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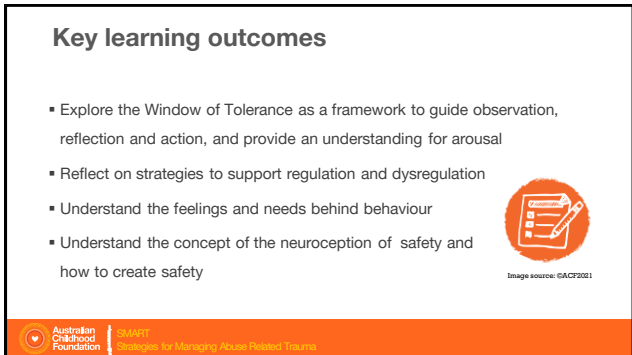
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**Relationships shape  
our sense of self and  
safety**



Image source: ©ACF2021

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**Neuroception and safety**

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



Image source: ©ACF2021

(Porges, 2015, p.115).



Image source: ©ACF2021

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**Polyvagal theory and protective responses**

by Stephen Porges

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

Image source: ©ACF2021 (Porges, 2012)

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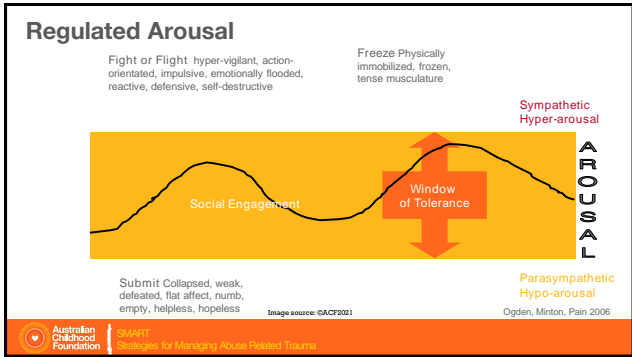
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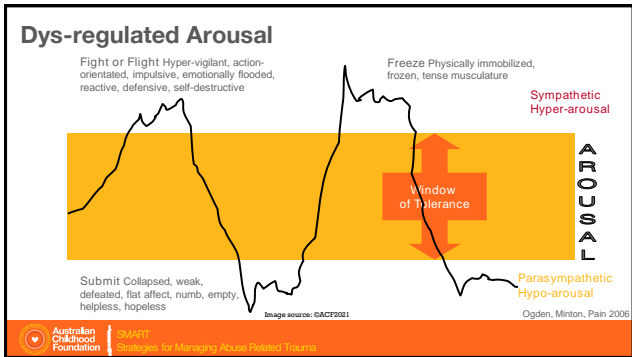
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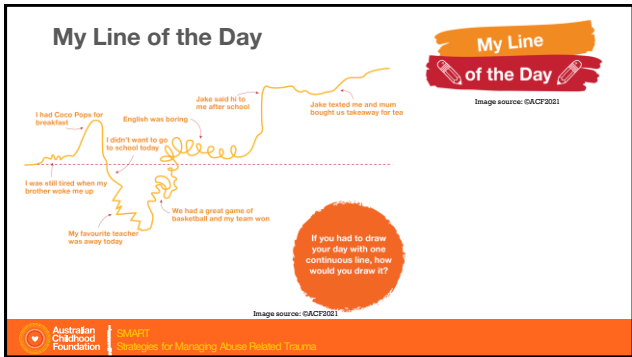
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**Strategies - MOBILISED responses - *Fight***

**What it might look like**

- angry, aggressive, irritable
- confrontational, controlling, shouting
- blaming others, pushing others away, argumentative

**Supportive responses/strategies**

- Help me stabilise my hyper-aroused nervous system
- Rhythm, containing and grounding
- Match my energy before helping me calm down
- Hanging, swinging, climbing, marching
- Stomping, jumping on the spot, drumming




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**Strategies - MOBILISED responses - *Flight***

**What it might look like**

- Anxious, silly, manic
- Running away, hiding, disruptive
- Difficulty with free play, silly voices, distracting

**Supportive responses**

- Be kind and patient when “finding” or collecting me
- Offer me an easy task/chore to do
- Help me settle my body – weighted blankets, heat packs
- Engage senses
- Encourage me to hang/swing/carry something heavy




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**Strategies MOBILISED responses – *Freeze***

**What it might look like**

- Arousal is high, but movement is inhibited
- May look confused or distracted
- Scanning the room, dilated pupils, wide eyes

**Supportive responses/strategies**

- Be curious about the freeze state- places that are less frozen than others?
- Gently facilitate movement eg. Wiggling one finger
- Play with metaphors like thawing ice
- Encourage breathing
- Engage senses




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### Strategies - IMMOBILISED responses - *Submit*

#### What it might look like

- low, sad, flat mood
- quiet, compliant
- alone, withdrawn

#### Supportive responses

- Orienting to the space/grounding exercises
- Orienting the senses
- Alignment- engaging the spine

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### Understanding behaviour

- What is the behaviour telling me?
- What might have triggered this behaviour?
- How does this behaviour serve to protect the child/young person and help him/her survive?
- What is the impact on me?



Image source: ©ACF2021

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### Trauma organised behaviour

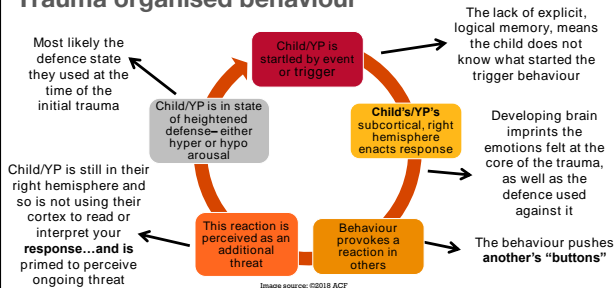


Image source: ©2018 ACF

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### Understanding the Feelings and Needs beneath the Behaviour




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### Group activity – behaviour

Observed behaviour	Assumed Meaning (how we might interpret the behaviour)	Possibly underlying cause/need (needs might include: safety, calm, connection/engaging)
Eg. refuses to make eye contact when spoken to, despite being asked several times to look at the teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defiance</li> <li>Wants to assert dominance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physiological response to feelings of unsafety – their body won't allow them to make eye contact (NEED – safety)</li> <li>Student has withdrawn and cannot hear/process instructions (NEED – connection/engaging)</li> </ul>

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### Strategies for keeping students in their WOT.

- Breath based activities
- Grounding activities
- Movement & Regulation activities
- Use of self




Image source: ©ACF2021

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### Creating an environment of SAFETY

**Physical environment:** Consider sensory factors – what promotes calm? What might trigger defensive/threat response?

**“Human” environment:** How do we use our voice, face and bodies to communicate safety? Do our interactions with students embody empathy and acceptance? Do our relationships prioritise predictability and consistency?



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### What might safety look like in practice?

Safety is connected to predictability (Porges, 2012)

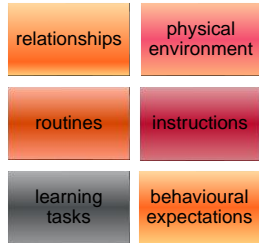


Image source: ©ACF2021

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