



Understanding and Transforming Trauma

SMART Foundation 2021 Golden Grove PS

21st January 2021

Trainer: Carolyn Grace



Australian Childhood Foundation



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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of this land and we pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future.



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SMART Learning Pathway

- SMART Online Training – 6 hours
- SMART – 2 hour training – facilitated by a local SMART Trainer
- SMART – Day 1 – Foundation (*includes specialist packages ie Early Years, Refugees, Adolescents, Working with Aboriginal communities*)
- SMART – Day 2 – Strategies (*for the above as well*)
- SMART Train the Trainer program – 3 days
- Graduate Certificate in Developmental Trauma (24 F:F days, online components available as well in 2021)



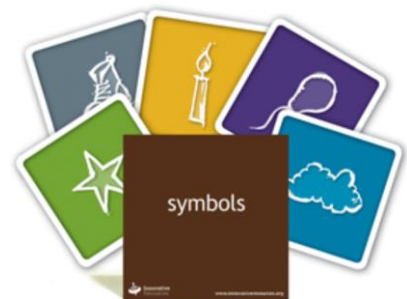
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Introductions

- Name
- Role



<https://innovativeresources.org/resources/card-sets/symbols/>

What are you passionate about in the work you are doing and in the work you are doing with children and young people who have experienced trauma?



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Session outline

- **examine** brain development in children
- **define** complex abuse related trauma
- **understand** the impact of trauma on children's and young people's development and functioning
- **develop** strategies for working with traumatised children
- **discuss** whole school or service approaches to supporting traumatised children



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Key learning outcomes

- develop an enhanced understanding of complex abuse related trauma, with a particular focus on its effects on brain functioning.
- apply a framework for assessing the impact of complex abuse related trauma on children and young people.
- build on practice skills to apply key models of intervention which promote recovery for children in an education setting.



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Principles guiding this workshop

- we assume a knowledge of child abuse and state mandatory reporting requirements
- discussion & questions only enhance the session
- abuse related trauma covers the impact of all forms of child abuse, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, family violence and neglect.
- ***your emotional safety is paramount***



Image source: istock



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Introducing the SMART Practice Framework

- Predictable
- Responsive
- Attuned
- Connecting
- Translating
- Involving
- Calming
- Engaging



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Safety & relationships are key...

It is important to remember that safety – feeling and being safe and having safe, connected and attuned relationships are key to supporting a child or young person who has experienced trauma.

These primary relationships contribute to:

- stored internal working models of primary relationships recorded in the right hemisphere
- the perception of emotion in self and others, enabling empathy and humour.
- healing from trauma

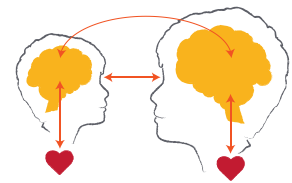


Image source: ©ACF2020



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Trauma

How would you define trauma?

What have you noticed with your students?

Simple	Intergenerational
Complex	Transgenerational
Developmental	Historical

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Defining trauma

Any single, ongoing or cumulative experience which:

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



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Complex relational trauma

- most often involves multiple incidents over an extended period of time
- is blaming or stigmatising of the victim
- *based in relationship and associated with shame*
- is an isolating experience due to the interpersonal element, often underpinned by intentionality
- induces a sense of disconnection from others and their support

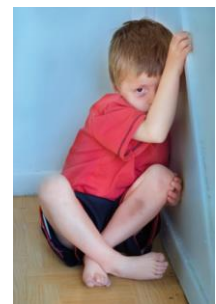


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Developmental trauma

Occurs when the foetus in utero, baby, child or adolescent experiences trauma, from abuse and neglect during these stages of development

- Children and young people are very vulnerable to the effects of trauma because of their **brain's developmental immaturity** - their brains are malleable, so the impact of trauma is faster to manifest and leaves deeper tracks of damage
- Children's **development can slow down or be impaired** often leading to children experiencing splintered development



Image source: istock



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Understanding the developing child and the impact of trauma

Development

- An understanding of child development is pivotal in recognising and distinguishing the impact of trauma
- Babies, children & young people who experience chronic traumatisation often experience developmental delays across a broad spectrum including:
 - Cognitive skills
 - Language skills
 - Motor skills
 - Social skills

Neurobiology

- An understanding of normative brain development gives us a point of comparison for considering the impact of trauma
- A neurobiological understanding of trauma offers explanations about the way that it affects a child/young person

Image source: <https://unsplash.com>



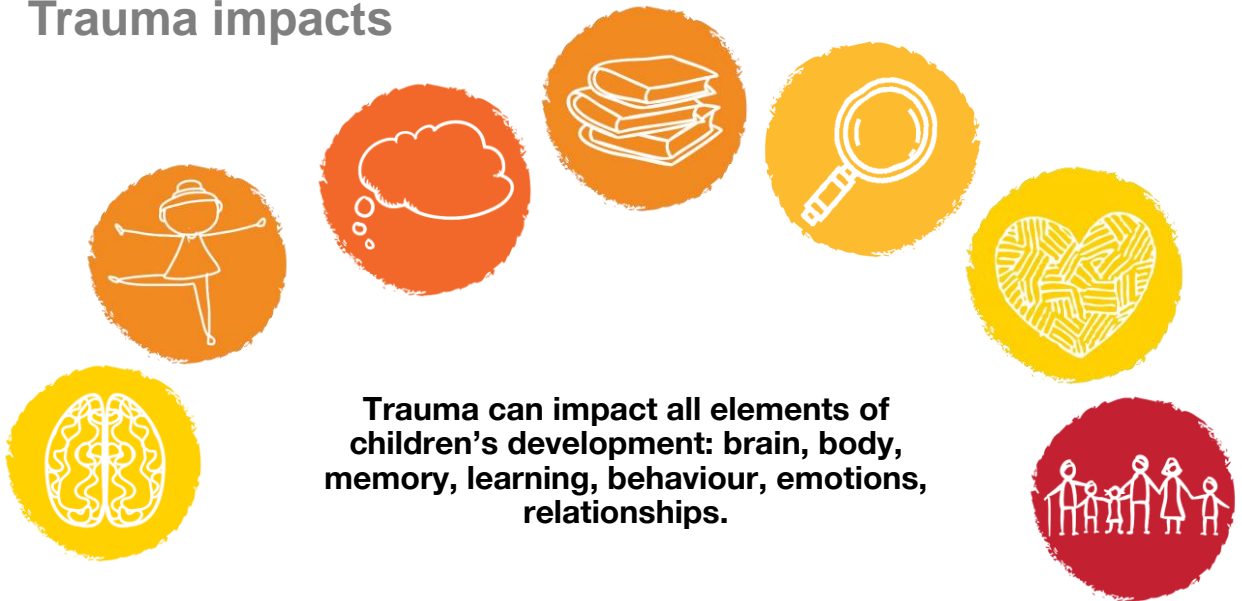
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Trauma impacts



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Neuronal connections

- Neurons – cells in our brain interact and communicate with other neurons
- 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

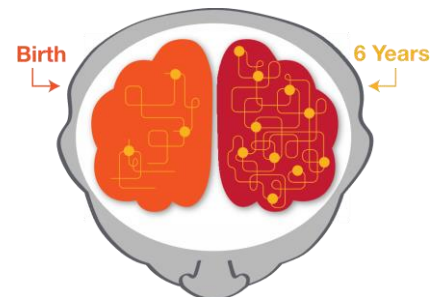


Image source: ©ACF 2020

What builds our neuronal connections?



Image source: Shutterstock



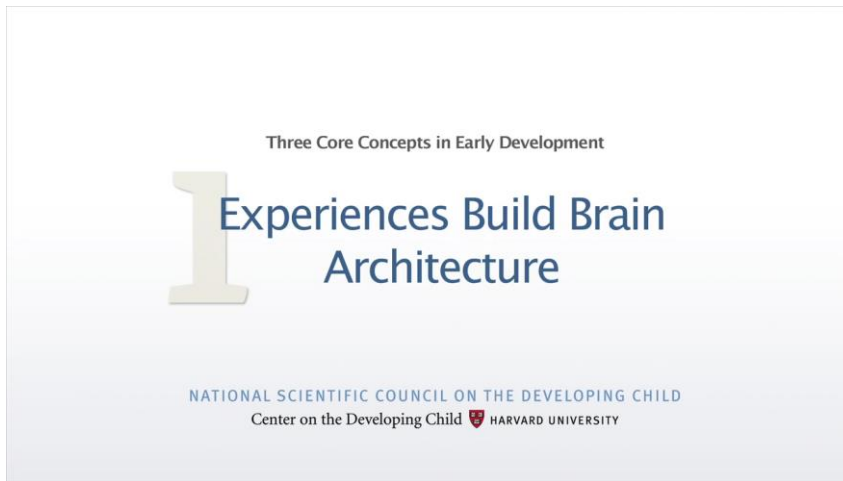
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Neuronal connections



What implications might this have for classroom practice?



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Neuroplasticity – hope for healing

Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's capacity to:

- Grow new nerve cells
- Strengthen connections between nerve cells
- Sprout new connections between different cells



Image source: <http://highexistence.com/its-all-in-your-head-how-to-take-advantage-of-neuroplasticity/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYCZa87g>



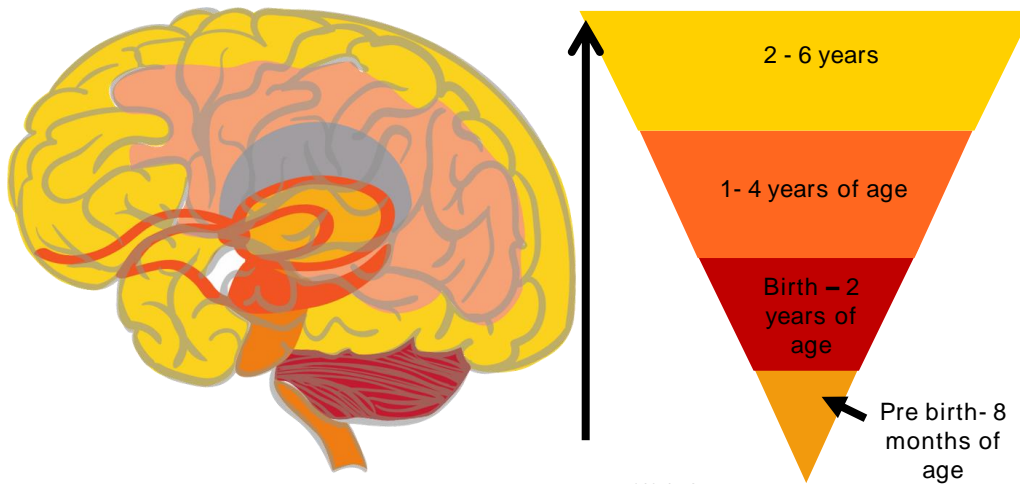
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Developmental stages of brain maturation



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Brainstem – survival centre

- basic life functions
- first part of our brain to develop & the most developed brain part at birth
- responsible for our heart beat, breathing, sucking and swallowing, temperature control blood pressure and our sleep cycle



Image source: ©ACF 2020



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The brain stem under stress and trauma

- may experience fast or slower heart rate
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- sleep disturbances and unsettledness
- sucking and swallowing and digestion difficulties
- may feel hot or cold or not notice changes in temperature



Image source: Shutterstock

What do you notice and what can you do?



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Cerebellum – body and balance centre

- helps us with our posture and balance
- helps us with our coordination and to control our movements
- helps us to know where our body is in space
- helps us with our voluntary movements such as walking and writing



Image source: ©ACF 2020



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The cerebellum under stress and trauma

- lack of coordination and balance
- difficulty in maintaining posture
- difficulty in undertaking tasks that require balance
- lack of awareness of their body in space
- difficulty with voluntary movement tasks – walking or writing



Image source: Shutterstock

What do you notice and what can you do?



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Strategies for transforming – brainstem & cerebellum

- include soothing and calming activities, safe containment
- movement based activities
 - include activities that have a rhythmic, repetitive element
 - include activities that have a balancing element & gross & fine motor skills
- breath based activities
- conduct a sensory audit – ie: is it too hot or too cold, too noisy?
- include proprioceptive and interoceptive awareness and activities

Have PREDICTABILITY in every aspect of the school day and curriculum.



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A Rhythmic Classroom model focuses on building a strong, regulated body – ensuring teachers incorporate knowledge of trauma’s significant impacts on the body and the body’s regulatory abilities

(Perry, 2009)



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A rhythmic classroom or school yard

- bring rhythm in to the classroom – activities like drumming, music, physical movement breaks, short exercise bursts
- brain breaks or “Brain kits” – for fine and large motor skills – cardio activities, or stationary equipment – (stationary bikes, treadmills)
- “rhythmic or containing furniture” for regulation – rocking chairs, hammocks, swings, beanbags, mats, blankets
- design school routines with a rhythmic sense to the lesson, day, week and year
- embedding “circle” routines and morning meetings with a sense of rhythm, positive emotion, fun and relational attunement
- integrating heart rate activities and heart rate monitors in both personal and learning development (ie great to include in maths or science lessons)



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Diencephalon – sorting and sending centre

- develops mainly after birth
- sorts out “messages” coming into the brain and sends them out to other parts of the brain
- uses hormones to send signals to body



Image source: ©ACF 2020



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The diencephalon under stress and trauma

- becomes overwhelmed and cannot sort the information
- is unable to send information to the memory and thinking parts of the brain – that pathway shuts down
- it alerts the amygdala which sets of a sensory information response sequence



Image source: Shutterstock

What do you notice and what can you do?



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Sensory information response sequence



Image: <https://data.integrativepro.com/images/hpa-axis-stress-response.png>



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Strategies for transforming – diencephalon

- conduct a sensory audit – ie: is it too hot or too cold, too noisy?
- provide calm, positive sensory experiences – calming items, fidgets (age appropriate options), boxes or areas in the classroom and other areas
- provide regular and predictable brain and body breaks, that include movement, mindfulness or breath-based activities – especially consider transition times

What might help during transitions and at beginnings and ends of classes?



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Limbic lobe - emotion and memory centre

- helps us attach an emotion to an experience or memory
- particularly involved with the emotions
- heavily involved in attachment processes
- develops mainly after birth
- two important brain parts – the amygdala and the hippocampus are in this part of the brain



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Amygdala

Has three roles:

- Alarm centre - the 'smoke detector' of the brain
- Memory centre - processes & stores implicit memories
- Emotion centre – helps with emotional understanding and regulation



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Implicit and Explicit Memory Systems

Implicit Memory Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Subconscious retrieval 	Explicit Memory Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conscious encoding and retrieval ▪ Explicit memory develops after brain systems are in place and has three component 	
Is non-verbal memory Active before birth	Develops around 18 months	Develops around 2 – 3 years
Implicit memory lacks conscious awareness & is fundamental to how the brain stores traumatic representations	Semantic/factual memory Knowledge of the world, memories about the way things work Episodic memory Discrete events that occur at different points in time	Narrative/Autobiographical To do with sense of self and time

Image source: ©2018 ACF



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The amygdala under stress and trauma

- can be over active or under active
- can evoke reminders and flashbacks of the trauma (awakenings)
- will have difficulty in emotional regulation
- will have difficulty in reading facial expressions



Image source: Shutterstock

What do you notice and what can you do?



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Strategies for transforming – Amygdala – IMPLICIT MEMORIES

- understand that their behaviour may be triggered/awakened because of an implicit memory
- don't ask questions at this stage – the thinking part of the brain will be offline.
- try to determine what might have caused the triggering or awakening (noise, smell, colour).
- stay calm, stay present and with the child or young person. Reassure

Re-entry to the classroom should be a safe and positive transition whenever possible.



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Strategies for transforming – Amygdala - EMOTIONS

- include explicit teaching around emotional literacy
- build emotional regulatory activities in to the day – calming, rhythmic, repetitive, breath-based – positive and constructive feedback, celebrating significant events, element of joy, fun and laughter
- provide opportunities to experience and understand emotions in others – through safe relationships, role modelling and game playing
- greet your students at the door or at the start of the day/lesson- even if they are late, make them feel included
- take time to know your students, understand their background and acknowledge their learning needs and successes.

(Golding, et al. , 2016)



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Hippocampus

- explicit memory centre
- provides context to memories
- provides consolidation of information from short term memory to long term memory
- memory puzzle sorting centre



Image source: ©ACF 2020



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Implicit and Explicit Memory Systems

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Image source: ©2018 ACF



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The hippocampus under stress and trauma

- doesn't function properly - it feels as if the trauma hasn't ended.
- reduction of hippocampal volume up to 25% as a result of high levels of cortisol
- working memory, retention and recall (retrieval) capacity is severely impacted



Image source: Shutterstock

What do you notice and what can you do?



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Strategies for transforming – hippocampus – EXPLICIT MEMORIES

- provide lots of opportunities for review of what has been taught
- have visual timetables and lots of reminders around the room
- reinforce, remind and practice expectations for entering classrooms and routines for classroom learning. Scaffolds like morning routines, timetables, what's on today, books to be out this morning etc.
- use of diaries or other reminder tools for high school aged students
- use of sticky notes, colour codes etc to assist
- allow extra time for activities
- break down tasks to be more manageable



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Cerebral cortex – thinking centre

- the largest part of the brain
- associated with higher brain function such as thought and action
- examples of functions:
 - reasoning
 - logic
 - judgement
 - voluntary movement



Image source: ©ACF 2020



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The Prefrontal Cortex- executive function centre

Begins to develop in infancy and is the final part of the brain to reach maturity in one's mid to late twenties

- self awareness
- reasoning and judgement
- foresight and anticipation
- focusing and sustaining attention
- planning organising and prioritising
- decision making
- reflecting
- enthusiasm, motivation and persistence
- impulse control
- working memory



Image source: ©2018 ACF



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Cortical areas under stress and trauma

Unable to:

- use foresight and anticipation, focus or sustain attention
- plan, organise or prioritise or make decisions well
- reflect or have self-awareness
- be enthusiastic, motivated or persist with activities
- use impulse control



Image source: Shutterstock

What do you notice and what can you do?



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Strategies for transforming – cortical areas

- problem solving activities - break down the problem in to “bite size”, achievable goals
- mapping and planning out the activity or options
- games - card games – boards games – strategy games
- sharing and taking turns games
- voluntary movement activities/complex patterns – table top drumming, clapping etc
- thinking and choice games – “Would you rather?”
- identity and life story work – help them build a picture of their life



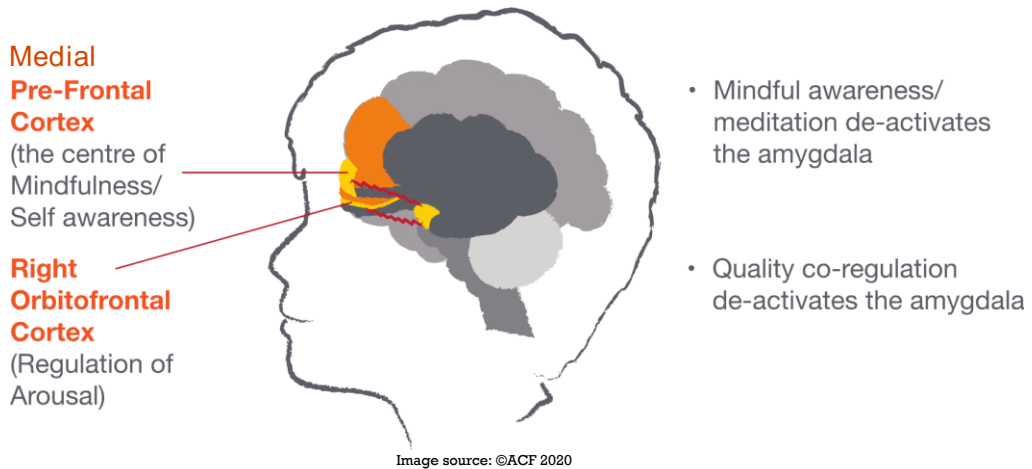
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Medial Pre-frontal Cortex and the Right Orbito-frontal Cortex



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Strategies for transforming – using the medial pre-frontal cortex and the right-orbitofrontal cortex

- mindfulness activities – engages the medial prefrontal cortex and the right orbito- frontal cortex
- any activities that build on focussing attention, use the working memory, social cognition, attuned communication, involved self-regulation (mirror games), impulse control, and judgement and reasoning.
- involve children/young people in physical activities that include movement and build in stillness



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Brain food for the developing child

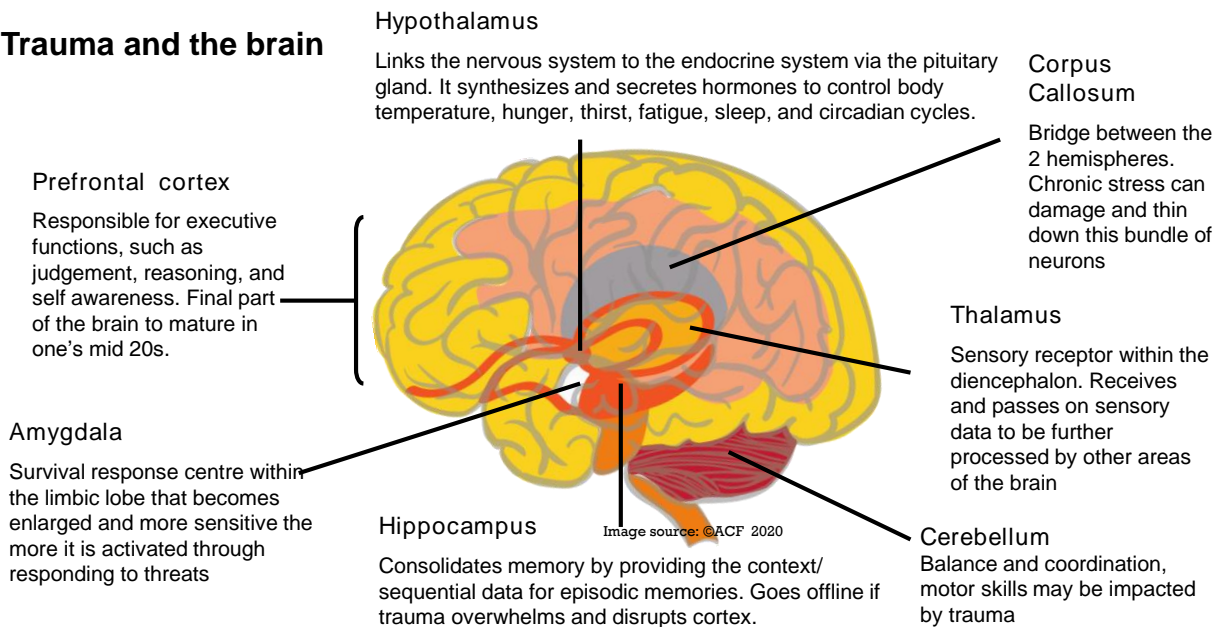
Age	Brain function focus	Brain food
12-25 years	Abstract thinking, decision making, analysing and problem solving	Opportunities to practise making decisions, to weigh up consequences, to take risks in non life and death settings, to learn boundaries. Integrative activities such as outdoor adventures, ropes courses, group work, yoga, meditation, mindfulness.
7-12 years	Consolidation and Exploration	Problem processing opportunities to concentrate on areas of interest, to challenge and be supported, games requiring skill, strength and agility, experiences of raised and lowered heart rate.
3 - 6 years	Maturing thinking functions	Reading, playing games, counting, talking, storytelling, games with siblings and in teams
1 - 4 years	Emotional functions	Playing games with parents, dress ups, acting stories, act out feelings, sharing, taking turns, dress ups
6 months – 2 years	Coordination of body movements	Dancing, painting, blocks, threading, sliding, crawling, rolling, running, clapping
In utero – 9 months	Basic Survival	Tactile play, peek a boo, lots of touch, being rocked



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Trauma and the brain



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Strategies for transforming

Brain area	Function	Activity ideas
Brainstem & Diencephalon	Basic survival & sensory processing	Pacification or stimulation. Activities in the child's preferred sensory modality
Cerebellum	Coordination of movement	Using music, rhyme and movement activities
Limbic	Emotional processing	Building relational connection through plays, animals, games
Cortex	Thinking processes	Linking experiences and sensations to words and descriptions
Prefrontal cortex	Analytical and abstract thinking	Challenges and safe risk taking activities

Image source: ©2018 ACF



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Development of the left and right hemispheres

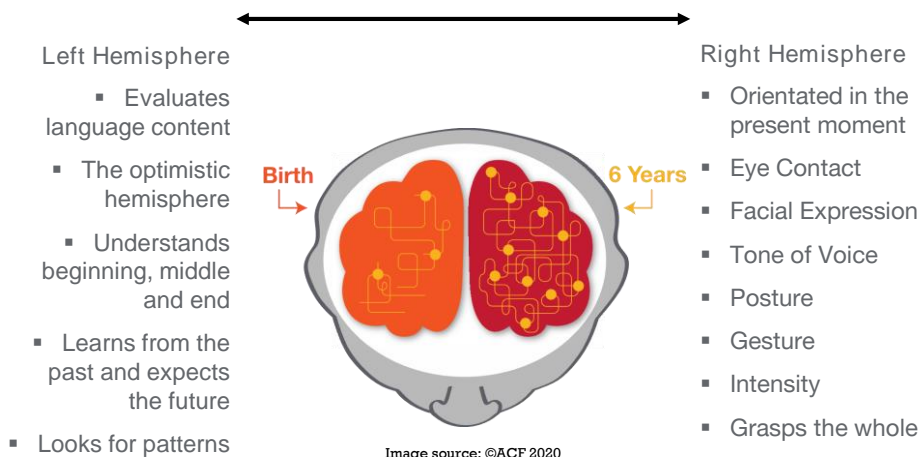


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Lateral integration – Left and right hemispheres working together

- hemispheric specialisation means that LH and RH need to work together to achieve optimal adaptive states.
- knowing a feeling and giving that feeling a language occur through the integrative capacity of the two hemispheres.
- tuning into, understanding and responding to social cues in communication occur through the integrative capacity of the two hemispheres.



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Hemispheres under stress and trauma

- will struggle to process the content of our words (left hemisphere - Wernicke's area)
- may not be able to speak & will be acutely aware of our facial expressions, posture, gestures, intensity of movements and eye contact and searching for signs of disapproval, rejection & danger (left hemisphere - Broca's area)
- will be tuned into the tone of voice, not the content (right hemisphere)
- difficulties with understanding and knowing feelings and articulating them
- difficulties with tuning into, understanding and responding to social cues in communication



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Strategies for transforming – RH and LH

Building RH

- using attunement and relationally based activities to build connection eg: mutual smiling, mirroring games based on facial expressions, voice copying
- modelling appropriate gestures and proximity

Building LH

- incorporating cognitive processes into calming or stimulating activities eg: counting for relaxation
- providing opportunities to use language and logic – through game playing, discussion and decision making



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Strategies for transforming – building RH/LH connection

Emotionally

- attunement and noticing how a child/young person feels, says and shows in the body and giving language – *“I notice that you are/have....(tears in your eyes, are yawning lots, are shivering...and I wonder if you are feeling....(sad, tired, scared....)*

Physically

- doing any activity that enables you to cross the imaginary “midline” of the body eg: cups games, hokey pokey, clapping chants, mirroring games, playing musical instruments, physical activity/sports



Image source: istock



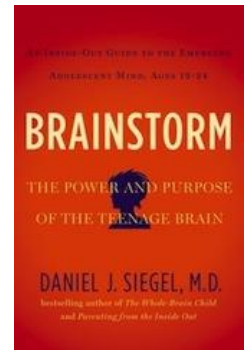
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Adolescents - The remodelling brain: Pruning & myelination in the teenage brain



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXnyM0ZuKNU>



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Young people and the importance of sleep

- adolescents need more sleep than adults or children - optimal time being about nine and a half hours
- pruning and myelination occur during sleep
- sleep strengthens learning and memories
- later starting times for schools show statistically significant impact on academic achievement

What do you think?



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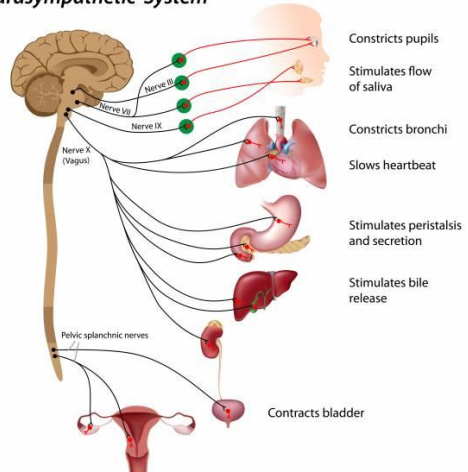
Polyvagal theory and neuroception

Cues of risk and safety are continually monitored by our nervous system.

“Before we can engage in social behaviour and learning we must first feel safe.”

(Porges, 2015, p.115).

Parasympathetic System



<http://lewisinstitute.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/img-strategies2.jpg>

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Polyvagal Theory and our protective responses

Behavioural Functions

Body Functions

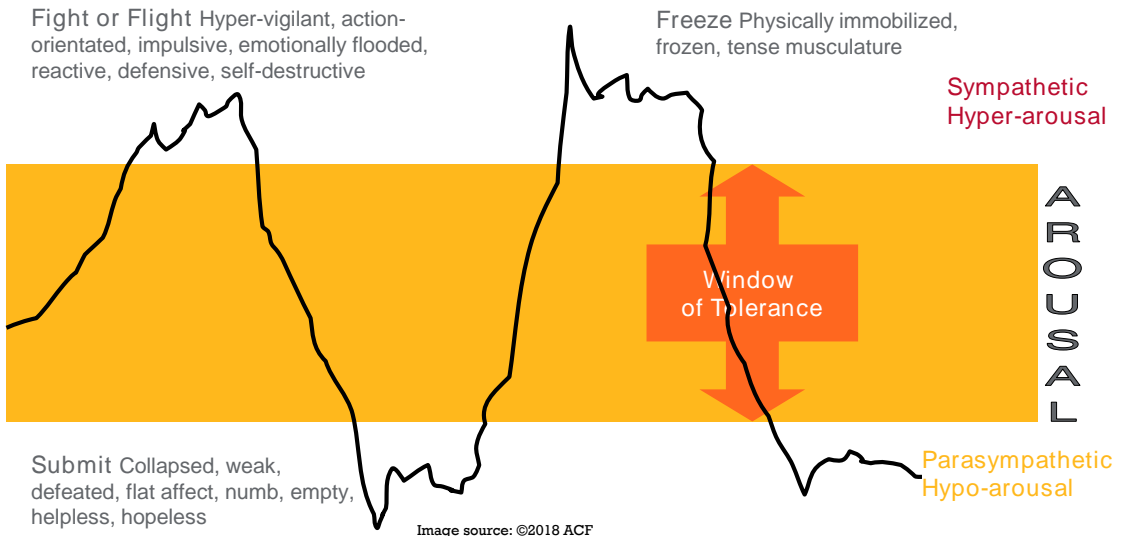
<p>Social Engagement</p> <p>Soothing and calming</p> <p>Indicates safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Lowers or raises vocalization pitch * Regulates middle ear muscles to perceive human voice * Changes facial expressivity * Head turning * Tears and eyelids * Slows or speeds heart rate
<p>Mobilization</p> <p>Fight or Flight</p> <p>Active Freeze</p> <p>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</p> <p>Collapse or submission/Death feigning</p> <p>Increased pain threshold</p> <p>Conserves metabolic resources</p> <p>Life threatening situations</p>	<p>Hypoarousal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Slows heart rate * Constricts bronchi * Stimulates gastrointestinal function

Image source: ©2018 ACF

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Dys-regulated Arousal




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Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006

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Regulated Arousal




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Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006

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The trauma organised behaviour cycle

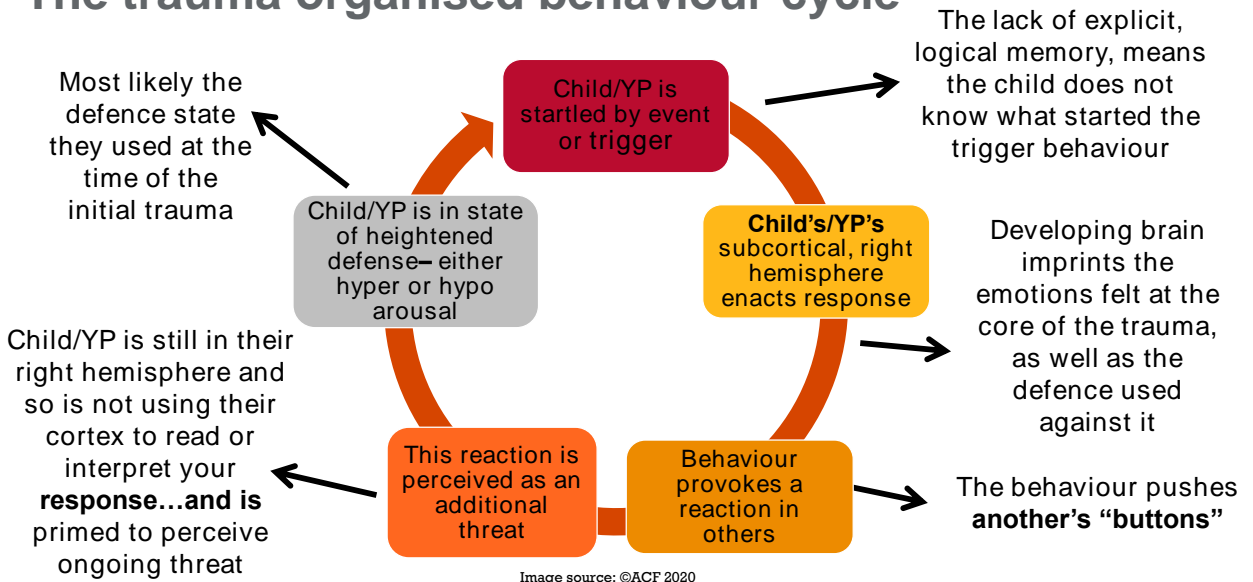


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Overshooting your Window of Tolerance:

- Upset and hyped up
- Angry and agitated
- Frustrated
- Heart beating fast
- Tense and can't think clearly
- Unable to regulate your emotions

Within your Window of Tolerance:

- Feeling safe, calm and peaceful
- Happy and able to think clearly
- Ready to learn
- Settled and content
- Mindful and able to regulate your emotions

Undershooting your Window of Tolerance:

- Sad and tired
- Unmotivated with no energy
- Feel empty and withdrawn
- Don't want to listen, talk or play
- Can't think about learning

Making Space for Learning – Action Research Project - St Thomas More School, Elizabeth Park, S.A.



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Arousal

Consider:

- What does hyper-arousal look like for students and your centre/school?
- What does hypo-arousal look like?
- Where is the calm in our centre/school?
- What is the calm for us?



Image source: Shutterstock



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Using the SMART PRACTICE Framework tool

- Predictable
- Responsive
- Attuned
- Connecting
- Translating
- Involving
- Calming
- Engaging



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Summary

Trauma has impaired children's cortical capacity to regulate subcortical functioning. In order to return cortical capacity (which is essential for learning) we must restore calm.

- Be predictable
- Be connected
- Be present
- Promote understanding
- Equip the child with calming and engaging strategies they can use and help co-regulate



Image source: istock



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Hope



Image source: istock

What are your hopes
for the children/yp
you work with?

What are your hopes
for your school?



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Thank you for your participation!

We appreciate your feedback!



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Keeping in touch with ACF & SMART

- SMART Online training
- SMART training
- Discussion papers
- Making Space For Learning resources
- <https://professionals.childhood.org.au/smart-online-training>
- Prosody Blog <http://www.childhoodtrauma.org.au/>
- Calendar Training <https://professionals.childhood.org.au/training-development/course-list/>

www.childhood.org.au



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