

Foundations of trauma informed approaches

A session for Lifestart



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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians and owners of this land and waters. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and to the children who are their leaders of tomorrow. We acknowledge their history and living culture and the many thousands of years in which they have raised their children to be safe and strong.



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Key messages of a trauma informed approach

Why do we need to know about this?



Underpinning development

- Brains develop best in connection with other brains
- Culture forms part of development, even before birth
- The brain-body connection is a key developmental principle
- *'The evidence is now clear that the way humans develop is a result of the interaction between a variety of genetic, epigenetic, and environmental factors that operate as an integrated system.'* (CCCH 2017)



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The human brain



- Neocortex
- Limbic
 - Hippocampus
 - Amygdala
- Diencephalon
 - Hypothalamus
 - Thalamus
- Corpus Callosum
- Cerebellum
- Brainstem



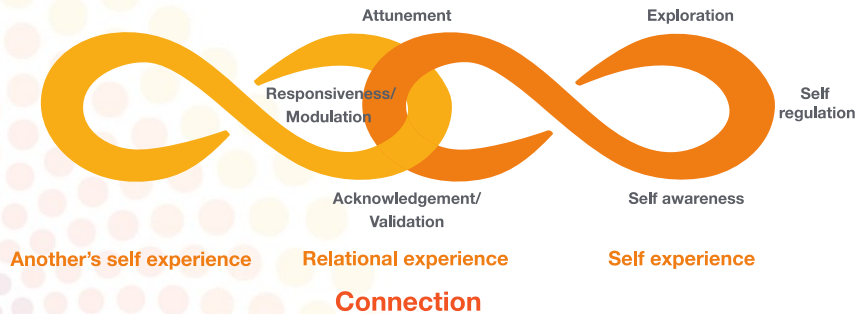
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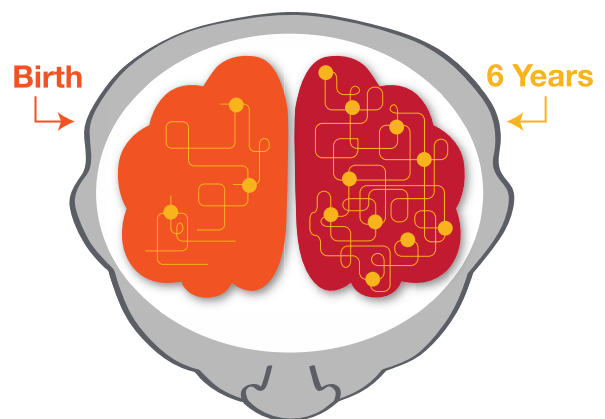
The importance of relationships

Normative development occurs in an integrated fashion through healthy attuned, co-regulatory relationships in the early years of life.



Neuronal connections

- The neural system has the ability for one neuron to communicate with up to 10,000 other neurons
- The newborn brain has approximately 100 billion neurons



Neuroplasticity

- The brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. Neuroplasticity allows the neurons (nerve cells) in the brain to compensate for injury and disease and to adjust their activities in response to new situations or to changes in their environment.
- Neuroplasticity gives us hope as the brain is always capable of change.

Defining trauma

Any single, ongoing or cumulative experience which:

- is a response to a perceived threat, usually to survival
- overwhelms our capacity to cope
- feels/is outside our control
- evokes a physiological and psychological set of responses based on fear or avoidance



Relational and developmental trauma

- Most often involves multiple incidents over an extended period of time
- Based in relationship and associated with shame – blaming or stigmatising the victim
- The interpersonal aspect of this trauma, often underpinned by intentionality, induces a sense of disconnection from others and their support
- This goes against the fact that relationships are key to survival and development in infancy and childhood
- Children’s brains are more impacted by all experiences
- Relational trauma experienced during development manifests faster and leaves deeper damage

Safety as a core principle

“...The detection of a person as safe or dangerous triggers neurobiologically determined prosocial or defensive behaviours. Even though we may not be aware of danger on a cognitive level, on a neurophysiological level, our body has already started a sequence of neural processes that would facilitate adaptive defense behaviours such as fight, flight or freeze...(p. 11, Porges, 2011)”.

- This is the concept known as neuroception
- It is fundamental to an understanding of safety from a child’s perspective

Polyvagal theory and protective responses

Behavioural Functions

Body Functions

by Stephen Porges

Social Engagement

Soothing and calming
Indicates safety

- Lowers or raises vocalisation pitch
- Regulates middle ear muscles to perceive human voice
- Changes facial expressivity
- Head turning
- Tears and eyelids
- Slows or speeds heart rate

Mobilisation

Fight or Flight
Active Freeze
Moderate or extreme danger

Hyper arousal

- Increases heart rate
- Sweat increases
- Inhibits gastrointestinal function
- Narrowing blood vessels - to slow blood flow to extremities
- Release of adrenaline

Immobilisation

Collapse or submission
Death feigning
Increased pain threshold
Conserves metabolic resources
Life threatening situations

Hypo - arousal

- Slows heart rate
- Constricts bronchi
- Stimulates gastrointestinal function



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Behaviour is a story



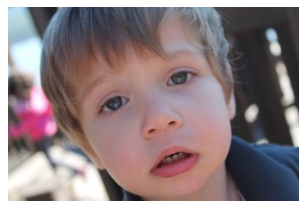
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Building trauma sensitive environments and routines




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Building predictability and safety

- Managing transitions
- Daily routines
- Calming activities for managing change
- Finding and accessing a safe place, safe activity, safe person
- Incorporating cultural safety
- Responding to behaviour from a relational perspective eg: time in



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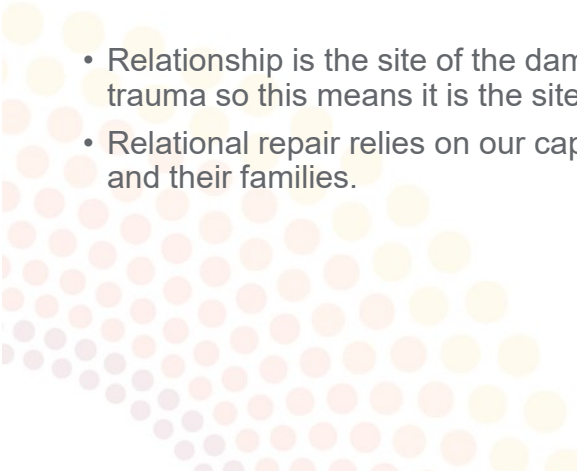


**“ Play is a neural
exercise and I have never
met a child who is able to
resist being part of this type
of exercise ”**

Theresa Kestley



Relationship as survival

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- Relationship is the site of the damage experienced through toxic stress and trauma so this means it is the site of repair as well.
 - Relational repair relies on our capacity to engage in relationships with children and their families.

The importance of collective responses



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Looking after each other



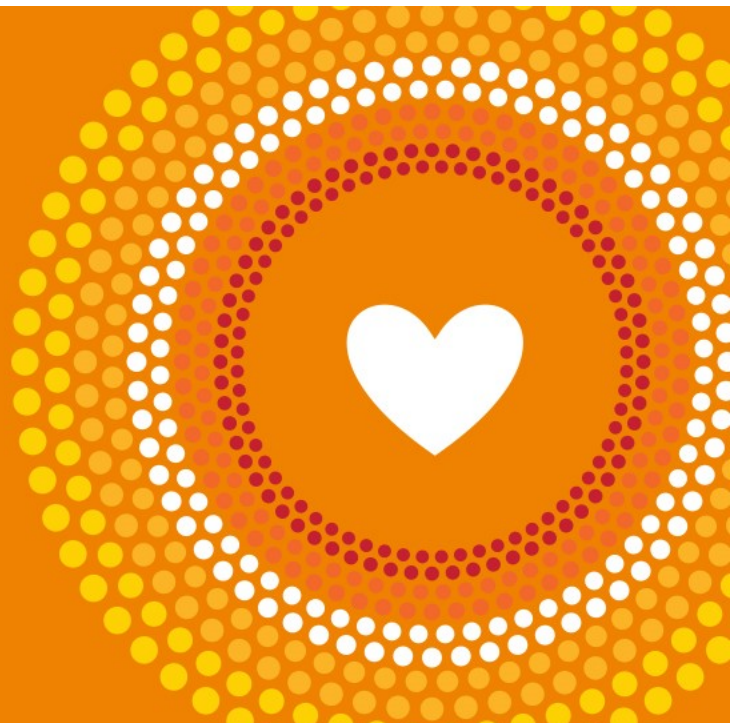
What does this mean for your work?



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