to calm students. It is our intention at this high school to implement as many of the strategies as possible particularly in the Learning Centre where a safe, calm and supportive environment has been created. This needs to be widened across the school - our next challenge.
(Assistant Principal - Learning Services South)

Presently engagement data is being collated from all project schools in order to determine outcomes of the project on engagement of students. A standardised engagement tool (Circle Assessment tool taken from “Listen to Me”) was decided upon by the advisory groups and has been utilised in all project schools to determine connectedness of students at Term one and again in Term three – this collected data will be additional to the research projects.

Over 2012 the Northern and Southern advisory groups have continued to grow and develop Trauma Network meetings to support the content of the Transforming Adolescent Trauma project. The aim of the Trauma networks is to enhance the capacity of members to effectively support traumatised young people in schools. The focus is on sharing information, user-friendly resources and evidence-based practices. It is a forum for sharing updates on events in the Transforming Trauma calendar, action research projects, ACF discussion papers and newsletters. Part of each network meeting is also designated for secondary consultation, where a brief case study will be presented. This is followed by discussion by Senior School Psychologists, Senior Social Workers and an ACF staff member, about possible support strategies. Some meetings will also involve a brief presentation which follows on from a theme which was introduced during the Transforming Trauma workshops.

These meetings have been very well attended with up to 40 participants at a time and have established as a strong network with a potential for longevity beyond the scope of the project.

In 2011 from June to November 9 days of school support staff training was provided across the North and South. (1 session being a whole school staff session for Jordon River Learning Federation)

The table below indicates the number of Social Workers and School Psychologists in each Learning Service who completed Transforming Trauma sessions in 2011.

Learning Service	No. of Social Workers	% of Social Work team	No. of School Psychologists	% of School Psychologist Team
North	19/20	95	17/18	94
South East	16/16	100	18/18	100
South	13/14	93	15/16	94

In addition, the following Learning Service support team members attended:

North: 2 Speech & Language Pathologists

South & South/East: 23 Support Teachers
 4 Speech & Language Pathologists
 2 Autism Consultants
 1 Manager School Support
 1 PBS Consultant

Outcomes reflected by Education staff due to 2011 professional development:

- Increased understanding of student behaviour where trauma education has commenced;
- Increased number of Individual Education Plans;
- Increased emphasis on behaviour management plans being shared across teaching teams;
- Earlier identification of trauma impaired young people through educated support staff and knowledge of indicators;
- Positive Behaviour Support Teams to feature impact of trauma learning for staff education beyond the life of the project;
- Principle of inclusion to guide future decision making in cases where students are identified as trauma impaired / recovering;
- School environments to develop opportunity for repair and recovery for trauma impacted students i.e. differentiated curriculum, increased learning support, calmer classrooms, consistency of behaviour management responses;
- Informed Positive Behaviour Support systems including use of restorative practice.
- Several School Psychologists have used strategies to engage individual students, as well as having conversations with staff re students with challenging behaviour that reflect the understandings from a trauma perspective.
- School Psychologists also report being more mindful of the trauma perspective in their reflective practice.
- Some School Psychologists have begun a trauma treatment plan involving engaging, calming and containing.

One teacher made the comment on the impact the trauma PL had for one of her students:

I had no idea why K behaved the way he did, I thought he was naughty. I now understand he is 13 years old and looks tough but he has the reading capacity of a 7 year old, and the maths ability of an 8 year old. He stuffed around in class because he had no way of understanding what I was teaching.

When I yelled in class he would yell back and got angry so quickly...he threw a chair at me...Now I know that he goes into 'fight' mode when he's threatened. All his teachers know to stay calm and role model being calm to him....He hasn't been suspended for 3 months and he's finally producing work...

Research Projects:

As a further part of the project, alongside the training provided, there was an opportunity for schools to participate in a research project that promoted the use of learning within the training and map the outcomes for engagement of students. In developing and implementing the 'Transforming Trauma' program across Tasmania, secondary schools involved with the program have been provided with the opportunity to undertake their own action research projects, specifically and creatively implementing the knowledge and strategies provided through the program's activity and resources, into their schools and with their students. Advisory group members and ACF staff have conducted school visits to provide consultation and support participation in these projects.

Within this resource you will see the documentation of these research projects thus far including their project purpose, process and outcomes. They are a testament to the hard work, commitment and enthusiasm we have seen from these schools and their dedication to their most disadvantaged students. We commend their efforts and look forward to seeing further outcomes in 2013.

Overview of project to date:

Since the Transforming Trauma project's inception there has been a growing commitment and sense of enthusiasm from the advisory groups alongside school support staff, teachers & principals. By the end of 2012 we will have provided education and training sessions to over 700 staff directly alongside the numbers of school staff that are receiving information sessions from SSO's who have completed the Train the Trainer sessions. Their sessions are averaging participation rates of between 35 and 60.

2012 has seen the development of the project in regards to direct line education staff and teachers attending generic sessions located across the state and we have had considerable enquiries about possible participation in these sessions from non- project schools as well as primary schools interested in the content and process.

At the project launch Mark Byrne (CEO, Children & Youth Services, DCYFS, Department of Health and Human Services) provided some sobering statistics with regards to the number of students in Out of Home Care in Tasmania and the impacts on educational outcomes for these students at risk including Literacy, Numeracy and suspension/absences statistics. This presentation reinforced the objectives of this project with regards to supporting education staff to better understand the disengaged students in their schools and to find new responsive ways to engage and support them whilst building the capacity of their schools to better identify, understand and respond to these young people at risk.

Bill Linton, Manager School Support Learning Services South reflects on the project thus far:
This project has empowered the support team – and staff are confident to take it into schools to work with staff and children around trauma issues.

Now that support staff are confident, they will continue to update their professional knowledge and spread information, building links with other staff. This approach, embedding practice in existing networks, will enhance the sustainability of the Transforming Trauma project.

The impact on LSS High Schools has been significant. Support Staff across the LS are aware of the effects of trauma on students. This has come about through staff participation in the Professional Learning opportunities that were provided by the Australian Childhood Foundation. This front line PL enabled staff to offer immediate wraparound support to students, implementing effective strategies.

An immediate effect of the TT grant is noted in the conversations that we have had with support staff with regard to particularly high needs students. The conversations are taking into account background information and considering the effect that that trauma can have on students and how they behave. Staff hunches and instincts are now able to be couched in theory. From this understanding of the neurobiology of trauma, comes greater capacity to effectively accommodate and engage students.

The provisional program for 2012 to include Principals, and where appropriate Senior Staff delegates, will again allow the strategies to infiltrate schools and lead to cultural change for schools.

The change is coming from the ground up, assisting key staff to better address student needs, leading to cultural change for schools.

We look forward to the further development of the Transforming Adolescent Trauma project in 2013 and further mapping of outcomes across the state. Meanwhile we commend the efforts of the Northern and Southern Transforming Trauma Advisory groups and all schools and school staff involved in the project.



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Brooks High School

Project title:

This was changed from evaluating connectivity between teachers and students during advisory groups to “An Evaluation of Teachers’ awareness, level of reflective thinking and enactment of techniques which arise out of an appreciation of a Bio-Social Model of Trauma”

Research Project Inquiry Question:

The project attempted to measure the impact of the Trauma Training on a High School Staff 5 months after 2 professional learning workshops had been given to the staff. The object of the training was to strengthen the capacity of staff to meet the needs of young people in High Schools who may have “experienced trauma, significant disruption” and or disadvantage.

Framework/theme focus areas:

Morton’s (2004) survey paradigm, which was used to evaluate instruction in trauma, was used in this evaluation. The focus areas were:

- The Effectiveness of the training;
- The increased level of awareness, experienced by teachers, which had arisen from the training;
- The increased level of reflection by teachers, as a result of the training;
- The use, by teachers of the management techniques presented in the training.

Timeframe:

5 Months

Staff involved:

1. School Staff (including Senior Staff), the Senior School Psychologist, Social Worker and Senior EAL Teacher.
2. The Psychologist, Social Worker and Senior EAL teacher provided the training on 30 April and 7 May, 2012.

Resources required:

2 X 3 hour Trauma Seminars were presented, one week apart.

The Context

The training revolved around a developmental, Bio-social Model that examined the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress on children and adolescents. A video where refugee children and adolescents spoke about their experiences, illustrated the concepts of the model. Classroom strategies were then presented.

Evaluation processes:

A survey conducted 4 months after the training to evaluate the residual impact of the training given by School Psychologists, Social Workers and EAL teachers.

Outcomes - What's different now?

1. The staff were overwhelming in their praise of the training in May. *Five months later*, the vast majority of the staff said that the training was good to outstanding (85%).
2. The vast majority of teachers (90%) agreed or strongly agreed that the training had increased their awareness of trauma and the effects of poverty on students. A similar percentage found that the 4 Corners Program on intergenerational poverty had had a similar effect on their awareness of the students that they teach.
3. The vast majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the training had increased their reflection on how they may deal with students and their practice(94%).
4. The great majority of teachers agreed that the training had provided them with useful class-room strategies in dealing with students who may have been traumatized (77%).

Challenges and significant learnings:

1. The presentation had been put up on the School's Share Point. This needs to be updated so that it remains fresh. The techniques need to be simple and practical.
2. As staff change, the presentation and training needs to be brought to the attention of new staff.



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Geeveston District School

Project title

What makes you strong, through tough times?

Research Project Inquiry Question

In what ways might art be used to build personal awareness, social awareness, personal management, and social management?

Framework/theme focus areas

Using Art as a therapeutic tool, students explored concepts of self-mapping and navigating, the aim of which was to promote self-awareness, develop coping and stress management strategies, while accessing personal creativity. Through developing a professional relationship with the art therapist, students had the opportunity to build a safe and empowering connection, which provided valuable life skills that have the potential to be sustainable for the young person and the school community. Art therapy groups provide socialisation, fun and promote healthy relationships while fostering confidence and pride. Through developing these skills young people are encouraged to feedback to school staff and the Transforming Trauma project, *'what makes young people strong through the tough times'*. This approach aims to give young people the courage to have their voice heard among the people leading them into their future. This information sharing between young people and the significant adults in their educational pathways, can highlight gaps and strategies that school staff can use in addressing the difficulties in working with young people from trauma backgrounds. Building the capacity of rural schools to integrate new models of practice that support and respond to the needs of these young people is the aim of this project.

Timeframe

From July 2012 until November 2012 Dover District School - 3hrs weekly

- 2 groups of 1.5hrs, 11 young people in each group (whole senior school)

From July 2012 until November 2012 Geeveston District School - 3hrs weekly

- 1 group of 3hrs, 8 young people

Staff involved

Louise Vanderdonk (Art Therapist)

Angela Spooner (School Social worker)

Peter Pickett (Principal, Geeveston District High School)

Charles White (Advanced Skills Teacher)

Tanya Nelson (Welfare Worker, Geeveston)

Class teachers Dover and Geeveston

Tracey Cameron (Dover Principal)

Martin Chance (Advanced Skills Teacher, Dover)

Ian Cartmel (Dover School Chaplin)

Resources required

Funding sourced already from Huon Rotary Club to the amount of \$4,600.00

This funding paid for the Art Therapist Facilitator's wage and materials, e.g. art journal/visual diary for each student, large paper, fluoro pastels, digital camera, ink cartridges for printing photos of students and art work, face paints, hoodies and screen printing materials and plaster, papier mache and tin foil for mask making.

Schools provided in-kind support, such as a space to deliver group program, support from School Social Worker and other staff, photocopying, paper, excess art materials etc.

The Context

Dover and Geeveston are both small rural schools. Dover is the most southern school in Australia. Both schools have, and will continue to work in partnership to offer the greatest educational opportunities for their students.

Description of Project

This program aimed to build the capacity of young people in their school to advocate for the needs of young people experiencing trauma or tough times. Hearing personalized stories and strategies directly from students not only empowers the young person to have their story acknowledged but creates an understanding of localized issues and supports for teaching staff. Building empathy and positive relationships is of benefit to the educational community. This also complements and re-affirms a key message in the training that teachers are receiving through the partnership with ACF and DoE: that significant relationships and processing of trauma are critical in healing trauma.

Positive group dynamics were developed through carefully selected creative exercises which emphasised establishing and fostering safe, supportive and empowering relationships. Young people had the opportunity to explore a number of exercises that were suited to their group capacity such

as The Heroic Journey, Personal Symbols (that will be printed on hoodies), The Masks That We Wear, Mandalas and more.

Once a level of awareness had been realised, facilitators presented groups with the inquiry question 'What Makes You Strong Through Tough Times?' Facilitators also explained to the groups that teachers and youth support staff have been learning new ways to help support young people through tough times. They then opened up the conversation, inviting the young people to share their thoughts.

By encouraging the groups and individuals to become involved in educating their elders we are hoping to not only strengthen personal self-awareness but also learn straight from our youth, how we can support them better. This process aims to empower all.

During the 14 - week *Resilience Through Art* project (funded by Rotary), visual diaries were kept to record and celebrate the journey of each young person involved. We also created a photographic record of different parts of the project. With permission, schools will present some of these exercises, thoughts and artworks at the Transforming Trauma Showcase in November.

We are mindful that *Resilience Through Art* and *Transforming Trauma* maintain their autonomy while working side by side to support one another.

Evaluation processes

- Student art journals
- Photos tracking student progress
- Quality of student conversation, reflecting on learning
- Student posters identifying group values, i.e. 'what do you want from this group?'
- Facilitator observations and anecdotal data
- Feedback from teachers on students (emails, statements, testimonials)
- Community support of art exhibitions / showcase opportunities
- Young people presenting back to the school community at the Huon Valley Health and Wellbeing Launch.

Outcomes - What's different now?

Young people are able to articulate through art, their life experiences and what strategies have helped them to cope so far.

The school community embraces young peoples' voice of trauma and what makes a young person strong through the tough times.

Students have an enhanced verbal and visual language to express themselves.

Challenges

- Other students wanting to join the group
- Maintaining boundaries and social norms
- Inconsistent participation from young people e.g. suspensions, other school excursions
- Understanding abstract ideas
- Disclosures of young people that are possibly require mandatory reporting
- Need for staff support with group dynamics

Key messages

Externalizing young people's story/ strategies for coping with trauma (tough times) can be empowering, insightful and motivating for not only students but the educational community alike.

You don't need to rub out mistakes, you can learn from them. The facilitators deliberately didn't provide rubbers. 'Every page in your journal tells a story.'

Take a break. When the energy level is too high, go out and play soccer for 15-20 mins. If we focused for the majority of the lesson we went out and played soccer at the end.

Build group cohesion through a positive group contract/social norms.

Provide multiple opportunities to interact with others in a way that feels safe for the young person.

Allow students to wear hats. They choose their hat to represent their identity or to show identity or culture that they want to be part of.

Build positive identity through photos. One student said:
Look at all the photos of me. I've never had so many photos of me.

Most Significant Learnings

Activities need to be self-paced and adapted to individual needs to engage students in the process. They can work on the same outcomes and the same concepts, but in a way that engages them. For example, one student would not have anything go on his face, instead he wanted to express himself with clay. A message and concept can remain the same while being expressed through different mediums to allow student choice and control.

Doing group finger knitting we joked that 'If you drop a stitch we're going to have to start again' but there was always the option of a back up person taking your place. Concepts taught: cooperation, ask for help, be patient, support the person next to you, and look what we can achieve when we work together.



Learning about masks and why we wear them, was a major learning. It helped students look within themselves, to learn how to adapt in different situations, to understand the effect that they have on their environment and their environment has on them. Being aware that masks can help can protect us or help us feel better, e.g. make-up, to blend into the environment, or to keep things private, e.g. pulling up a hoodie.

This face painting shows the relationship of the opposites in our lives, the internal conflict we have sometimes, and the need to maintain balance.

Relaxation activities, even without closing your eyes, were confronting for some students. Silence can be experienced as foreign and therefore uncomfortable. We used music for the rest of the time. This was provided by students who DJed the session. They would ask their peers not to play some music, and also request favourite songs.

Allow students to observe an activity before joining in. Allow them to do this in their own time. Give them the choice and control.

Using The Heroic Journey as a visual prompt during lessons was a helpful reference point to show that there will be ups and downs in any situation.

Conclusion

Although both groups were very different, distinct messages have been clear:

- Ownership, involvement
- Being heard, having a voice
- Importance of time and space
- Capturing memories
- Support from others

Journals

Journals became a space where students were able to express ownership, memories & reflections. All students engaged with journaling, even those with low literacy would use colour, words and symbols to personalise their pages. Other thoughts and feeling were shared and discussed verbally with the facilitators. It became obvious that sharing thought and feeling on paper required a lot of trust from the students. It was critical that they were not judged or corrected for what they chose to write or draw.

As facilitators it was imperative to use inquisitive enquiry to think through the processes, questions and means of engaging the group and individuals, and to enable sharing of perceptions. Through carefully constructed questions, behaviours and strategies, facilitators were able to lead purposeful discussion, idea sharing, deliberation and decision. Through the collaborative process developed a shared commitment to decisions and courses of action.

Photos

Young people love photos and reliving an experience, whether it is memories of a party or a cool activity at school, this is very evident in our Facebook culture. Students looked forward to the beginning of each session where they would look at the photos taken of the group the week before. Students selected images that resonated with them and used these in their journal entries.

In the first week a 14 yr old male students felt so engaged with the activity of creating a positive group contract, he took a photo of it on his phone to share with friends and family. It is in this sharing and discussing that the understanding of the concept and themselves occurs. Photos can indicate whether a student is engaged with an activity and feels a sense of ownership or contribution.

Photos have been a very insightful reflection tool. Young people could often get caught up in the practical activity and not always fully understand the concept, in the sometimes overwhelming sensory experience. To be able to look back and talk through the process has been pivotal.



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Inspired Learning,
Creating Futures.



Geilston Bay High School

Project title

Trauma and Mental Health within the PBS Framework

Research Project Inquiry Question

“What knowledge, skills and understanding do we need to support students with a trauma background within a diverse student cohort?”

Theme focus areas

Developing staff understanding and awareness – building a diverse, robust “tool kit”
Integrating the principles of Transforming Trauma and Mind Matters into our PBS framework with the aim of better supporting our diverse student cohort.

Timeframe

Term 3 2012

Staff involved

All teaching staff and teacher aides
Case Study No. 1 written by Robyn Harvey, Principal
Case Study No. 2 written by Ashe Lan, My Zone Teacher

Resources required

Access to Transforming Trauma and Mind Matters professional learning and support staff, Richmond Fellowship, Nicola Crates (Optia), relevant resources to use with students.

The Context

Geilston Bay High School is a small urban high school with an ENI of 71.85 which indicates a high level of complex disadvantage. We are a low SES school and many of our students fluctuate along the mental health/ trauma continuum with a corresponding impact on their ability to engage successfully in their learning program. Our school has a very strong focus on personalized learning which for us means knowing every student well so we can support their individual learning needs. Our vision is “Inspired Learning, Creating Futures” which is achieved through dynamic school and community partnerships supporting focused learning within a caring environment. Our school learning program operates using a Significant Adult approach and is underpinned by our 4R’s model which stands for Relationships, Relevance, Rigor and the Really Important Stuff. School Wide Positive Behaviour Support is embedded in our practice and our school expectations – “We show respect, We are fair, We will achieve” inform all interactions within the school.

Description of Project

1. To build staff awareness, knowledge and understanding about the impact of trauma on students’ brain function, physiology, mental health and the effect on the student’s capacity to engage not only in learning but in reasoning, problem solving, dialogue and other typical interactions.
2. To integrate knowledge and strategies into our existing PBS framework with the aim to better support the health and well-being of our school community and improve our students capacity to successfully engage in learning.

Process

Most teaching staff attended the Transforming Trauma workshops.

Whole staff introduction to Mind Matters.

Follow-up grade team planning linking to the Australian Curriculum.

Richmond Fellowship presentation – how to support people with mental health issues and potentially high level challenging behavior.

Nicola Crates (Optia) – Breaking with Tradition: Contemporary considerations in the ethical and effective management of serious behavioural crises.

Risk assessment workshop (key staff).

Restorative practice workshop with all grade 7 students.

Development of escalation plans using informed practice and strategies for students with high level challenging behavior (potential violence) to ensure safety of all and support student engagement – shared and discussed with all staff.

Build relationships with external specialists eg. psychologist, psychiatrist, pediatrician and other agencies to facilitate informed decisions and a wrap-around consistent approach for individual students.

Establishment of a “green room” for use as a calm down/ chill out space where students can engage in a range of calming activities including mandalas, moon sand, stress balls, puzzles, magazines, listening to music etc. (currently being developed)

Existing Practice: My Zone and Student Activities Centre (Area C)

My Zone supports our most disengaged students in a highly personalized, focused learning program. Students are supported by a teacher in small groups of no more than 8 and typically participate in a blended learning program that may include mainstream classroom lessons, online and off-campus activities.

Student Activities Centre supports a range of activities including student leadership meetings, lunch time activities and small group learning activities with different teachers. The space also includes a highly specialized classroom which at different times supports a range of students with specialized learning needs. The area intentionally includes a cross section of activities for a range of students across all grades to minimize risk of stigmatization and isolation of students requiring additional support.

Evaluation processes

Anecdotal evidence suggests the knowledge, understanding and strategies being used are achieving positive results within the school. Staff report increased knowledge and understanding of the neurobiology of trauma and the impact this has on a student's capacity to engage. Understanding and therefore tolerance of resulting behaviours was varied across the staff prior to engaging in the targeted professional learning. One staff member acknowledged the need to hear some of the key messages from an "external expert" to confirm that school based decisions and direction were correct and best practice.

Over time requests for enrolment for students requiring additional support, disengaged or chronic non-attenders have increased significantly. These requests come from individual students and parents, within the Department and from external agencies such as Child Protection and Mission Australia – acknowledgement that the practice and support provided is highly regarded.

We currently collect detailed behavior data across the school which our PBS team regularly reviews to monitor trends, and analyse for problem areas and behaviours. This then informs future practice and professional learning

Future intentions include mental health and well-being surveys of students and profiling our student cohort on the basis of complex trauma, social connection (males) and self-efficacy (females).

Outcomes - What's different now?

Over time our focus on raising awareness and building understanding has increased capacity, empathy and tolerance at the same time equipping staff with more efficacious practice. Tracking the behaviour incidents and escalation patterns of two of our most challenging students has shown significant improvement. Incidents with one of the students has reduced to almost nil and potential situations are managed calmly without further escalation. The second student while still challenging and at times confronting has had no instances of high level outbursts. This same practice used with a newly enrolled student with a history of trauma and high level challenging behavior is allowing us to establish much more positive patterns of interaction and avoiding high level escalations as we get to know each other better.

Uptake and translation into practice remains varied across staff. The next step for us is to document some of the key elements of practice within our PBS framework and continue to assist staff to use these within their daily interactions with students to ensure it becomes embedded in our school ethos.

Challenges

Many staff initially felt that some of the practices were counter-intuitive and not the way they would usually respond to student behavior. The learning and assimilation continues to evolve and develop

as it challenges people's thinking and beliefs. Much of the related practice requires a paradigm shift and sometimes a shift in belief and values. Individual beliefs and values are usually deeply embedded in our emotions making change a challenging process.

Many staff felt (and a few still do) that the practices such as stimulus satiation, diversion to preferred activities and strategic capitulation were rewarding bad behaviour and hence would reinforce such behaviour causing an increase in the frequency and lead to copying by other students so they too can receive a "reward". The evidence and our own observations would in fact prove the opposite is true.

We have found that other students are usually very aware of the difficulties facing certain students and are not keen to "trade places". They usually respond to and are certainly open to discussion, reason and explanation of how we are trying to support a fellow classmate. This of course needs to be done with sensitivity and within the confines of confidentiality but has achieved positive support and raised the level of understanding and empathy within the school as a whole.

The challenges extend beyond support, empathy, understanding and appropriate response to behavior to the structure and delivery of learning. Significant modifications may be required for a student to access the curriculum bringing into question the relevance and rigor of each student's learning program. This typically requires attention to differentiation, differing points of access, modes of delivery and keys to engagement. Ongoing professional learning and collegial support will be required to continue to develop the collective knowledge, skills and understanding needed across the school.

Most significant learning

The alignment principle (or perhaps better described as the misalignment principle) – the more dangerous and high level the behavior, the more necessary and justifiable a severe and punitive response. This punitive approach in fact does very little if anything to reduce future episodes of similar behavior.

Looking at student need and shifting the focus to learning, away from responding punitively to behavior has been the single most significant learning across the staff.

In more general terms staff describe the transforming trauma PL as one of the best PL sessions they have attended in their career.

Key messages

Whilst it may be a steep learning curve, potentially seem counter-intuitive and initially require intensive time investment, the reward for all – students and staff – far out ways the required input.

CASE STUDY No. 1

Grade 8 student with history of relational trauma

The year began with a honeymoon period but quickly deteriorated into frequent high level escalations, sometimes several in one day, usually involving throwing of chairs or some physical contact. After the event he would typically be distressed and embarrassed by what had happened and not know how to recover and face “people” again. Staff tolerance quickly evaporated and serious concern was expressed about their or the school’s capacity to include the student. Several case conferences, planning sessions, discussions, trial and error followed as we grappled with the issues and how best to address them in the best interests of everyone involved but most importantly the student. A risk assessment was completed with the support of the Department.

We quickly realised the “traditional” methods/ strategies did not work and in fact contributed to the escalation. We needed something radically different.

We sought additional advice from a consulting psychologist and advocated for referral to a psychiatrist, and continued at all times to meet and discuss options with the family. We began trialling diversionary tactics, addressing need where possible and at times used strategic capitulation. Staff were directed to use these strategies at all times. Uptake continues to vary across the staff – learning program reflects this and minimises contact with unsupported situations without prior planning to minimise risk.

Now, there are radically different results – no significant incidents – potential triggers and issues are identified early and escalations avoided.

Once high level escalations were under control the next question was how to support new learning of replacement behaviours. This is addressed at another time when the student is calm and a quiet conversation can be had. Issues and expectations are not laboriously rehashed but rather quietly addressed frequently (the dripping tap strategy) and where possible, linked or reframed in the students experience. Small gains continue to be made as the student responds in more socially acceptable ways across varied contexts.

The student’s attendance is good. He appears to be engaged and happy, his presence in the school is acknowledged with cheery greetings by most. He knows who from and where to seek help when things go wrong. Recovery from a potential issue is no longer a painfully shameful event. His family are supportive – interactions with peers are improving slowly.

CASE STUDY No. 2

My Zone

My Zone is an alternative learning program specifically catering to the students who have disconnected from education and pose the highest behavioural challenges and/or learning difficulties at Geilston Bay High School. The program is highly individualised and develops and adapts around the specialised needs of the students in the class. The opportunity to develop literacy and numeracy skills is combined with learning and experiencing respect and trust in the classroom; repairing broken connections and relationships, processing and reflecting, and reconnecting students to the pleasures of authentic learning and genuine success. There are currently 12 students who regularly attend My Zone and the program operates 4 days per week. The My Zone teacher runs groups of approximately 5 students per session.

The format of the My Zone program is based on guiding Positive Behaviour System (PBS) principles:

1) Recognising the 'need' or function behind behaviour. Students currently in My Zone display the following needs:

- **Attention:** *I think I do work in this class because (the teacher) is always there to help when you need it.*
- **Safety/security:** *My Zone is small, there's usually no more than 6 students here, that's why I feel safe.*
- **Positive relationships:** *My Zone is the only class that I do work in, there aren't so many other kids and I get along with them all way better. I get respect in this class.*
- **Space:** *That's the one of things I like about (the teacher), she gets that sometimes you need to just chill.*
- **Control:** *I like it when it says on the board that I can choose what I want to do.*
- **To be heard:** *(The teacher) is really good to talk to, she always gives really good advice, even if I don't always follow it.*
- **Empowerment:** *We get to talk about heaps of things and ask questions about things, like just last session we ended up doing health, and talking about STIs and sex and pap smears.*
- **Freedom:** *I don't have to worry about getting distracted by my friends, because that's what always happened before, I can just sit down and do my work without anyone hassling me.*

2) My Zone provides a safe environment to address student behaviour without punitive measures. There is a positive atmosphere, an acceptance of the student despite the behaviour.

3) My Zone teaches functional ways to meet needs, often through the student's journey of self-reflection and the opportunity to process this information.

4) My Zone provides a space for students to participate in experiential learning, where disruptive behaviours have a minimal effect on the larger school population.

5) Each student has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that addresses their emotional wellbeing and the Meta skills required for them to engage in their personalised literacy and numeracy program.

The Role of Transforming Trauma

The importance of identifying and understanding the function of behaviour i.e. the neuropsychological and psychophysiological triggers of behaviours and their consequential effects on mental health and self-esteem are crucial to the success of the My Zone program, both in terms

of student management and being able to teach students effective ways to co-regulate their behaviour and form positive relationships.

The flexible learning program allows opportunities to change activities, have the space to be alone, to have feelings validated and a chance to talk and be understood. By focussing on students' strengths and interests, it provides a scope for students to work toward regaining their sense of control and the ability to form new, healthy patterns of behaviour.

In developing these new skills in self-knowledge, social relationships and unlearning what are now maladaptive patterns of behaviour, the students are more likely to experience positive mental health outcomes; make informed, positive choices; and experience their own potential as individuals.

The following 'real life' stories may illustrate this further:

Example 1: 'Billy'

Billy was a grade 9 student who was regularly being suspended from school to the point of impending exclusion. He was verbally and physically aggressive and used his time at school, predominantly, to sell cigarettes, organise fights and bully/harass other students. When I met Billy he refused to look me in the eye, made sexist and derogatory comments toward me and attempted to intimidate me with inappropriate language and sexual innuendo. Whilst in some cases Billy's actions did have the desired effect, I remained friendly, consistent in my expectations and always found something positive to say to Billy throughout the duration of the lesson. I met with his parents and soon gained his mother's approval and trust.

Billy's behaviour improved, particularly with regard to the more personal comments he had been making toward me and I would regularly report positive feedback to his parents and teachers at school. They, in turn, would praise him and engage positively with him. Once Billy's behaviour started to improve and our professional relationship had strengthened, I was able to focus more on learning about Billy's aims and goals in life and having conversations with him about his future. Billy was engaging in voluntary work at a primary school, helping the groundsman with general maintenance tasks. I created a work journal for Billy to complete at the end of each day, totalling his hours worked, tasks that he had completed, skills involved and any new skills he had acquired. We began writing his resume and I organised for him to meet with a representative from Advanced Personnel Management (APM), who in turn began to look for official work experience for Billy. Billy's behaviour improved steadily and working with him in class was an absolute pleasure. We focussed on subject matter that was specifically tailored to helping him in the work place, in the areas that were relevant to him.

He gained his WorkSafely General Health and Safety Awareness certificate and his Building and Construction WorkSafely certificate, he was extremely proud of this. Billy became instrumental in persuading new students, just starting the My Zone program, to be open minded and 'leave their attitude at the door'. Billy soon found work experience, through APM, at a local business and successfully applied for fulltime exemption from school. He is now enrolled at the Polytechnic College, and has visited us since to see how we are going and say

"hi".

– Ashe Lan, My Zone teacher.

Example 2: 'Kevin'

Having been a non-attender of school for one and a half years, Kevin had attended one lesson in my class and returned the following day for his second. The first day had been incident free and he had spent the time revising the method of subtraction with his friend,

Alice. When he entered my class on the second day, his body language was agitated and he was irate in his responses to me, he made a brief comment about being the only student in the class at that time. I informed him that I was expecting other students to arrive but looked forward to the opportunity to work with him one-on-one. When I told him what his lesson consisted of, working on multiplication and division, he responded "I'm not writing anything".

I pointed out to him that there would be some writing required, as I had written the problems on the white board and was expecting him to copy them in to his book, however, now that I knew he didn't like writing, I would be very happy to do something different the following lesson. I offered him the opportunity to solve the problems on the whiteboard, rather than in his book, he refused to do this. I asked him if he was able to do multiplication and he responded that he could, he just wasn't going to.

I asked him if he was willing to talk through the problems on the board with me, he responded that he was not. I asked him if there was something else that he would like to focus on, such as reading, he responded that there was not. I asked him what he had envisioned doing in my class that day and he responded that he had only turned up so that he would not get in to trouble with his parents and was intending to wait for an hour and a half and then leave.

I made the observation that he had gone to a lot of trouble to get to class on time, which I was very impressed with, but pointed out that there was more required of him in my class than simply attending. I told him that I was prepared to give him 5 minutes to decide how he would be willing to constructively spend his time in my class and if he decided not to participate I would contact a senior staff member to see him home. Kevin reacted violently to this, he threw his mobile phone on the ground, kicked over a chair and began screaming at me, using abusive language and stating that I was threatening him and I was "just like everybody else". He exited my classroom, slamming the door behind him. I was in the process of phoning a senior staff member to notify them of Kevin's reaction and that he had left my classroom and was unsupervised, when Kevin re-entered and sat down.

I hung up the phone and stated that I was glad he had returned because it had saved an unnecessary phone call and meant that we could still leave the lesson on a positive note, if he was happy to participate. In that time, I had been thinking over some of the comments Kevin had made leading up to his reaction and asked him if he was very upset that there was no one else in the class.

He said yes, that he didn't like being the only one because it made him feel 'like an idiot'. I responded that his feelings made sense and that I wouldn't want to be 'hanging out' with my teacher and not my mates either. I pointed out that this was a great opportunity to achieve some excellent work without having to worry about his mates finding out how smart he is, he laughed at that. I apologised for coming across threatening to him and told him I had been trying to give him a choice, not an ultimatum and that I was pleased to see that his mobile phone had survived the fallout – but could he now please put it away so we could focus on the task set for the lesson. He did so and the lesson continued, incident free.

Kevin left with much praise and positive reinforcement and, I trust, the knowledge that these upsets do not destroy a professional relationship, but, hopefully strengthen them due

to an increased understanding, trust and respect for one another. - Ashe Lan, My Zone teacher

Example 3: 'Zoe'

Zoe was enrolled at My Zone due to being disruptive in class, refusing to participate, excessive socialising in the classroom, disrespectful behaviour and what was considered a general disregard for learning and school expectations.

When Zoe attended her first session of My Zone, the regular teacher was absent and a relief teacher was there instead. It was not a good day for attendance and Zoe was the only one there for the duration. Zoe recalls "I got there and thought, 'if this is how it's going to be all the time I'm not coming back'. Then next session (the teacher) was there and there were other people around but I still wasn't sure".

When I first met Zoe, she looked me up and down and stated "I'm going to get changed in to my pyjamas now". I encouraged her to do so, if she felt that would result in her feeling more comfortable and able to work on the set activities. Zoe made a rather elaborate display of changing in to her pyjamas, but 10 minutes later, she changed back in to her school uniform and started to do her work. When I asked to reflect on this, months later, Zoe states "I can't really remember that, I think I would have probably been checking to see how far I could push you."

Once Zoe had attended a few more sessions of My Zone, she began to become more talkative. Firstly with me, particularly on the occasions where she was the only student, and then slowly with the other members of the class. Reflecting on this, she says "I was really shy, it took me a while to stop being shy, but everyone's really nice in here and we can just talk about stuff and (the teacher) is like one of us, as long as we do our work too, she still expects us to do that".

In my discussions with Zoe, some recurring themes soon became evident – how 'dumb' she thinks she is and how 'lazy' she thinks she is. She became very open with discussing her mental health (her recent treatment for Depression), her family history and her family's attitude toward her 'never going to get through college being so stupid'. As our conversations became more regular and our relationship strengthened, she started to become very inquisitive and would regularly seek advice, answers and information.

There was ample opportunity for me to talk positively about her abilities to her and praise her and encourage her. Her self-deprecation became a 'joke' between us, and the regularity of this occurring has significantly decreased. Zoe still does not feel confident to say that she is "good" at anything, but she has developed the understanding that her strength is more in English than in Maths, that she can apply herself really well to her work, that her work is always presented neatly with attention to detail and that she is very well liked by her peers.

Zoe will start college next year and she appears to be quietly confident. She has asked which subjects she would need to do in order to attend university and what would be required if she wanted to work in the area of early childhood.

– Ashe Lan, My Zone Teacher



TRANSFORMING TRAUMA PROJECT



A partnership program between the
Australian Childhood Foundation and the Department of Education



Jordan River
LEARNING FEDERATION

Jordan River Learning Federation - Senior School

Project title

Using calming activities after break times in senior school.

Framework/theme focus areas

The use of calming activities after transition periods in a senior school. Grade 9, 10, 11 and 12 students will choose a calming activity after each break for a period of 10 to 15 minutes.

Research Project Inquiry Question

Are calming activities useful in settling students after break times?

Time frame

This project will run for a period of 4 weeks.

Staff involved

All school staff

Resources required

Newspapers, music CDs, smartboards, paper, mandalas, modelling clay, novels.

Context

Jordan River Senior School (Years 9-12) is situated in the Bridgewater and Gagebrook communities. The students come from a community with high unemployment, low health outcomes, low parental school achievements, a high crime rate, and high percentage of child and family intervention. The 2006 Census indicates that Gagebrook is the most disadvantaged suburb in Tasmania and Bridgewater was the 5th most disadvantaged suburb.

Description of Project

All staff attended a Professional Learning day with Lauren from Australian Childhood Foundation. The day was devoted to revising some of the neurobiology work that we had previously introduced, and then sharing a range of activities that are supportive for children with a trauma history. Lauren brought many activities and examples of calming practices that she shared with the staff. We were also given the opportunity to take part in some of the activities.

Afterwards we discussed the activities and as a whole staff decided we would try some of these. Looking at our School Wide Positive Behaviour Supports (SWPBS) data we could identify that staff were dealing with difficult behavior straight after break times. Students were returning to the classroom usually in a heightened state after the breaks. Due to a history of trauma many of our students have difficulty navigating the social world. Break times are therefore often a struggle. Many have difficulty staying out of trouble and find the social interaction challenging with less teacher direction to support and assist them. Subsequently when they return to class many are upset or angry; some cannot transition and make the change to on task activities and some are physically present but are certainly not in the “moment” and ready to listen, engage and learn.

Staff chose a range of activities that they believed would support their particular Advisory Class. Some classroom teachers introduced only one activity and all students took part. Other staff members chose 4 or more and provided the materials in a box that students could select from when they came into their room.

Some of the activities were:

Grade 11 and 12: Colouring mandalas

Grade 9: Play dough, drawing

Grade 10: Cupping, colouring mandalas

Although staff looked at breathing techniques (activities with feathers) no one chose this as a Classroom activity as many staff felt this would be too far outside the students’ comfort zone.

One staff member did start taking a Yoga class and he found the breathing exercises to be very calming.

Calming Box

The teacher of this grade 9 class went through a range of activities with her students. After each break the students could choose to:

Use the feathers/cottonballs to do some mindfulness activities.

Use the hand cream for a five minute hand massage (to themselves).

Work with the stress ball for five minutes.

Model or mould the play dough for 5 minutes.





Mandalas

Another teacher chose the mandalas as the only activity to use with the whole class. He had a range of mandalas and students from grade 11 and 12 chose which one suited them. This was without a great deal of background knowledge or explanation and the students engaged well at this level.



Further drawing

One of the grade 11 students started with the mandalas, however he then started his own design (he said for a tattoo) and worked on this during the time others worked on their mandalas.

What's different now?

Staff feel that they have some strategies for dealing with highly aroused students. They have even used calming activities during other times to reduce student anxiety and agitation.

Challenges

Starting. We seemed to find a few reasons why it was difficult, but once we started we wondered why we thought it would be so hard.

Key messages

This doesn't have to be hard. We downloaded the mandalas from the internet from free sites and shared them between the staff. Most of the other activities were inexpensive, and once you had the set up materials it was cost sustainable.

Most significant learning

Sometimes 10 to 15 minutes can save you hours in dealing with behaviors which have resulted from highly aroused students who have not been within their 'window of tolerance' and ready to engage.





TRANSFORMING TRAUMA PROJECT



A partnership program between the
Australian Childhood Foundation and the Department of Education



Learning Services South- Huon Valley Support Team

Project title

Educating the Educators

Research Project inquiry question

Can school social workers and school psychologists train teachers in all the schools in the Huon Valley so they understand what trauma is, how it impacts on learning and what strategies they can use at school?

Framework/theme focus areas

Up-skilling teachers so they have an understanding of trauma to better support students.

Timeframe

March – October

Staff involved

Sam Dobson – Senior Social Worker
Natasha Laird – School Psychologist
Anna Todd – School Psychologist
Angela Spooner – School Social Worker
Cameron Paynter – Grade 8 Coordinator, Huonville High
Clare Laning – School Psychologist

Resources required

Making Space Learning (free downloadable book from ACF website), handouts: Brain Food, brain changes throughout adolescence, the human brain, guided breathing technique (Briere & Scott 2006), identity shields, copies of PowerPoint, ideas for predictability at schoolwide and classroom levels, mandalas for colouring, mindfulness activity - telling a story peacefully, resource pamphlet from ACF, green leaves cut out for tree of hope, yellow squares of card for teachers to write why they became a teacher and what the greatest challenges are (one comment on each side), feathers for mindful breathing, lollies, chewing gum, cotton balls, textured things, play dough, soft and squeeze balls, soft toys, toy cars, shells, a table of things to touch and hold, SMART board for watching YouTube clips and for PowerPoint, drink or fruit or platters of nibbles for mindful tasting on arrival, laminated questions on display on group tables, butchers paper, textas, administrative support for photocopying.

The Context

The Huon Valley is situated south of Hobart, where there is lots of primary industry. The Huon schools are geographically spread but work together through the Huon Alliance. Each of the support staff who delivered the training, had existing relationships with the schools, know most of the staff and support the students and their families through direct practice.

Description of Project

Anna, Natasha, Cam and Sam developed a training package immediately after attending the Transforming Trauma Train the Trainer workshop.

Staff who had attended previous training shared resources and with Cam's input worked out what would be most beneficial for teachers.

Samantha Dobson, Senior Social Worker, emailed and/or spoke to each school principal to discuss the possibility of onsite trauma training, for 70min after school.

It was helpful having a tub of resources together to take to schools (as mentioned above).

All activity related resources including food/drink for mindful eating/drinking were provided by the support team running the training. Some schools offered to provide platters of nibbles.

Staff delivering training were those who already had relationships with that school/context plus others who had been delivering the program. There were always at least staff two involved, and up to four.

Transforming Trauma Training - February

Planning – March

Glen Huon/Franklin – 28 March

Huonville High – 29 March

Huonville Primary School -16 April

Kingston Beach Educational Care – 22 May

Geeveston and Dover District High Schools – 20 June

LINC – two morning sessions 1 & 15 August

Evaluation processes & what's different now?

Teacher feedback:

Insightful.

Was not aware of trauma, prior to the fantastic presentation.

Has given me greater understanding what children have to deal with every day.

Has given me strategies to assist students in class, highly recommend the training for all school staff.

The training was a fantastic insight into a number of my students' experiences and gave me some useful tools to use in the classroom.

It helped me to gain an insight into the reasons behind behaviours.

The training took us to levels of understanding that have changed how we interact with students.

My staff all wish that they had access to this understanding of trauma when they started out as teachers. – School Principal

Love learning about strategies to help engage students, I didn't realize that traumatized students were actually unable to engage because of the physiological status of their brain.

I've always found that the best professional learning activities have involved me in challenging my preconceptions or, at least, looking at a situation critically and coming to some new, deeper understanding. The trauma training session presented us with numerous interesting new ideas stemming from brain research, many of which were new to me, but most importantly it caused me to re-evaluate my practice in light of this new information. I found it extremely practical and immediately useful to my teaching and dealing with students.

Staff comments on the tree of hope where participants were invited to write their hopes for students on a leaf and attach it to the display. These leaves of hope have been on the staff room wall for 6 months now at Huonville High).

The children will feel supported and trust us.

I hope they feel calm and confident to achieve anything they want to.

Believe in themselves.

I hope they don't fall off the tree and if they do that they flutter to the ground and land softly.

Additional schools are now requesting package. It has also been shared with the whole Learning Services South, Social Work team.

One of the school psychologists presented the training to her supervision group at UTAS

Challenges

It all takes time, more time than you expect. It requires coordinating by phone, email and across different locations. It takes planning and organizing to have everything you need to run the training. It takes energy and enthusiasm after a busy day of supporting students. You need to regulate yourself. Take care of yourself.

Most significant learning

How incredibly beneficial it is for teachers and the students they teach.

How there is a gap. We expect teachers to be able to support students with a history of trauma but they don't necessarily have the knowledge and skills to do that.

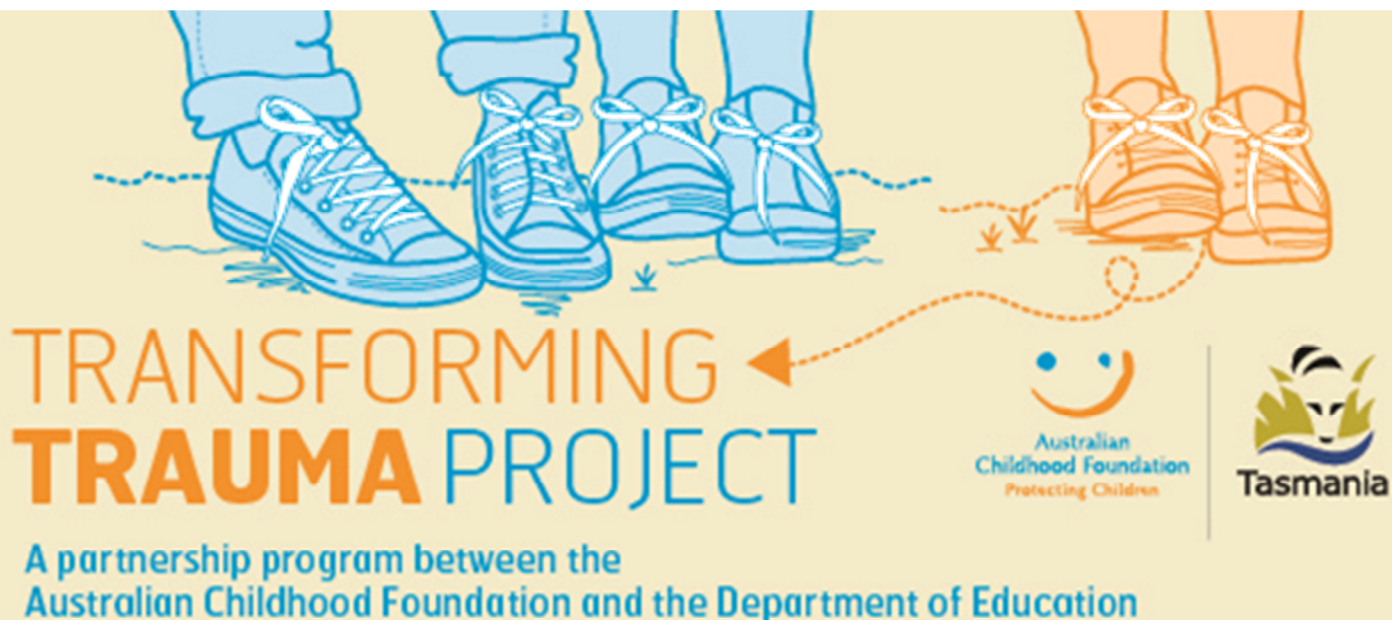
Key messages

Two of the ACF messages:

Our brains have the power to heal another brain.

Time doesn't heal trauma. Processing does.

In the simplest ways, teachers, like any member of the community, have the ability to help someone heal.



Prospect High School

Looking beyond the behaviour

Framework/theme focus areas

The focus of the project was to promote greater understanding, empathy and management success for students affected by trauma and to highlight the impact trauma has on cognitive, emotional and social development. Training was completed through whole staff presentations, grade team follow-up discussions and the development of individual support plans for selected students with trauma backgrounds.

Timeframe

2012 ongoing

Staff involved

Gene Colgrave (School Psychologist), Karen Mason (Social Worker), Cary Stocks (Principal), Jacque Everson (Assistant Principal), Whole Staff Involved

Resources required

- Trauma Management Plan
- Calmer Classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children - State Government Victoria
- Making Space for Learning- Australian Childhood Foundation

- Window of Tolerance: Discussion paper- Australian Childhood Foundation

The Context

Prospect High School is one of five High Schools in the Launceston area and a feeder school for several primary schools.

Project Inquiry Question

There were a number of questions we sought to explore:

- What is the actual cause of the behaviours that these students are displaying?
- What are we doing that isn't working?
- What are we doing that is working?
- What do we need to do differently?

Description of Project

To develop individual student support plans for students with trauma backgrounds using the ACF recommended strategies. The project was limited to one target student per grade. Individual student support plans involved collaboration with whole grade team's.

Evaluation processes

To evaluate the project we drew on:

- Group discussions with teachers
- Anecdotal stories and observations from teachers
- Analysis of behaviour incident data
- Attendance data

Outcomes - What's different now?

Increased teacher understanding of the impact of trauma on brain neurobiology and on child behavior and development. The development of a deeper understanding of individual student backgrounds and life experiences. Increased knowledge and applied use of most successful management strategies.

Challenges

Difficulties sticking to 'game plan' in the face of persistent challenges, high level behaviour and inconsistent attendance. The need to perceive progress in terms of small steps and the level of sustained effort required to make noticeable differences. The instability and unpredictability of student's lives in this cohort affected the capacity to make long term school based plans and arrangements.

Most significant learning

The importance of teachers providing regular 1:1 contact and support for students and connecting on an even level which was a significant intervention in itself.

Key messages

Importance of information sharing regarding effective strategies and promoting a shared understanding of the student's life experiences. Using support plans to be prepared for the unexpected.

Conclusion

Partial success was achieved across all individual support plans. Staff indicated benefitting from the trauma training provided particularly practical strategies.

CASE STUDY

Adam is 15 years of age and is in Grade 9. Adam has experienced significant trauma and school reports detail an extensive behavioural history. Adam often leaves class without permission, wanders the corridors and exhibits stress responses on arrival to school and during transition periods which is characterised by aggressive and inappropriate behaviour and a refusal to engage in class.

Behaviours observed included:

- Heightened fight/flight response accompanied by aggressive behaviour towards peers
- Regresses to childlike behaviours e.g. inappropriate noises, comments
- Difficulty in social situations with peers, overexcitement, misinterprets social cues
- Difficulty coping with change and unfamiliar environments

Support strategies used included:

- Teachers are able to assess where Adam is in relation to his window of tolerance e.g. overshooting or undershooting and use appropriate strategies to assist him to regulate own arousal levels.
- Importance of co-regulation and offering Adam time and space to calm
- Teachers designated defined roles e.g. authoritarian, mentor/buddy, advocate
- Any changes to class routine are discussed with Adam well ahead of time
- Specific interests have been incorporated into key subject areas



TRANSFORMING TRAUMA PROJECT



A partnership program between the
Australian Childhood Foundation and the Department of Education



QUEECHY HIGH SCHOOL

Queechy High School

Project title

“Calming, Engaging, Learning”

Research Project Inquiry Question

How can we increase student focus and productivity in the classroom; particularly in those classes with a higher ratio of students with trauma histories?

Framework/theme focus areas

- Calming & Engaging
- Increasing capacity for learning in the classroom.

Timeframe

- Term 2 – 2012 (12 weeks)
- 3 x lessons per week.

Staff involved

- Adrian Smith (AST / Class Teacher Science)
- Brendan Poke (AST)
- Alicia Hodge (Social Worker)
- Anita Markham (School Psychologist)

Resources required

Relaxation Technique Cards

The Context

The class cohort chosen to be involved with the action research project was selected due to the higher ratio of students within the class known to have trauma histories. The group, a grade 9 science class was known to be fairly disruptive, at times, and was described as being difficult to settle and maintain on task during learning times.

Project Inquiry Question

Does the use of a regular calming activity (*eg. relaxation task*) at the beginning of each lesson, combined with strategic use of engagement activities (*eg. having students stop and point to a specific object in the room*), increase the students' level of focus and time on-task, and reduce incidences of challenging behaviour?

Description of Project

The aim of this project was to increase student engagement in learning as well as to reduce incidences of challenging behaviour. Students in the chosen class participated in a brief calming activity (*relaxation technique*) prior to commencing a set learning task during every science lesson for the duration of the project (*3 lessons per week over 12 week period*). The calming activity was repeated as necessary during the lesson. The calming activity was facilitated by the class teacher, Adrian Smith, and observational notes were taken by the teacher to monitor the impact on students focus, productivity and behaviour.

Evaluation processes

Observational

Outcomes - What's different now?

- Teacher report indicates that relationships with some students within the class have improved since implementation of the calming and engaging activities. The teacher perceived that the calming and engaging activities provided him with another avenue through which to connect with and establish relationships with some students in the class.
- Teacher reports indicate that the calming and engaging strategies were found an effective way in which to improve the productivity and learning for the targeted class for short periods of time (*10 minute intervals*).
- Calming and engaging strategies were observed to be effective in preventing escalation in challenging behaviours, and were also helpful in teaching students self-soothing and emotional/behavioural regulation skills.

Challenges

- Teacher evaluation indicates that initially it was challenging to persuade the students to take the presented calming and engaging tasks seriously or for them to mentally comprehend the purpose of these activities. There was some initial resistance observed in response to the introduction of the calming and engaging strategies as the students expressed concern about feeling and being treated differently. However, this resistance reportedly lessened significantly after the first couple of weeks with the students being more accepting of the tasks and this was evidenced by greater maturity in the students' response to them. The student's response to implementation of the tasks was reportedly mediated by the teachers use of reflective positive feedback to students in regards to the observations made in terms of improvements in task focus and learning. It was further mediated by clear explanation of the project goals.
- Teacher evaluation also indicates that the activities tended to decrease in efficacy, in terms of increasing student task focus and productivity, if they were utilized too much during a lesson (*eg. 5-6 times per lesson*).

- Teacher evaluation indicates that the calming and engaging tasks were needed less during morning lessons; as opposed to afternoon ones, and this was attributed to the students being more fatigued and unsettled by afternoon.
- The teacher was unexpectedly absent for a period of two weeks nearing the end of the project. As a result the teacher found that upon his return the class had regressed, and were much more unsettled and disruptive. It took about one and half weeks for him to reestablish the routine and to observe the same level of efficacy that was previously being experienced prior to his absence.

Most significant learning

- The teacher reported that the calming and engaging strategies utilized were found to be an effective way in which to improve the productivity and learning for the targeted class for short periods of time (*10 minute intervals*). However, it was further commented that one size does not fit all, and it was communicated that the same strategies might not work for other cohorts of students.
- For the target class, the teacher reported that the strategies used were helpful in establishing consistent boundaries and expectations for the group from lesson to lesson in terms of learning, focus and in promoting predictability. In addition, it was noted that implementation of the strategies assisted in decreasing incidences of higher level behaviour issues as the calming and engaging tasks, when used strategically throughout the lesson, helped to interrupt and prevent the escalation of lower level behaviours.

Key messages

- Calming and engaging strategies are crucial components of building and maintaining relationships with young people who have experienced trauma.
- Calming and engaging strategies can assist in improving student's ability to focus on tasks and increase their capacity for learning.
- Calming and engaging strategies were effective in preventing escalation in challenging behaviours, and were also helpful in teaching students self-soothing and emotional/behavioural regulation skills.

Conclusion

In summary, from this action research project the following outcomes were found:

- Calming and engaging strategies are crucial components of building and maintaining relationships with young people who have experienced trauma.
- Calming and engaging strategies can assist in improving student's ability to focus on tasks and increase their capacity for learning.
- Calming and engaging strategies were effective in preventing escalation in challenging behaviours, and were also helpful in teaching students self-soothing and emotional/behavioural regulation skills.

The opportunity to have implemented these interventions has clearly shown that using calming and engaging activities with a mixed cohort of students can lead to positive improvements in the areas of student learning, behaviour and relationships.

CASE STUDY

John (Pseudonym)

Pre-Project Observations:

John is a student who has experienced trauma throughout his childhood in the form of family violence. In class John was observed to be withdrawn, and not easily engaged. He would not generally engage in informal conversations with the teacher. His behaviour was described as being quiet disruptive on occasions.

Post-Project Observations:

The teacher has observed that his relationship with John has improved over the course of the project. Even though John is still experiencing issues outside of school, the teacher has found him to be more communicative in class, and less disruptive.



TRANSFORMING TRAUMA PROJECT



A partnership program between the
Australian Childhood Foundation and the Department of Education



Scottsdale High School

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Project title

'Teacher's Perceived Efficacy of ACF Strategies and Classroom Activities'

Research Project Inquiry Question

Do teaching staff feel that the information about trauma shared with them, and the ACF strategies and classroom activities they have used with their class, help to improve student's classroom behaviour, overall?

Framework/theme focus areas

The framework for this research project is based on the three ACF principles of the 'Transforming Trauma' training: Calming, Engaging and Containing.

Timeframe

Teaching staff implemented the ACF strategies and classroom activities over a period of approximately 3.5 months.

Staff involved

- Benjamin Gofton –Teacher
- Robert Lade-Teacher
- Sherri Rainbow-Teacher
- Lisa Hudson-School Social Worker

- Paul Bertoia-School Psychologist

Resources required

- ACF 'Calming, Containing and Engaging Activities' booklets (provided to each teacher)
- Line of my Day worksheets
- Board games
- Identity Shield worksheets
- Calming Strategies Checklist worksheets
- Various items to house, feed and care for the pet rats
- 'Transforming Adolescent Trauma' training sessions x2

Context

Scottsdale High School is a school located in the North-East of Tasmania approximately 70 kilometres from Launceston. Scottsdale High School is a year 7-12 school with a current enrolment of approximately 370 students.

Although the school is often not made aware of past traumas students may have experienced, there are a small number of students who display behaviours that could be related to trauma. Some of the behaviours displayed by said children include; difficulty regulating emotions/behaviours, a propensity for emotional outbursts, often being distracted in class and difficulties in maintaining relationships with others.

Research Project Inquiry Question

Do teaching staff feel that the information about trauma shared with them, and the ACF strategies and classroom activities they have used with their class, help to improve student's classroom behaviour, overall?

Description of Project

The 'Transforming Adolescent Trauma' training was delivered by School Social Worker Lisa Hudson and School Psychologist Paul Bertoia in two, two and a half hour sessions on 23/04/2012 and 07/05/2012 to all teaching staff at Scottsdale High School. During the second training session, teachers were asked to form groups according to teaching grades and were given 'Action Plans'. The action plans asked teachers to do the following:

Transforming Trauma Action Plan:

List three strategies mentioned in the presentation that you think you may use in class (1 from each section)	Calming: Containing Engaging:
List three classroom activities in the 'Transforming Adolescent Trauma' booklet that you think you will try during the next 6 months	1. 2. 3.

Although all teaching staff participated in the action plan activity, for the purposes of the action research, only the grade eight teaching staff were asked to participate in the project. Three teachers participated in the project, from the time of the second training session (07/05/2012) to 28/09/2012. Teaching staff were asked to make a commitment to try the strategies and activities listed in their action plans and report back to support staff via a survey at the end of September. In the survey, they commented and rated the efficacy of the strategies and classroom activities.

Classroom Activities Used:

- Line of My Day activity
- Identity Shield activity
- Calming Strategies Checklist
- Classroom Pets
- Board Games activities
- Reflective Circle Time
- Cool Down Time
- Art Therapy
- Breathing exercises
- Meditation exercises

Evaluation processes

Evaluation took place via a survey that was delivered to participating teachers. Some of the questions in the survey included the following:

- Which activity did you find the most useful?
- Do you feel that the strategies and activities helped when working with children with emotional/behavioural issues?
- Have you noticed any improvements in the behaviour of the children in your class since implementing the strategies?
- Will you continue to use the strategies/activities as part of your teaching practice?

Outcomes - What's different now?

- There has been a noted increase in student focus/attention
- Students appear easier to settle
- Students are less prone to disruption
- It has been noted that there are less behavioural issues in class

Challenges

- Time and energy challenges for participating staff
- Attendance issues with some students

Most significant learning

- Building our understanding of trauma and the impact it has on student learning
- Building relationships with students, therefore increasing student engagement at school

Key messages

- The promotion of awareness concerning the impact that trauma has on a student's capacity to learn and the strategies to engage with, and provide a calm environment for students who have experienced past trauma.

Comments from teaching staff:

- “I feel that the personalised aspect of each activity helped engage the students and contributed towards the activity having the desired effect (e.g. calming, engaging etc.)”
- “I have found that if you have 5 minutes of quiet time, afterwards the students are settled and ready to listen for and respond to instructions.”
- “Students with the rats in their classroom have enjoyed having them, students that have experienced trauma particularly enjoy holding and patting the rats”
- “I have noticed that disruptive classroom behaviour (e.g. excessive talking, laughing etc.) and issues around defiance and refusing to work have been reduced after implementing calming strategies at the start of a lesson.”

Conclusion

Overall, the teachers involved with the action research found that the strategies achieved the desired effect; their students were more engaged and calm. They reported fewer behavioural issues and all teachers indicated they would continue to use the activities and strategies with their class teacher groups in the future.

CASE STUDY

One of the teachers who participated in the research project was particularly interested in the use of animal therapy with children who had experienced trauma. The teacher ‘adopted’ two pet rats for the class, named Bobby and Shadow Facts.

To create a sense of ownership, the children voted on what they would call the rats, talked about how to care for the rats and built an enclosure for the rats.

The teacher reported that the students in the grade 8 class teacher group were calmer after interacting with the rats. The teacher reported that the rats had a particularly calming effect on one student, John* who had experienced significant trauma in his life.

John is fourteen years of age and upon enrolling John at the school, his mother disclosed to staff that he had witnessed domestic violence between her and his father when he was younger for a number of years. John’s behaviour prior to the rats being introduced to the classroom was often disruptive, defiant and he regularly employed a number of work avoidance strategies. John had difficulty maintaining friendships and would often act aggressively towards other students.

When the rats were introduced into the class, John took an active role in caring for them. He particularly enjoyed handling and petting the rats. His teacher noticed that John appeared calmer after handling the rats and his disruptive behaviour during class ceased. His teacher reported that John has not experienced any emotional outbursts during class and seemed to be engaging more with other students and classroom activities.

*Please note that the name used is fictional.



Taroona High School

Project title

A Paradigm Shift

Research Project Inquiry Question

What support strategies and processes are necessary to successfully transition students, with significant degrees of trauma, to move towards becoming fully engaged in education?

Timeframe

Term 3, 2011 – Term 3, 2012.

Staff involved

Teachers who were trained through ACF & DOE in 'Transforming Trauma', Teacher Assistants who were involved with online SMART Modules, school attendants, administrative staff, members of school association, a significant number of students, senior staff who provided PL for staff which is ongoing, psychologists, Child & Family Services, School Psychologist, DOE School Support Manager.

Resources required

Time, money, selection of specific staff with the appropriate skills & capacity to be "coached" in working effectively with students with trauma. Guaranteed transport, flexibility of timetabling for teachers (allowing rapid response to situations where dignity & respect may be compromised due to

misunderstanding or social learning difficulties, resulting in an escalation of problematic behaviours), Teacher Assistants and students.

Description of Project

This project focusses on several students who have suffered varying degrees of trauma throughout their childhood and how their transition into and through high school was facilitated. The project examines what needs to occur in terms of professional learning for those involved within the school system and the importance of maintaining close links with other agencies.

Evaluation processes

- Sessions with Child Trauma Counsellors.
- Anecdotal – ongoing feedback provided by the children themselves about how they are feeling and what is school like.
- Documented observations of changes in attitude, behavior, resilience and social capital.
- Conversations with Teacher Assistants about what has changed, what is still the same.
- Student voice.
- Data from behaviour data base.

Outcomes - What's different now?

There are increased levels of student participation, to full-time attenders who have increasing control over their self-regulation and educational opportunities. There is a group of young people, who are beginning to enjoy social mobility, increasing independence, and access to multiple environments.

There is a consensus within teaching staff that significant adjustments to traditional timetable models are now accepted as legitimate alternatives. E.g. music therapy that includes drumming, guitar and the exploration of alternative music models. Student voice – *“I really like going because it makes you feel relaxed, it's good fun and no-one is sad.....you forget about everything else that is happening.”*

Challenges

- What is possible, achievable & sustainable
- The tension of determining how much to reveal about the student and to whom
- Creating an environment that provides a secure attachment
- Engagement of staff in targeted PL in order for them to understand the nature of complex trauma
- Transforming common misconceptions e.g. *that happened years ago, surely they are over that now.* Paradigm shift.
- How to promote recovery and resilience in children who have been exposed to such adversity
- Connecting them socially in a dignified and respectful way.
- Creating calming options that appeal and help reconnect.

Most significant student learning

- Improved ability to self-regulate – they are more able to calm themselves. One student says, *I like going to the gym – it makes me feel good.*
Another says about drumming, *it makes me feel happy because I see the others*

having fun.

- Students more clearly articulate their needs to adults or peers to provide them with space or time out.
- Increase in help seeking behaviours. Students do not limit themselves to teachers and others employed for counseling. *I'll go and hang with Megan (the kitchen attendant).*
The School Psychologist has also commented on Megan's ability to help calm students by inviting them to help her fold tea towels and other washing in the laundry.
- Students understand that with improved listening comes improved understanding.
- Greater awareness of different view-points and the recognition that all are valid, the development of empathy.
- The learning that results from caring for animals – empathy, choice, trust, loyalty, development of a bond.
- Students are now more able to negotiate educational options.

Key messages

- Honest dialogue with school support network (see staff involved) is fundamental to success.
- A 'wrap-around' approach is the one that appears to work
- If role clarity is ensured, the a 'wrap-around' approach works well
- To teachers the emphasis is on the students and not the curriculum.
- For the care team and education to successfully support and resource these students it appears that stability of placement both in the homes and schools is an absolute imperative.
- Ongoing, regular respectful meetings where support for one another is important

Conclusion

- Significant, targeted, informed, and collaborative levels of support will result in the most successful outcomes for students, through professional dialogue at a whole school level.
- Being part of a successful program has demonstrated to our staff the 'possibilities' that are available when driven by a committed team of professionals.
- It is fundamental that staff are available to respond when a significant issue or dilemma arises – this requires a critical mass of informed personnel.
- An increased awareness of the range of presentation of students who have experienced some form of trauma – e.g. those that are withdrawn through to those who are hyper vigilant.
- The importance of financial support cannot be underestimated and success at school appears to be congruent with the levels of support and flexibility of support provided.
- Because of the quality of transition, staff are willing and able to model appropriate behaviours
- Through professional development staff's confidence and competence in dealing with and supporting students with trauma is increasing and they are better able to keep students within their windows of tolerance.
- It is essential that there is a group of key staff, in simpatico with each other to promote and ensure that responses to the needs of the students are responsible and respectful.

Transforming Trauma

Discussion Paper Number One - August 2011

Working with the window of tolerance in the classroom

Preamble

This discussion paper is one in a series designed to stimulate discussion and sharing of experience amongst staff in educational settings working with young people who may have experienced complex relational trauma. This paper complements and extends on the training provided through the Transforming Trauma program, an initiative of the Tasmanian Department of Education.

Introduction

How have you responded in moments of extreme stress? Were you primed for action with a surge of energy ready to challenge or escape? Alternatively you may have found yourself suddenly depleted feeling foggy or collapsed? Our responses in extremely stressful situations represent a potent mix of primitive biological drives and patterned reactions developed from prior experiences of threat. These responses are less consciously chosen as they are determined by environmental factors that shape them over time. In these moments our entire internal system becomes subsumed with one goal- survival and we lose our ability to think logically and rationally about the situation.

Thankfully most of us don't spend too much time in this state. We navigate our way through life with various intensities of emotional and physiological arousal that we process without disrupting the overall functioning of our system. These ebbs and flows of life could be described as occurring within a 'window of tolerance'. This is an optimal zone for processing and integrating our experiences of life. In this zone we can rationalize and reflect on problems and choices and are in touch with what's going on around us. In this zone our bodies are un-strained and we feel relatively calm.

Overshooting the Window

Window of
Tolerance



Undershooting the Window

Probably all of us could identify times when we have been outside of the boundaries of our window of tolerance. At these times our thinking or behaviour has become disrupted by our intensified emotional and physiological arousal. We may behave in ways we wouldn't normally choose and we lack flexibility in our responses. At these dysregulated times we enter into states often characterized by either excessive rigidity or chaos.

It would seem the width of our window of tolerance varies from person to person. For some the window may be quite narrow, while for others they may be able to tolerate a high degree of intensity of emotional or physiological arousal. For example, those who follow the adventurer Bear Grills in his program, *Man vs. Wild* will have watched him navigate his way through a range of highly challenging situations that would strike terror into the hearts of most of us. For Bear, high degrees of intensity feels ok and he is able to think, behave, and feel with balance and effectiveness revealing a wide window of tolerance. For others, however, their window of tolerance may be quite narrow. For these people, emotions such as sadness or fear may be quite disruptive to functioning if they are even mildly present.

The width of ones window of tolerance may also change depending upon factors such as context or state of mind. For example we may be more able to tolerate stressful situations when familiar people are around us and thus our window of tolerance may be broader when we are with these people.

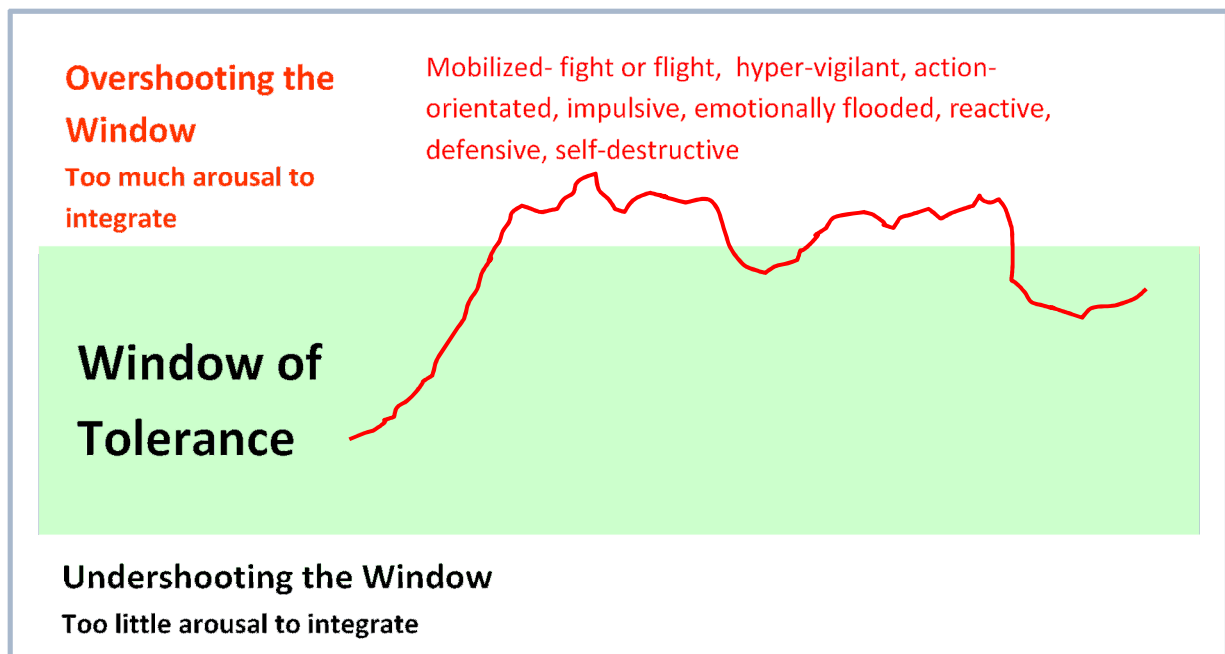
The Window of Tolerance and Trauma

For many young people who have experienced trauma their systems are too often overwhelmed. They find themselves operating outside of their window much more than the average person. They also find themselves with a window that lacks width and flexibility compared with the average person. For some this means they commonly overshoot their window, while for others they tend to undershoot it.

Both under and over shooting protections put in place by traumatised young people are probably responses that have developed over their lifetimes as useful ways to survive when threatened. These young people have become acclimatised to environments that they expect to be threatening or dangerous. Their systems have been primed too many times to work hard to survive and this becomes an overarching daily imperative that is deeply programed into their brains, so much so that they are not consciously aware of looking for threatening cues around them but their subconscious brain does anyway. We probably underestimate the amount of time young people spend in survival mode rather than learning mode in our classrooms.

Overshooting the window- Too much arousal

Many traumatised young people have difficulty finding stillness. You might have noticed their darting eyes and a tendency to fiddle with something in their hands or how easily they startle. You might even notice yourself feeling a little stirred up or ill at ease when around them. You notice this because their internal system that is primed to act to protect itself is communicating with your nervous system. These young people are likely to engage in actions such as fight or flight in the face of threat. We can expect them to move toward or away when they feel unsafe. These protective actions are deeply engrained in the most primitive part of their brains and they have likely been used successfully in the past by the young person to help keep her/himself safe.



Some bodily cues suggesting too much arousal and an overshooting of the window of tolerance:

- Dilated pupils (to let light in to see better)
- Lack of saliva making mouth dry
- Shallow breathing
- Butterflies in the stomach
- Faster heart beat
- Excessive sweating
- Tensed muscles (readied for action)
- Agitated movement
- Trouble finding stillness

Garry

The bell sounds ending lunchtime. A teacher hurries towards her year 9 class having missed lunch to handle a yard duty incident. Distracted and rushed she moves into the classroom and the students flow in behind her. As she sorts out her teaching materials two students begin throwing around a cap that one student has forgotten to remove after lunch. The teacher raises her head to spy her student Garry moving around the room trying to get his cap back. The teacher recognises the cap as Garry's because he is always wearing it in the yard. She sighs to herself as she recognises Garry as a student that is frequently unsettled and unproductive in her classroom. The class has barely begun and he is already in the middle of the disruption she thinks to herself. The teacher moves forward and says firmly "I'll have that cap" and picks it up off the floor before Garry can dive for it. She announces that she will be keeping it until the end of the class as he is not supposed to have his cap in the classroom anyway. Garry squeals "that isn't fair". His chest puffs up and his eyes look wildly at her. His left fist tightens and the veins in his reddened neck become prominent. His face shows he is mad and his body seethes with anger as his arm and shoulder muscles tense. Without consciously thinking the teacher takes a step back from him. He yells "I hate this f###ing school" towards her. She replies frustratedly tightening in her body "Garry that is not appropriate language". Garry lunges towards his cap in the teachers hand. The teacher drops the cap with a sudden surge of fear. Garry scrapes it up from the floor and takes off out of the classroom.

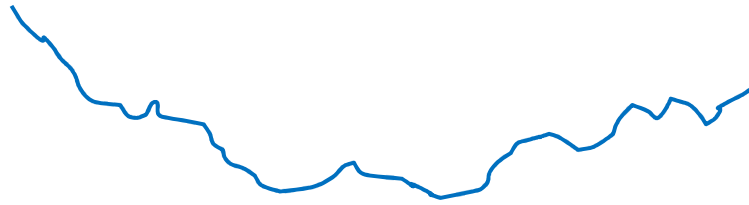
Undershooting the window- Too little arousal

Some traumatised young people have endured extremely high levels of trauma. These young people might describe feeling empty and hollow at times of high stress. They might lack a sense of themselves at these times and describe not feeling anything in their body. At these times they are moving into a state of protection that involves shutting down their system to protect themselves. These young people will not seek interaction with others and instead will retreat into themselves to endure the moment through a fortification of withdrawal.

Overshooting the Window

Too much arousal to integrate

Window of Tolerance



Some bodily cues suggesting too little arousal and an undershooting of the window of tolerance:

- Slumped body parts
- Collapsed body
- Endless stare with pin like pupils
- Loose muscles
- Slowed heart rate
- Blank face

Miranda

A teacher pauses as he goes to write Miranda's 'Health and Human Development' semester report. For most students reports flowed easily for him but with the lack of submitted work and a large amount of absences he noticed next to Miranda's name in his attendance book he found himself struggling to find words for her. When he thought about her, the picture in his mind was of a shrunken, head lowered young person, hunched down in her chair at the back of the classroom. He found her really hard to read and he realised he had never seen her really smile like other kids. He recalled a difficult moment that occurred some time ago when he called upon her to answer a question after showing a sex education DVD to the class and how response-less she had been, just vacantly sitting there, face blank and slumped down in her chair. He had quickly called upon another student as he had felt a sense of disconnect and awkwardness. He felt a bit exasperated when he thought about her and didn't know what to do with her, how to engage her, nothing seemed to touch her. From what he understood Miranda was involved quite a bit with the school counsellor and he imagined she had a difficult home life. He wasn't sure about the best way to teach Miranda but he knew something needed to change as presently not much was getting through to her.

Operating from within the window of tolerance

When within their window of tolerance a young person's physiological system is not stretched. They won't feel signs of fight, flight, freeze or collapse as their systems sense that they are safe. In their window of tolerance social engagement is available to them. They are better equipped to listen to others around them, interact cooperatively and learn.

Some cues suggesting young people are in their window of tolerance:

- Body feels calm, settled, neutral
- Able to be socially orientated with those around them
- Able to be reflective
- Able think clearly
- Able to set boundaries
- Able to self regulate
- Able to be mindful

Recognising those that overshoot and undershoot the window of tolerance in the classroom

It is often easier to recognise those young people in the classroom who overshoot their window of tolerance compared with those who undershoot. These are likely to be the students who show their stress by moving towards or away from you. This movement is highly visible as we are biologically primed as social beings to notice others threatened movements to then gauge our own safety. For overshooting students looking to find safety involves an active re-negotiation of relationships, while for those who undershoot their window, seeking safety often involves slipping away from others in a passive attempt to find invisibility for a time. These students do not demand a response from others. In fact they are working hard to be overlooked and with twenty four or so other students in the classroom it is easy to not spot them.

Introducing and implementing the window of tolerance into the school context

Thinking about introducing and implementing the 'window of tolerance' into a school context could be something to consider as a broader teaching group. Some questions to think about:

- Where and by whom would it be best introduced? Eg. In Homeroom or English or Math or to year level group gatherings?
- What are some ways it could be consistently supported across teaching contexts and classrooms?
- What are some ways it could be consistently supported and utilised by coordinators and principals?
- What are some ways students could be involved in its introduction and implementation?

Some ideas for introducing the window of tolerance in the classroom

- Introduce the window of tolerance model to your students. Talk about examples of when someone might overshoot or undershoot the window paying attention to what that might feel like in the body and normalising that exceeding the window happens for us all at times.
- Represent the window of tolerance concept in a concrete way. For example it might be drawn on the white board or each student might have an A4 laminated version of the window at their desks.
- Institute window 'check ins' throughout class time to gauge views about where the group is at in terms of the window.
- Acknowledge contextual events that may be influencing where everyone is at with regard to their window e.g. approaching exams or social function.
- Model reflecting upon where you are in relation to your window of tolerance. You don't need to detail underlying reasons.

Some ideas for working with young people who are frequently outside of their window of tolerance

As a first step in working with young people who frequently find themselves outside of their window of tolerance we should acknowledge the important role their protective response/s have played for them in the past. It is wonderful that when they really needed it their brain and body found a way to survive.

We also need to help young people hold on to a sense of safety in their daily life as much as possible. It is only when they don't sense safety that they will need their protective responses. With this in mind you might like to consider the following questions with the young person in a time of calmness:

- Where is the safest place for you at school?
- Where is the safest place for you in the world? Is there any way we can help you bring some of that place with you to school?
- Are there people at school that help you feel safe and ok? If so who?
- Is there anyone you wish you could bring with you to school to help feel ok? (might be from family or a friend or might be a music or sport hero etc.) How might we help you bring something of this person with you to school?

The responses to these questions could contribute to a plan built with the young person to help her/him more readily hold on to a sense of safety in their every day. The more a young person feels safe at school the less likely it is they will exceed their window of tolerance.

Some other ideas for working with young people outside of their window of tolerance:

- Learn more about the body signs of increasing stress for the young person and for yourself.
- Offer students opportunities that will increase their sense of control and power.
- Recalibrate your expectations for young person's advancement- it may be that she/he isn't able to grasp all of the course material and the focus may need to be a social/regulatory one for a time.

Some ideas for working with young people who overshoot their window of tolerance

Young people who overshoot their window of tolerance have highly primed nervous systems ready for action. Their systems require calming through activity that allows them to slow down. We need to aim to help these young people find regulating movement. Some ideas for use with these students in the classroom include:

- Intersperse directed group activity breaks- e.g. yawn and stretch breaks, everyone walk once around the room without lifting your feet off the floor or like there is no gravity in the room, initiate Mexican waves, stand up turn around and sit down again.
- Incorporate more kinaesthetic learning opportunities.
- Plan movement breaks with young person- e.g. walk around the oval or opportunity to run an errand or to be able to connect with safest place in school (wherever that is for the young person).
- Plan and practice an escape route with the young person should they need it.
- Work with colleagues and young person to create a plan for if they become activated and practice it.

Some ideas for working with young people who undershoot their window of tolerance

Young people who undershoot their window of tolerance have nervous systems that can begin to shut down when they lose a sense of safety. These are the students that can become disconnected from themselves and the classroom and require gentle engagement to re-enter their window of tolerance. Some ideas for use with these students in the classroom include:

Present moment breaks- introduce short, sharp activities that bring young people into the present moment with a focus on what is happening in the here and now. Some examples-

- Everyone point to something that's green.
- Tap your head and rub your belly at the same time, then swap.
- Find out what colour eyes the person next to you has.
- Push your big toes into the bottom of your shoes.

Sensory stimulation

- Everyone say three objects you can see, two things you can hear, and one thing you can smell.
- Incorporate kinaesthetic learning opportunities that have a sensory element to them i.e. activities that stimulate many of the senses
- Create a space in the room for a sensory break e.g. cushion corner with textured cushions and calming posters and DVD player playing calming music etc.

The window of tolerance is a model we could all apply to our lives. It may be a handy guide to help us better understand the shifting states of the young people we work with, as well as an opportunity to be more reflective about our own windows. It can help us better understand how available our students are to learning at any given time and it can provide us some direction around what a young person might need to re-establish themselves safely within their window of tolerance.

Questions for Consideration

Three questions about the young person's resources:

1. In what situations is the young person most likely to be able to maintain themselves within their window of tolerance and thus utilise social engagement with others and feel safe?
2. Are there particular people that she/he feels most safe with?
3. In what situations are the young person's protective responses most likely to be shown?

Five questions to take into the classroom with you:

1. Where is the young person in relation to their window of tolerance?
2. How do I know?
3. Where am I in relation to my window of tolerance?
4. How do I know?
5. What do I need right now to maintain myself in my window of tolerance?

Three questions to share with colleagues

1. What are some ways to share knowledge about the window of tolerance framework amongst teachers and students?
2. What are some strategies you already use to help students maintain themselves within their windows of tolerance?
3. What are some things you do to maintain yourselves within your windows of tolerance?

Further reading about the 'window of tolerance'

Ogden, P& Minton, K. (2000) Sensorimotor Psychotherapy: One Method for Processing Traumatic Memory. *Traumatology*, volume VI, issue 3, article 3.

Electronic version of this article: <http://www.fsu.edu/~trauma/v6i3/v6i3a3.html>

Ogden, P. Minton, K. & Pain, C. (2006) *Trauma and the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy*. New York: Norton & Co.

Siegel, D. (1999) *The Developing Mind- How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. New York: Guilford. (Chapter 7 'Self Regulation' is particularly relevant)



Transforming Trauma Tasmania Newsletter 2012

Welcome

Hello and welcome to the first edition of Transforming Trauma News for 2012. This edition will cover the program's activity this year including sessions on offer to School Counsellors, Psychologists and Support Staff, sessions for Teaching staff, sessions for Welfare staff and projects being undertaken in schools across the state in the research program. In this edition we will also look at our most recent discussion paper.

As this is the first newsletter we welcome you to participate in what is on offer for the program in 2012 and follow what is being undertaken with the research projects this year. The goal of the 'Transforming Trauma' Project is that schools and Learning Services will enhance their capacity to respond in effective, flexible and proactive ways to meet the needs of young people with a history of trauma.

Irrespective of location we all work within education and care environments with young people who are dealing with the impacts and implications of the traumas they have experienced. Through educating ourselves, colleagues, families and our communities we are moving further towards a system of education that is encompassing, tolerant and understanding of the needs of these young

people and influencing positive outcomes for them. The focus for all research projects this year is Engagement – Engaging young people in their school community.

Project Beginnings 2011

In 2011 we began the process of offering two day training sessions to school support staff in order to enable the information to be shared amongst the school communities they work within. These sessions were very well attended and received, thus enabling school support staff to focus collectively on trauma, its impacts on young people and their learning as well as engagement in the school sector. Following these sessions, in early 2012 school support staff were offered a 'Train the Trainer' session in order to provide the schools they work within a two hour 'Transforming Trauma' training session for all school staff.

Schools and staff involved in last year's program have provided some rich feedback which was published in the 2011 Feedback Report.

I have really gained a better understanding of how to work and support students who are dealing with trauma. I think it has helped improved my practice.

(Teacher Middle campus)

I thought it was great that all the staff were there. We often have to deal with the really tough kids who won't get into class, and we don't really know what we are doing. It feels better being able to talk to teachers about trauma. We are all talking about it in the staff room.

(Teacher Assistant Middle campus)

The most recent Trauma training has clearly generated the capacity for our high school to offer a highly traumatised young boy the opportunity to access secondary schooling. With the knowledge gleaned from the workshop key staff now have the confidence and skills to embrace this challenge and provide an environment that significantly increases the likelihood of a successful transition. Without this training the provision of such a program would not even have been considered.

(Senior School Psychologist- Learning Services South)

Particularly useful were the calming strategies that TT taught us, it has meant we have included these as part of our program at our school; students have made their own shields and frequently make use of the mandala colouring in sheets.

(Senior Social Worker – Learning Services South)

I thought the transforming trauma workshops were fantastic and they should become far more widely available - they are not only pertinent to those students suffering from trauma. The professional learning around the brain and the function of its different parts and the part they play in behavioural traits is relevant to all teachers. We have many teachers assigned to working with difficult students who are literally working in the dark. They need some of the strategies we were introduced to and need more understanding about students' reactions to ways of being treated. Once again we realise how important relationships and empathy are. Some behaviour management strategies and school policies can exacerbate the problems.

I personally have found the knowledge I gained invaluable. I have found myself advising other teachers of strategies and activities to calm students. It is our intention at this high school to implement as many of the strategies as possible particularly in the Learning Centre where a safe, calm and supportive environment has been created. This needs to be widened across the school - our next challenge.

(Assistant Principal - Learning Services South)

Schedule for 2012

Southern Region:

Transforming Trauma for teachers

- April 20th: Southern Lights Hotel, 19 Kingston View Drive, Kingston
- May 25th: Rydges Hobart Hotel, Cnr Argyle Street & Lewis Street, North Hobart
- August 3rd: Tatterstalls Park Racecourse, 6 Goodwood Road, Glenorchy
- Oct 16th: Bellerive Yacht Club, 64 Cambridge Road, Bellerive,

Session for Welfare/NGO's:

- August 22nd: Hobart Function and Conference Centre, Elizabeth Street Pier, Hobart

One day session for School Support Staff

- June 19th: Transforming Problem Sexual Behaviours - Hobart Function and Conference Centre, Elizabeth Street Pier, Hobart
- Sept 25th: Assessment Through a Trauma Lens - Rydges Hobart Hotel, Cnr Argyle Street & Lewis Street, North Hobart

Northern Region:

One day session for School Support Staff

- April 16th: Transforming Problem Sexual Behaviours -Tailrace Centre 1 Waterfront Drive, Riverside Launceston
- October 18th: Assessment Through a Trauma lens - Tailrace Centre 1 Waterfront Drive, Riverside Launceston

One day session for teachers

- August 31st: The Tramsheds, 4 Invermay Road, Inveresk

A further Teacher session will be offered through a host school to be determined by mid- year.

Show Cases

Southern:

Nov 2nd : Mercure Hotel Hobart, 156 Bathurst Street, Hobart 1pm – 5pm

Northern:

Oct 26th: The Tramsheds, 4 Invermay Road, Inveresk 1pm – 5pm

Research Projects

As a further part of the project, alongside the training provided, there is an opportunity for schools to participate in a research project that can promote the use of learning within the training and map the outcomes for engagement of students. In developing and implementing the ‘Transforming Trauma’ program across Tasmania, secondary schools involved with the program are being provided with the opportunity to undertake their own action research projects, specifically and creatively implementing the knowledge and strategies provided through the program’s activity and resources, into their schools and with their students.

Currently schools are determining how they will map staff and student outcomes associated with the further learning and looking to identify existing engagement projects/activities currently being undertaken in the schools with a view to tying together the learning from the ‘Transforming Trauma’ training. Thus implementing some of the strategies associated with this learning into these projects. The outcomes will be very interesting to discover!

Schools will be supported throughout the research project by members of their Regional Advisory Group and will also be given the opportunity to share the outcomes of these projects at an annual state-wide showcase event.

We look forward to reporting the ongoing development and results of these projects over the year.



Trauma Network Meetings

Trauma Support Network – ALL WELCOME!

The aim of the network is to enhance the capacity of members to effectively support traumatised young people in schools. The focus is on sharing information, user-friendly resources and evidence-based practices. It is a forum for sharing updates on events in the Transforming Trauma calendar, action research projects, ACF discussion papers and newsletters. Part of each network meeting is also designated for secondary consultation, where a brief case study will be presented. This is

followed by discussion by Senior School Psychologists, Senior Social Workers and an ACF staff member, about possible support strategies. Some meetings will also involve a brief presentation which follows on from a theme which was introduced during the Transforming Trauma workshops.

RSVP to gayle.gregory@education.tas.gov.au. For more information contact helen.barret@education.tas.gov.au , ph. 6233 7927.

Learning Services South Trauma Network

Term 1 – Thurs, May 3

Term 2 – Wed, July 25

Term 3 – Tues, Oct 9

All meetings will be 2-4pm, in the Level 2 Meeting Room, 99 Bathurst St.

Parking is available at the Melville St car park.

Discussion Papers

In 2012 there will be a series of discussion papers produced to encourage thinking amongst educational and support staff who have completed 'Transforming Trauma' training. These papers are designed to encourage schools to focus on, share and discuss a particular area of knowledge or practice pertaining to traumatised young people and families. Typically, topics have been chosen as they stem from the ongoing questions and themes that arise in training and in discussion in the Regional Advisory groups. Current papers are available on:

Share Point (<http://www.ecentre.education.tas.gov.au/sites/pbslss/default.aspx>)

and at www.childhood.org.au

Topics identified for 2012 include:

1. Assessment in an Educational Setting
2. Polyvagal Theory and its implications for Education
3. Transforming Problem Sexual Behaviours in the educational setting
4. Working toward a culturally reflective and relevant approach with Indigenous children/young people in the classroom

We are excited about the content of these papers as well as their potential for further learning and development of staff in school sites across the state. The first paper for 2012 will be the 'Assessment in an Educational Setting' discussion paper, and an excerpt of this is below;

Effectively supporting... young people in an educational setting requires some understanding of how they have been impacted by their experiences of trauma, and how these experiences then influence how they perceive themselves, learn and engage with others. This process of assessment involves gathering and appraising information to gain an understanding of the young person within their familial, community and cultural context. It should include a consideration of strengths and vulnerabilities.

This discussion paper will highlight some questions educational staff may want to consider when developing their understanding of young people they are working with, who have experienced complex relational trauma.

Top 10 messages about the Adolescent Brain

These messages have been shared in the various training sessions and we will be adding to the 'core knowledge' about the adolescent brain specifically, in subsequent newsletters.

- The adolescent brain is a 'work in progress'. It is different from the brain of a child and that of an adult.
- There is an influx of synaptic opportunities - for girls at approximately 11 years and for boys at approximately 12 and a half years. Therefore it is important to offer adolescents as many and varied learning opportunities and activities as possible to grow the developing brain.
- The process of Myelination is crucial. Myelin is a white fatty substance that acts like a protective coating for neurons. Thus allowing for neurons to work more effectively in transmitting information around the brain. Throughout adolescence the part of the brain that is working hard for learning and cognition is the prefrontal cortex (CEO of the brain) which is responsible for abilities like higher order thinking, judgement, self- regulation and impulse control.
- This process of Myelination will not be completed until the adolescent is approximately twenty-six years of age. Therefore why we might see a lack of impulse control, emotive behaviour or unconstructive decision making and judgement processes at times.
- Adolescents use local regions of their brain (limbic) when making decisions as compared to adults whose brains are more integrated.
- Adolescents cannot be expected to operate with the level of maturity, judgement, risk aversion or impulse control of an adult (AMA brief to the Supreme Court).
- Adolescents are more likely to respond to issues/stimuli with gut reactions whereas with increasing age and more frontal cortex, they are able to modulate or inhibit or understand their behaviour. Thus we will see: short attention span, increased impulsivity and risk taking, procrastination, lack of motivation, disorganization and trouble working through long term goals, poor judgement and problem solving, over emotional reactions, trouble reading facial expressions and ill- attuned communication skills.
- The impact of trauma on the adolescent brain will affect: Memory, Arousal Circuitry, Avoidance, Re-experiencing.

- In order to assist a traumatised adolescent, we can work towards increasing their ability to handle distress helping with: Arousal Modulation, Affect Regulation, Identifying and Discriminating Emotions, Grounding - keeping in the present.
- Be aware of young people's developmental vulnerability; especially in light of a trauma overlay.

Feedback

If you have any feedback on your experience with the project or input for our reports or future newsletters, please email training@childhood.org.au

Further Information

For further information about the Transforming Trauma Project you can go to the website www.childhood.org.au and follow the links in the Professional Education/Training section or access <http://www.ecentre.education.tas.gov.au/sites/pbslss/default.aspx>

For email feedback or enquiries: training@childhood.org.au