



Understanding and Transforming Trauma

**SMART Foundation
Early Years & Primary**

2021

 Australian Childhood Foundation | **SMART**
Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma

1

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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2

SMART Learning Pathway

- SMART Online Training – register through Plink - 8 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, blended delivery available as well)
- Trauma Aware Schools Initiative



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Introductions

- Name
- Role



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



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childhood.org.au

4

Outline of our day



- 9.00am Start
- 10.45am – 11.00am Morning Tea



- 12.45pm – 1.15pm Lunch



- 3.15pm – Evaluations
- 3.30pm Finish

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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 – success criteria

- **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.



Image source: ©2021 ACF



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Principles guiding this session



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Your emotional safety is paramount



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SMART PRACTICE

- P** Predictable
- R** Responsive
- A** Attuned
- C** Connecting
- T** Translating
- i** Involving
- C** Calming
- E** Engaging



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Safety and 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.



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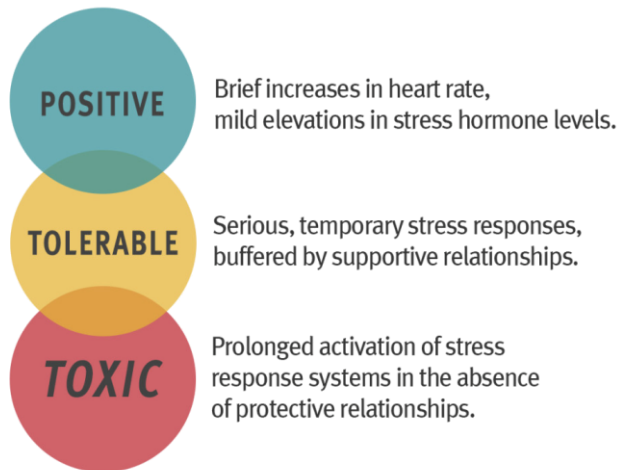


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10

Stress....



Defining trauma

Trauma is not what happens
to you,
but what happens **inside** you
(Gabor Mate 2018)



The growing brain.....

How much does a brain weigh?

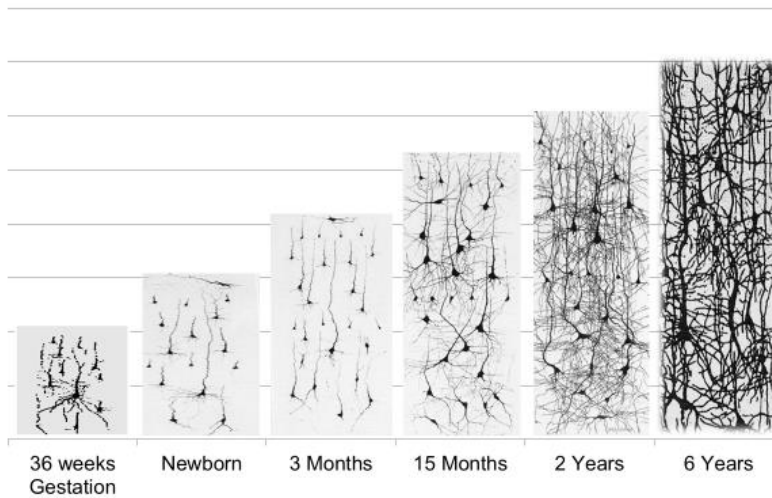


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Neural Circuit Formation in the Early Years



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Brain development

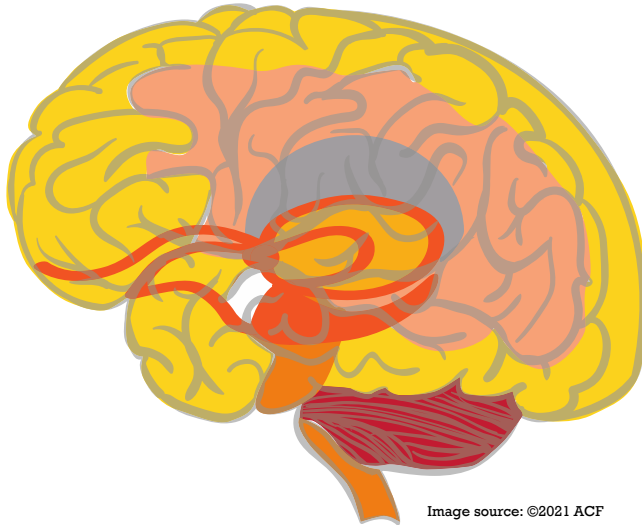


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Cortex
Reasoning/judging centre
3–6 years

Limbic System
Emotional centre
1–4 years

Cerebellum
Motor centre
Birth–2 years

Brain Stem
Basic survival functions
Pre-birth–8 months



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Where trauma affects the brain

Amygdala

Survival response centre within the limbic lobe that becomes enlarged and more sensitive the more it is activated through responding to threats

Hippocampus

Consolidates memory by providing the context/ sequential data for episodic memories. Goes offline if trauma overwhelms and disrupts cortex.

Corpus Callosum

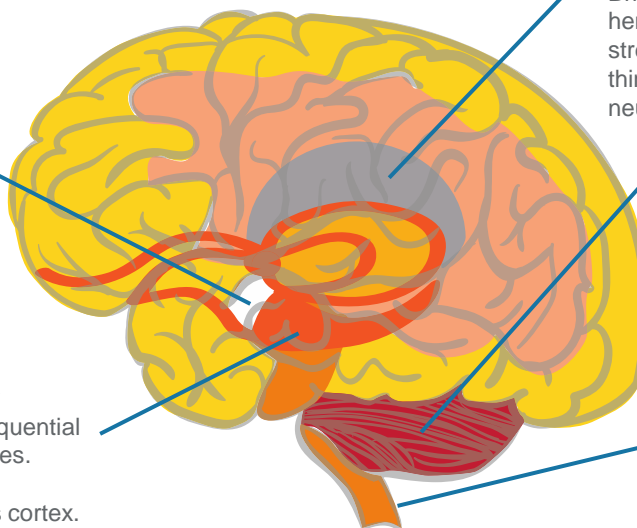
Bridge between the 2 hemispheres. Chronic stress can damage and thin down this bundle of neurons

Cerebellum

Difficulties with balance, gross and fine motor skills, spatial awareness

Brain stem

Dysregulation, increase heart rate, breathing and sleep difficulties



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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

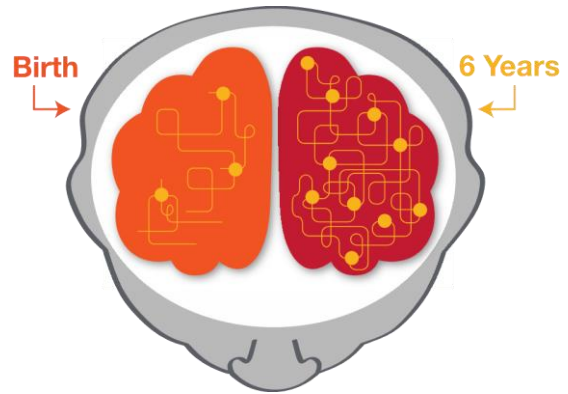


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Three Core Concepts in Early Development



Experiences Build Brain Architecture

NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD

Center on the Developing Child HARVARD UNIVERSITY



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Strengthening neuronal connections

Provide opportunities for repeated experiences

- Ensure students have an opportunity to practice tasks over and over
- Provide encouragement when tasks are achieved as this will connect to the brains' reward system
- Include lots of physical activities that are repetitive – playing musical instruments, skipping, dancing etc
- Model positive relational connections, emotion, fun and relational attunement



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Growing and regulating the brainstem

Provide activities which are rhythmical and synchronous with others:

- Rhythmic sounds - stories, songs, rhymes & music
- Rhythmic movement
- Rhythmic touch



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Growing and regulating the cerebellum

Provide activities which have support and balance, develops gross and fine motor skill elements and are synchronous with others

- Balancing activities
- Stretching – aligning the spine activities
- Spine/lumbar support
- Throwing and catching objects
- Writing, drawing, colouring, making



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Growing and regulating the amygdala

Provide activities that support emotional and social connection, understand the implicit memory needs and that calm and connect

- Explicit emotional literacy teaching
- Calm, sensory supportive environments
- Support the child, reassure
- Stay present – provide safety



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Growing and regulating the hippocampus

Provide activities that support memory retention and recall and review and repetition

- Practice activities and learning skills over and over
- Reinforce learning through repetition
- Provide playful opportunities to learn
- Use visuals to assist



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Growing and regulating the cortical areas

Provide activities that connect the cortical areas, through choice, problem solving, planning and voluntary movement

- Play thinking and choice games
- Map out and plan activities together
- Break down problems to work through
- Allow choice and options
- Use voluntary movement activities



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24

Lateral brain development

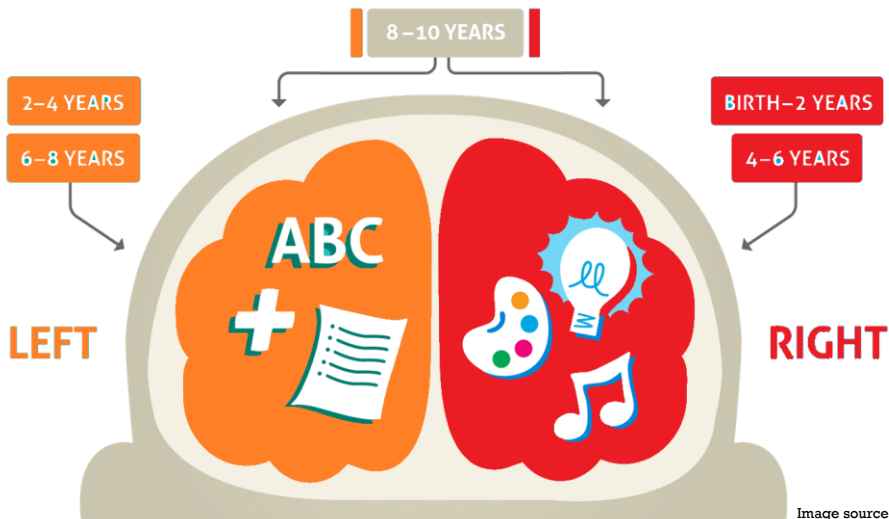


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Attachment and the right brain

- Neuroimaging studies show areas of the right hemisphere lighting up in the brains of parents & infants during non-verbal interactions.

(Schore, 2003)

- A secure attachment relationship facilitates right brain development and promotes efficient affect regulation.



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26

Mindfulness

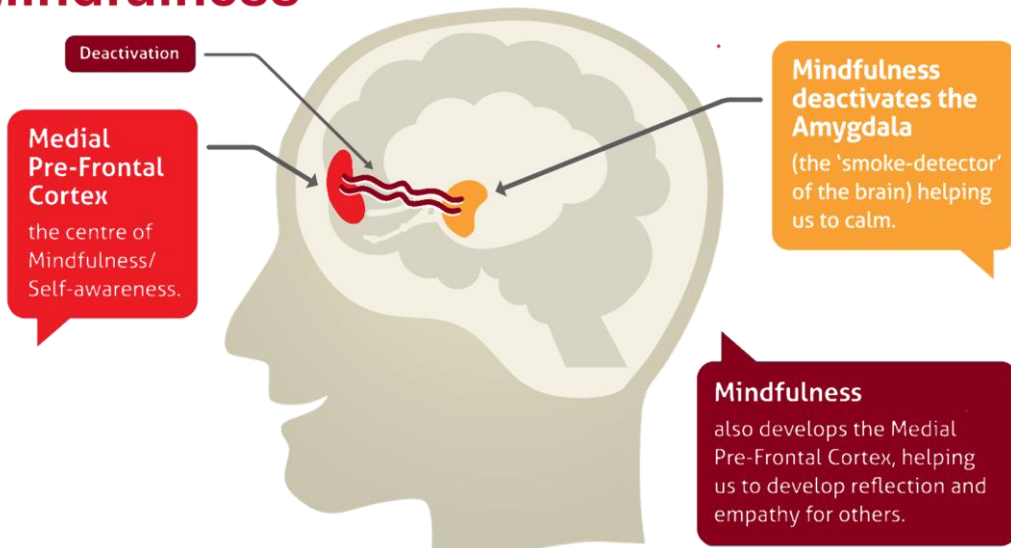


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Stop...Pause...Play



Australian Childhood Foundation's STOP, PAUSE, PLAY technique!
HOW TO BE MINDFUL

STOP

What you are doing and If possible make sure your feet are firmly on the ground.

PAUSE

Focus on your breath. Breathe in slowly, right down into your belly, then exhale completely. Take 5 more slow breaths, being aware of each breath in and each breath out. After several such breaths, you will find that your heart rate has slowed down, your breathing is deeper and you will feel calmer. It is the out breath that relaxes your body and allows you to feel calmer and think clearly.

PLAY

Respond to your child the way you want to. When you are in this calm state, you will probably be better able to respond in a thoughtful or considered way to your child. You will also be more likely to stay connected to what is going on for your children. You will be more aware of their experience of the situation and how they might be feeling.



www.cooleybrains.com

Adapted from "Mindful Parenting, The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2012"

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The importance of play

“ 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

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Neuroplasticity



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Interpersonal attunement

- When people are in relationships, the ability of one to regulate him/herself, affects the other's ability to regulate
- The child's arousal shapes, and is shaped by, relationships

Child's movement
in her/his window
of tolerance

Movement in my
window of tolerance

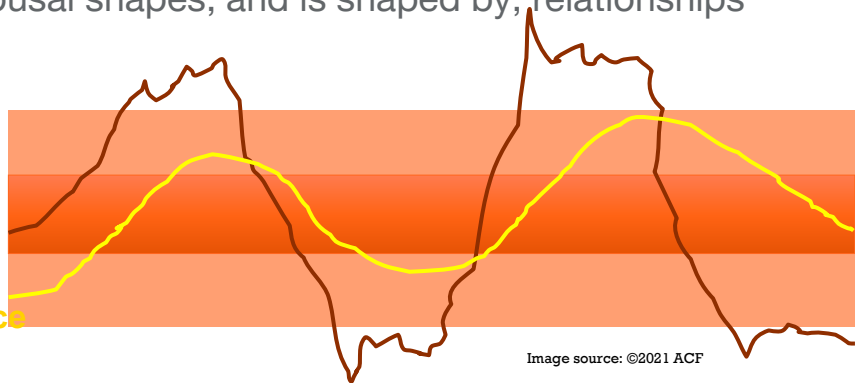


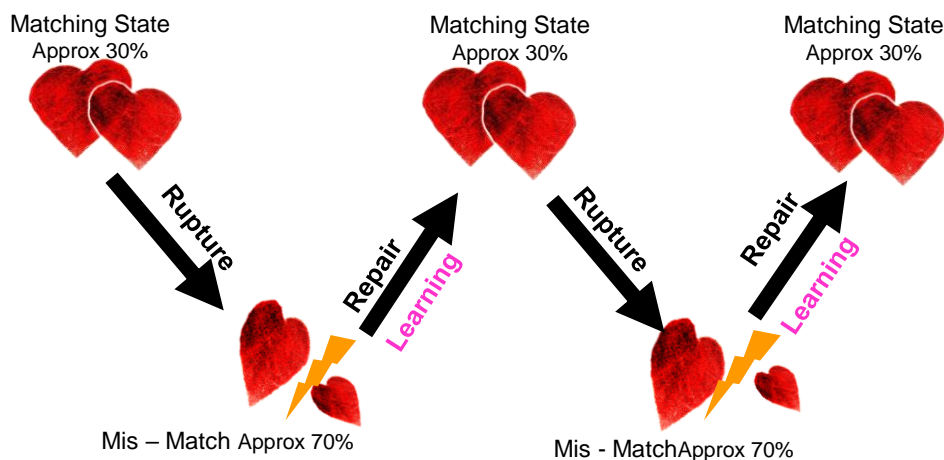
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31

Attunement, misattunement & repair

'good enough' parenting

(Ed Tronic)



32

Attunement, misattunement & repair

(Ed Tronic)

In even the healthiest relationships, rupture is inevitable and can have positive effects. Children learn:

'Life isn't perfect. We can recover from mistakes'

'I can change my feelings'

'Together we can face the world'

Prolonged rupture without repair causes a cascade of negative psychophysiological effects. Children learn:

'I am helpless'

'You can't be trusted'

'The world is threatening'



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Reframing our approach

Rather than asking:

"What are you doing?"

and

"How can I stop it?"



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Ask: ***"What are you trying to tell me?"***

and

"What do you need from me?"



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Repair in practice

*'What you did is not ok,
but you are still a good person
and I still love you'*



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35

35

Building safety and connection

- Children effected by trauma need stable, safe, consistent environments and relationships to help them to be calm and open to learning
- Safety = predictable and consistent routines, relationships and responses



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Neuroception of safety: predictability

Predictability is a metaphor for safety.

**“The removal of threat is not the same as the presence of safety”
(Porges, 2014)**



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Building predictability

Predictability is achieved by:

- Reliable routines e.g. bedtime story/song, start to day
- Using visual cues to help children prepare for the day – sequencing...better to use photos of the actual child, than clipart
- Preparing children for what's coming next
- Talking to baby/child about your intentions
- Same staff & caregiver/s every day



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Transitions

List all the transitions you expect children to traverse in one ordinary day

- **How many are essential?**
- How can you provide safe passage for children through the transition?
 - Safe Person
 - Safe Activity
 - Safe Place



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Building safety and connection

Managing transitions and change is extremely difficult for traumatised children

- transitions are experienced as a threat
- they feel a lose of their sense of safety
- they may revert to survival mode

**How can you help children to feel safe during
TRANSITIONS?**



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40

Calming and regulation

- Traumatized children find it difficult to regulate their own feelings of stress/distress.
- The best way to help the extremely dysregulated child is to remain calm and regulated yourself.



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41

41

Quality and best practice

As educators there are particular skills that are central to quality and best practice:

- **Relationships and Connections**
- **Child led practice**
- **Positive interactions**
- **Consistent approach**
- **Compassionate Practice**



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42

Engagement with safety

- understand & respect the child's need for distance in relationship
- increase your tolerance for 'stuckness' and 'crisis'
- practise mindfulness
- use phrases like: 'I noticed that...', 'Isn't that interesting!'
- practise self-care and seek support
- practise calming techniques

(Janina Fisher)



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Trauma- based behaviour and you...

- Don't take the child's behaviour personally
- Don't take the parent's behaviour personally
- Be aware of what presses your own buttons
- Get comfortable with discomfort!



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44

Deep listening

‘To listen in reciprocal relationships with no judgment, just to try to understand’



(JUDY ATKINSON 2017, *the Value of Deep Listening-The Aboriginal Gift to the Nation*)

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Summary – Be a safe harbour

‘Be my anchor when I’m all at sea’
PREDICTABLE PERSON

‘Ferry me to calmer waters’

SING-SONG VOICE
RHYTHMIC, REPETITIVE ACTIVITY WITH OTHERS
SENSORY INPUT



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46

46

Day 2 Strategies – what's coming up in our next session...

In Day 2 you will

- Be introduced to the Polyvagal Theory and the concept of the Window of Tolerance.
- Explore the different arousal levels and consider supportive strategies for each.
- Explore further the meaning of the behaviours we see in our students.
- Build a toolkit of strategies, focusing on the SMART Audit Tool



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47

Holding hope



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What are your hopes
for the children
you work with?

What are your hopes
for your school?



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48

Thank you for your participation...

We appreciate your feedback!



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