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Trauma-Responsive Practice With Families

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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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Principles guiding the workshop

- This workshop assumes a knowledge of what constitutes child abuse and neglect
- Abuse related trauma covers the impact of all forms of child abuse, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, family violence and neglect.
- This workshop provides a link between the neurobiology of complex trauma and its impacts on brain, body and relationships
- We will consider transgenerational trauma and its positive and negative impacts on resilience, adaptability and survival, with further emphasis on hereditary structures and epigenetics
- Your safety is paramount.




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Learning outcomes

- Strengthen your understanding of the broad issues vulnerable children face within the context of culture, relationship, environment and experience.
- Explore the difficulties in engaging and re-engaging marginalised parents and carers who have also experienced complex trauma and explore the long-term implications of their experiences.
- Build your understanding of intergenerational trauma, trans-generational trauma, the science of epigenetics and its impact on our understanding of family functioning and the developing child
- Identify and take away practical skills and strategies that facilitate trauma recovery for children and families and promote healing

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Session Overview

- Who are we working with?
- How does trauma impact the children and families we are supporting?
- The 5 Parenting Systems
- Embedding Safety & Enabling Engagement
- Repairing Interpersonal Relationships

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Vulnerable Families in Australia



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Why trauma informed practice with families is important

- Families we work with have experienced both current, historical and generational trauma
- Trauma impacts how people access services
- Responses to trauma are adaptive – without a trauma lens, behaviours can be seen as ‘antisocial’ or ‘maladaptive’
- Trauma survivors require specific, tailored interventions that minimise re-traumatisation and understand individual needs and responses to trauma

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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**
- often evokes a **physiological** and **psychological** set of responses based on fear or avoidance

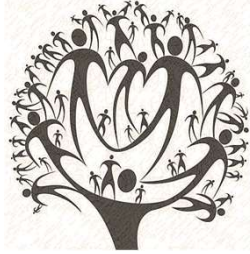
Types of Trauma

Simple	Intergenerational
Complex	Transgenerational
Developmental	Historical

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Transgenerational transmission and cultural impacts:

- Our culture influences our brain development
- Our relationships influence our culture and our culture influences our relationships
- Sensory data is interpreted according to our culture long before our ability to think about and understand our culture



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Culture and Transgenerational Trauma



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Brain Development and the impact of trauma




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Brain development


- The brain develops through a mix of genetics and environmental factors.
- Key to this development are relationships
- The brain develops sequentially from the bottom up



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Sequential brain development – building blocks




The Thinking brain
3-5 Years
The Emotions and Memory Brain - Birth to 4 years
The Movement Brain Birth – 2 years
The survival brain Pre birth to 8 months

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Hemispheric integration

Left Hemisphere <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluates language content• Optimistic hemisphere• Understands beginning, middle and end• Learns from the past and expects the future• Looks for patterns		Right Hemisphere <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the present moment• Eye contact• Facial expression• Tone of voice• Posture• Gesture• Intensity• Is mute• Grasps the whole
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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

<http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=40362>



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Toxic stress & Epigenetics




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The 5 Parenting Systems




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Brain systems that support parenting

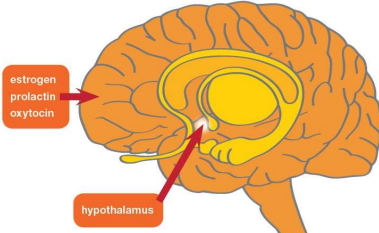
- Parental Approach System**
 - Get close to the child without becoming defensive.
- Parental Reward System**
 - Enjoy interacting with the child.
- Parental Child Reading System**
 - Understand the mind of the child.
- Parental Meaning Making System**
 - Make sense of our experiences with the child and our social life.
- Parental Executive System**
 - Regulate interpersonal conflicts between approach and avoidance, pro-social and defensive reactions.



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The Parental Approach System



estrogen
prolactin
oxytocin

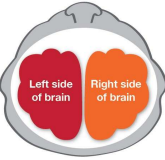
hypothalamus

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Early Adversity impacts on our Parenting ability

- The environment we grow up in can shape how we use our right and left brain systems of avoidance and approach.
- If we begin life exposed to insensitive care giving our right brained harm avoidance system is likely to be used a lot.
- Instead of feeling protected and connected with our caregiver, we are more likely to shift into a defensive state of protest or collapse in order to try to protect ourselves.



Left side of brain
Right side of brain

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The Parental Reward System

1. We become a parent which generates hormones that talk to our hypothalamus.

2. Our hypothalamus releases oxytocin (the love hormone) which activates the reward system.

3. The reward system works by this area sending dopamine to the orbitofrontal cortex and the nucleus accumbens.

Hypothalamus

Orbitofrontal cortex plays a key role in processing rewarding experiences and helps us create positive parenting memories.

dopamine

When the Nucleus accumbens is activated we become highly motivated to approach things that have led to reward in the past. It can become activated responding to expectations of positive interactions with our child.

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Parental child reading System

Facial Expression
Tone of Voice
Body Language
Gestures

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The Parental Meaning Making System

Well-Connected Brain
Utilizing the front part of the brain

Stressed out Brain
Utilizing the more primitive middle region of the brain

Open Flexible and Adaptive

Closed and Rigid

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The Blocked Executive Parenting System

Unprocessed trauma history

Experiencing chronic stress

Exposure to high levels of adversity in early life

Poor attachment with caregiver in early childhood

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Legacy of trauma

- Trauma is re-enacted in the relationship with the infant/child
- Unresolved parental attachment trauma is reflected in the handling and care of the infant
- Trauma disrupts emotional interaction and regulation
- Attachment relationship is impaired
- 'Re-organizing' adult attachment is protective against the transmission of attachment trauma between generations

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Embedding Safety and Enabling engagement

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How do you promote safety for the families you work with?

Think about:

- Client's perception of safety
- Physical & emotional safety – triggers
- Risk of re-traumatization – triggers
- Attunement
- Body language
- Cultural safety
- The language you use
- Environmental safety – service space – warm/cold, dark/light, noise, colours etc
- The worker-client relationship- trust, respect, transparency
- Addressing both child AND parental trauma




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The Vagus Nerve

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Behavioural Functions	Body Functions
 <p>Social Engagement Soothing and calming Indicates safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowers or raises vocalization pitch • Regulates middle ear muscles to perceive human voice • Changes facial expressivity • Head turning • Tears and eyelids • Slows or speeds heart rate
 <p>Mobilization Fight or Flight Active Freeze Moderate to extreme danger</p>	<p>Hyper arousal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases heart rate • Sweat increases • Inhibits gastrointestinal function • Narrowing blood vessels- to slow blood flow to extremities • Release of adrenaline
 <p>Immobilization Collapse or submission Death feigning Increased pain threshold Conserves metabolic resources Life threatening situations</p>	<p>Hypo- arousal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slows heart rate • Constricts bronchi • Stimulates gastrointestinal function

Evolution

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Mobilisation to Social Engagement

Strategies to help clients regulate and return to a neuroception of safety:

- **Prosody** – gentle calm voice (*brainstem/limbic*)
- **Facial expressions** – (*vagus nerve/ ANS*)
- **Body language** – (*vagus nerve/ANS/right brain*)
- **Offer a glass of water, cup of tea** (*brainstem*)
- **Breathing 5-2-7** breath work (*brainstem, limbic*)

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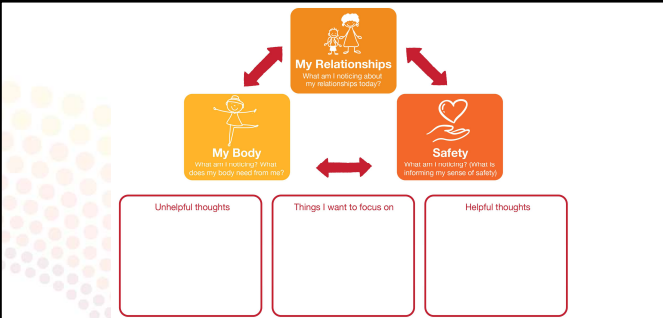
Mobilisation to Social Engagement

- **Listen and validate feelings** (*limbic/cortex*)
- **Hold space** (when safe)
- **Check in with your own emotions/triggers** (*right brain to right brain, co-regulation*)
- **Empathy** (*limbic/cortex*)
- **Connection relating** (*limbic/cortex*)
- **Draw on strengths** (*limbic/cortex*)
- **Humour** (*limbic/cortex*)
- **Unconditional positive regard** (*right brain/limbic/cortex*)



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My Body
What are I noticing? What does my body need from me?

My Relationships
What am I noticing about my relationships today?

Safety
What am I noticing? What is informing my sense of safety?

Unhelpful thoughts | Things I want to focus on | Helpful thoughts

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P.A.C.E (Dan Hughes, DDP)

- Playful
- Accepting
- Curious
- Empathic




"P.A.C.E is a formula for epigenetic reprogramming of the child's neuroceptive system" (Jon Baylin)

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Parental Reflective Function



What is it: the parent's capacity to ascribe meaning to emotions and behaviours – linked to p outcome across multiple developmental domains. RF has explicit and implicit components, as well as self/other aspects

The impact of stress and trauma: as stress increases, child-reading system gives way to hypervigilance for signs of distress, anger or rejection – which trigger defensive reactions and bias the child-reading system toward negative perceptions (Hughes & Baylin).

How do we develop it: Research demonstrates that reflective capacity can be increased through targeted intervention that focuses on the inner world and intentionality of the child (e.g. Bringing up Great Kids, Circle of Security, Tuned-In Parenting, Lighthouse Parenting).

Promoted through active, facilitated **wondering** about mental states. Support curiosity and 'wondering'. Listen to parents' speech about their child – does it contain any 'mental state' talk? Watch parents interact with their child – look for instances of 'mind-mindedness' and highlight these to the parent.

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Relationship-based strategies


- **For school age children:**
- Understand their chronological age and their developmental age – these may be different
- Explore what's under the behaviour; use PACE
- Notice what the child does well and offer praise
- Set boundaries and have good routines
- View discipline as a learning not a punishment
- Use 'time-in' rather than time-out

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Helping Parents Understand Behaviour

- When parents feel understood, they become open to trying to understand others
- Always consider the underlying function of parents' behaviours and reactions
- Help parents to wonder about their child's inner world
- Develop openness and curiosity about behaviour
- If we can understand what drives a behaviour, we can work out how to respond to it
- If we can meet the need that is driving a behaviour, the behaviour can start to reduce
- **Some clues:** *is the behaviour a fight/flight/freeze/withdraw response? Is it related to hunger/tiredness? Is it a bid for connection or space?*



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Establishing parent-child boundaries

- 'Parentification' can be instrumental or emotional
- Help parents to establish their role as the parent – identify appropriate alternatives for emotional and practical support
- Help parents to develop appropriate expectations for: behaviours, emotional capacities, household contributions, relational repair

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Connection through Movement & Play

- Incorporate interventions that involve the body
- Explore opportunities for families to engage in movement-based activities together
- Support families to establish a culture of play and fun (not all parents know how to "play")

Family yoga?
Family walks
Loungeroom dance party
Infant massage
Hammock/swings

Connected play – blowing bubbles together
Cotton ball hockey
Feather tennis



Support parents to engage in their children's play in a child-led way – let the child direct and script

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Managing parents/caregiver responses

"A coherent life story is one in which the adult has made sense of his or her own childhood experience, and has insights into how that past has influenced his development as an adult and as a parent" (Siegel 2006)

- To enable a parent to provide a child with reparative experiences they need to have a coherent life story - self narrative
- How a parent has come to make sense of their early life experiences, is the most robust predictor of how their children will become attuned to them and healed in relationship



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Managing parents/caregiver responses

- Parents need assistance to make sense of their life experience through a supportive, empathic emotional relationship which encourages authenticity, nurturing and direct communication
- Often, accessing internal recollections can enable a parent to become part of a larger narrative of their life. This is not always comfortable but can assist in discovering new possibilities.....



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Building Strength and Belonging through Story

- Develop Family Traditions and Rituals
- Story Telling
- Family/Child Story Book
- Help Families Explore their History



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Helpful Resources

The Handbook of Therapeutic Care for Children
Evidence-Informed Approaches to Working with Traumatized Children and Adolescents in Foster, Kinship and Adoptive Care
Edited by Janise Mitchell, Joe Tucci and Ed Tronick
Foreword by Stephen W. Porges

Healing Relational Trauma with Attachment-Focused Interventions
DYADIC DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Daniel A. Hughes | Kim S. Golding | Julie Hudson

Brain-Based Parenting
THE NEUROSCIENCE OF CAREGIVING FOR HEALTHY ATTACHMENT
Daniel A. Hughes, Jonathan Bayn
Foreword by Daniel J. Siegel

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