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Trauma Responsive Practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

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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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Principles guiding this workshop

- we assume a knowledge of child abuse and state mandatory reporting requirements
- abuse related trauma covers the impact of all forms of child abuse, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, family violence and neglect.
- While the focus of this session is on the child and their experience, there is a clear acknowledgement that engaging families and caregivers is critical in any intervention
- Understanding trauma and its impacts supports the capacity for effective intervention

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Learning outcomes

Strengthen

Strengthen your understanding of the broad issues vulnerable children face within the context of culture, relationship, environment and experience.

Explore

Explore the difficulties in engaging and reengaging marginalized parents and carers who have also experienced complex trauma and explore the long-term implications of their experiences.

Build

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.



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Learning outcomes

Consider

Consider a conceptual model of trauma responsive work with children who have experienced developmental (relational) trauma.

Explore

Explore evidence-based practice strategies and interventions with traumatised children and young people, and their parents

Identify and experience

Identify and experience practical skills and strategies that help facilitate trauma recovery for children and families



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Strong in Culture



Dadirri
the deep inner
spring inside us


Deep Listening
Dadirri
Quiet still awareness Waiting



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Finding our anchors



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The Importance of Culture

- “Culture is central to identity, culture defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value, what is important to us.” (Muriel Bamblett)
- Our traditional view that Aboriginal children are the gifts from the creator and this is something that's been really, really sort of important to remember, our children are the story holders of our future and it's really important that they take up that role. And Elders play a critical role in the identify formation of our children.(Muriel Bamblett 2014)



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Understanding History and Context

- Understandings of Aboriginal history which include pre-colonisation, colonisation, white assimilation, the Stolen Generations, historical impact across generations and contemporary history are all important.
- A good starting point for understanding traditional Aboriginal life prior to colonisation is the ‘Dreamtime, People, Land’ model showing people’s existence was based on connections to each other, country and law which was central to Aboriginal spirituality (Casey & Keen 2005). Joseph ‘Nipper’ Roe’s, ‘Dreamtime, People, Land’ model (1998). (Extract from Casey W., & Keen J., (2005).

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Our Worldview

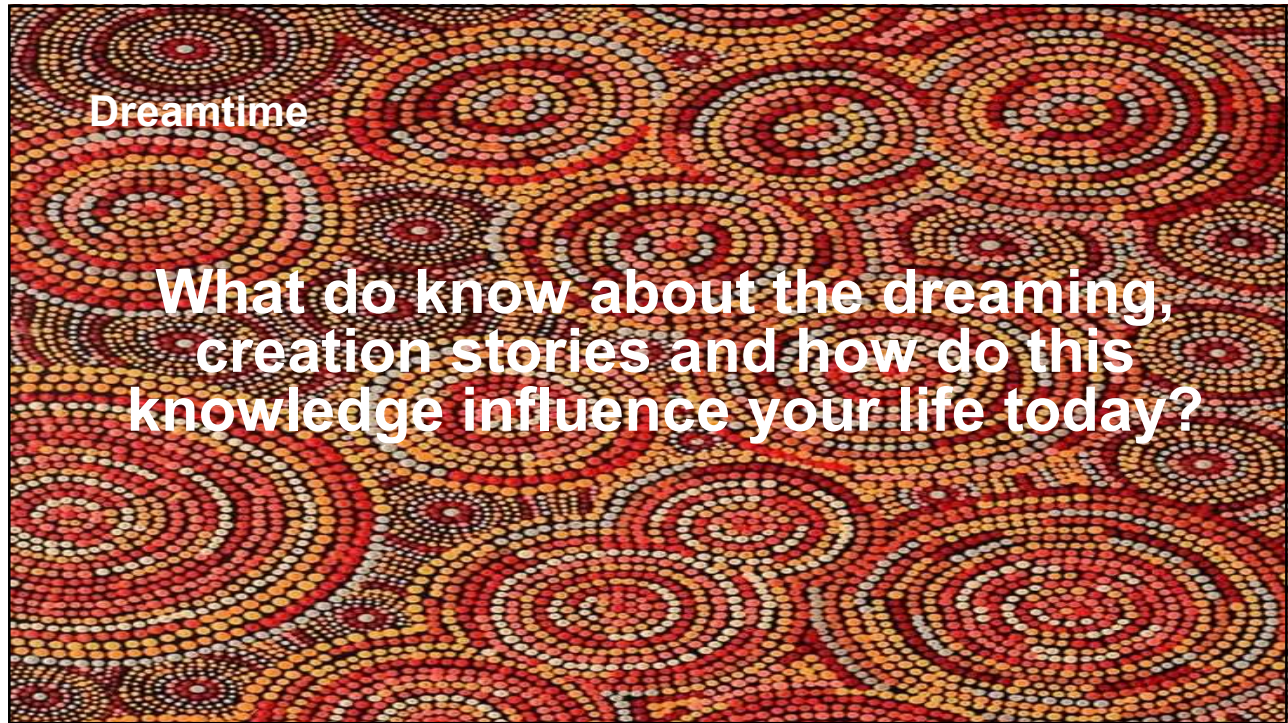
- Our worldview provides us with an ordered sense of reality. Our worldview enables us to make sense of what we do and what we observe in the world and provides us with a sense of certainty and, to some degree at least, predictability. It gives us security because it enables us to interpret what happens in the world in terms of a mental framework that makes sense to us.
- The Dreaming is a worldview. The Dreaming provides an explanation of creation; blueprints for life; rules or laws for living including rules for social relationships, economic activities, religious activities and ceremonies, and art-in short, the rules governing all activities.
- Aboriginal people and culture are grounded in a non-European/Western world view.

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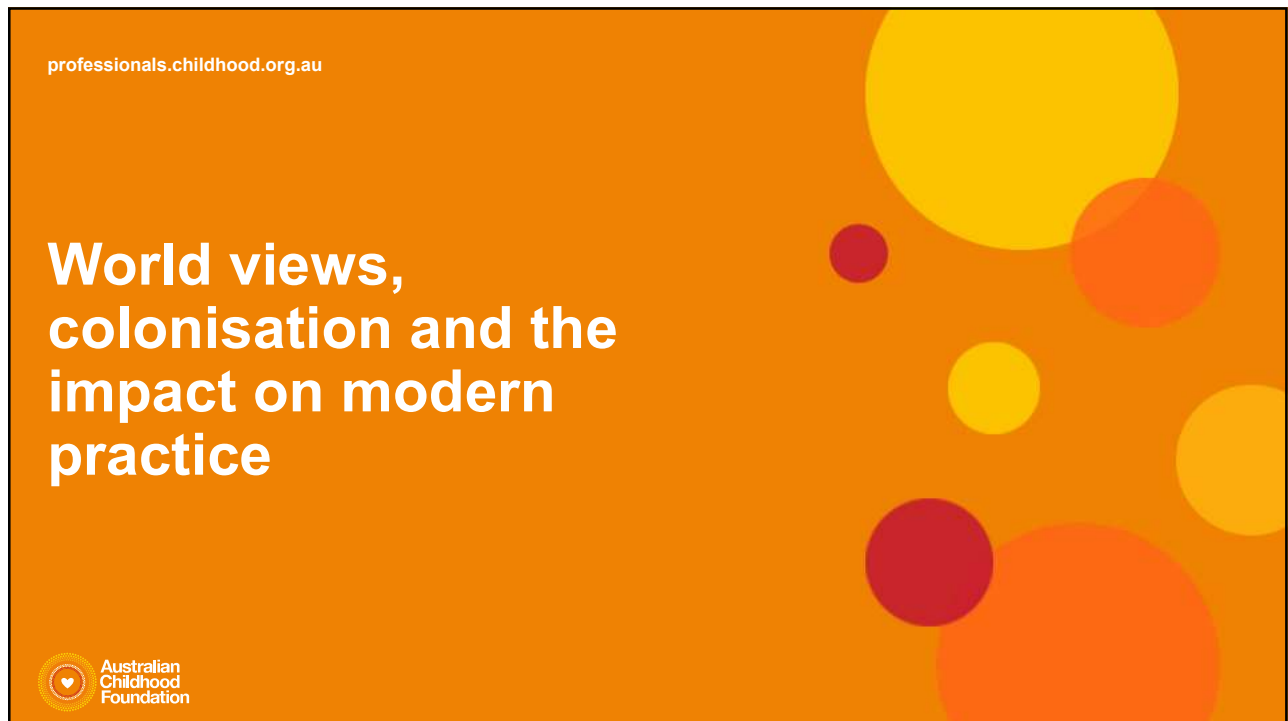
Dream Time



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Knowledges and Worldviews

In the paper *Cultural Responsiveness and School Education (2)*, Thelma Perso wrote:

“The biggest barrier to progress may be the ethno-centric attitude that the ‘Western way’ is the only valid and authentic way of viewing the world. This attitude blinds us to the rich variety of worldviews that are evident in other cultures, especially Indigenous cultures. Breaking through this barrier into ways of working that respect and try to deeply understand other cultures will likely prove fruitful for all cultural groups.”



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The Dreaming World-View

The Dreaming is a different world view.

At its heart are ideas of:

- Continuity - things stay the same
- Relationships are how things get done
- We don't own the land - we care for it - we are custodians
- Whatever we have it is shared with everybody else.
- Holistic and relational reciprocity and respect
- Oral culture.



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Western World View

European/Western world views have at their heart ideas of:

- Progress and change - the world progresses and things improve
- Roles and functions - things get done in society because people have roles and functions.
- Time is linear and measurable
- Ownership
- Counting, measuring, dissecting and analysis
- Written culture

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Collective view of relationship



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Collective view of relationship

- Aboriginal people view individuals within a community holistically. Aboriginal understanding of the individual is in relation to the family, the community, the tribe, the land and the spiritual beings of the lore and dreaming. A person's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cultural needs and well-being are intrinsically linked—they cannot be isolated. The person is not seen as separate, but in relationship to and with others. An Aboriginal perspective views:
 - the person's relationship to their whole family—not just to their parents and siblings
 - the person's relationship to their community—not just their family
 - the person's relationship to the land and the spirit beings which determine lore and meaning.


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What might be some of the consequences of the differences in these two world views for the children and families you are working with?



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Some practical consequences of differing world views

Some of the practical effects of coming from a culture grounded in the dreaming, the land and kinship (rather than a European/Western world view) are:

- A more fluid approach to the start and finish times of meetings
- Meeting are gatherings not functional business meetings
- Consultations and conversations can continue to go on even after 'the decision' seems to have been made - endings are harder to define.
- People can give away goods provided by service providers because someone else they have kinship ties with needed it more than they did.
- Stories and times for stories are important
- People are holistic (not fragmented functions).

Some of the practical effects of coming from a culture grounded in the European/Western world view rather than the dreaming, the land and kinship are:

- A more specific start and finish times for meetings with expectation of being on time
- Meeting are expected to be functional business meetings
- Once decisions are made, meetings end and the expectation is that the decisions made are followed through.
- Goods provided by service providers are provided for a specific reason for the use of that person and should not be given away. If its given away perhaps it wasn't needed or valued?
- Time is important and getting things done on time is important
- People are individuals, even as part of a family they have individually rights and responsibilities

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Epigenetics and trauma storylines

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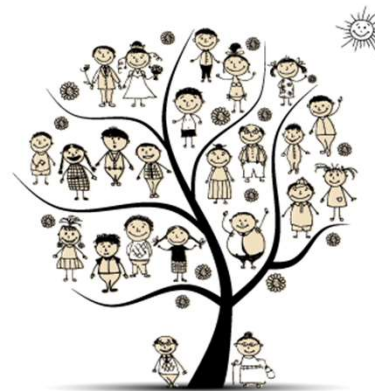
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Intergenerational transmission

- Intergenerational transmission – is thought about and spoken about between grandparents, parents and children
- These might include family habits, skills and ways of being

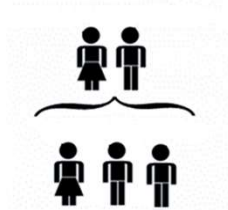


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Defining intergenerational trauma

- The prefix 'inter' is from the Latin meaning **between, or among, together or mutually together**

Intergenerational trauma is **passed down directly from one generation to the next**



- Intergenerational trauma occurs directly through experiencing the trauma or from seeing or hearing about it

Transgenerational transmission

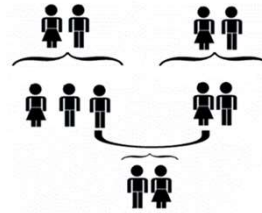
- Sometimes they can be connected with unjust events
- They are often passed down from generation-to-generation without being thought about or assimilated, sometimes through parenting styles, parental mental health, culturally, spiritually



Defining transgenerational trauma

- The prefix 'trans' is from the Latin word meaning **across or crossing, through, beyond or on the other side**

Transgenerational trauma **is transmitted across a number of generations**



“This type of trauma occurs without direct stimulus but is instead transmitted from a parent who has experienced a traumatic event”

(Davidson & Mellor 2001 as cited in Goodman, West & Cirecie, 2008)



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Transgenerational transmission and cultural impacts:

Duran and Duran (1995) suggest:

“...that historical trauma becomes embedded in the cultural memory of a people and is passed on by the same mechanisms by which culture is generally transmitted, and therefore becomes ‘normalised’ within that culture.”

Atkinson, J., Trauma Trails :Recreating Song Lines, 2002



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Impacts of Intergenerational trauma

- Systematic removal of children
- Alcohol
- Loss of culture and identity
- Anger
- Depression, low self-esteem and self-image
- Poverty
- Violence
- Neglect and abuse
- Disconnection



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Epigenetics



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Defining trauma

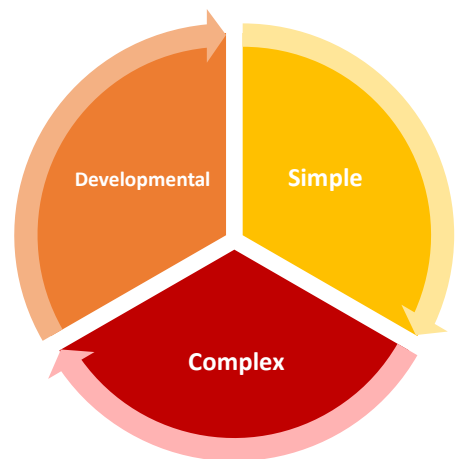


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Defining trauma

Any single, ongoing or cumulative experience which:

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



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Collective trauma

Collective or historical trauma is trauma that happens to large groups of people. It can result from colonialism, war, genocide, slavery, incarceration, terrorism, displacement, poverty, and natural or human-made disasters, among others.

Research indicates, however, that responses to deliberate perpetration of mass trauma differ from those caused by accident or forces of nature, with trauma from deliberate intent creating a deeper sense of dismay and alienation (Sotero, 2006).

According to Sotero (2006), “intentional violence threatens basic assumptions about an orderly, just world and the intrinsic invulnerability and worthiness of the individual.”

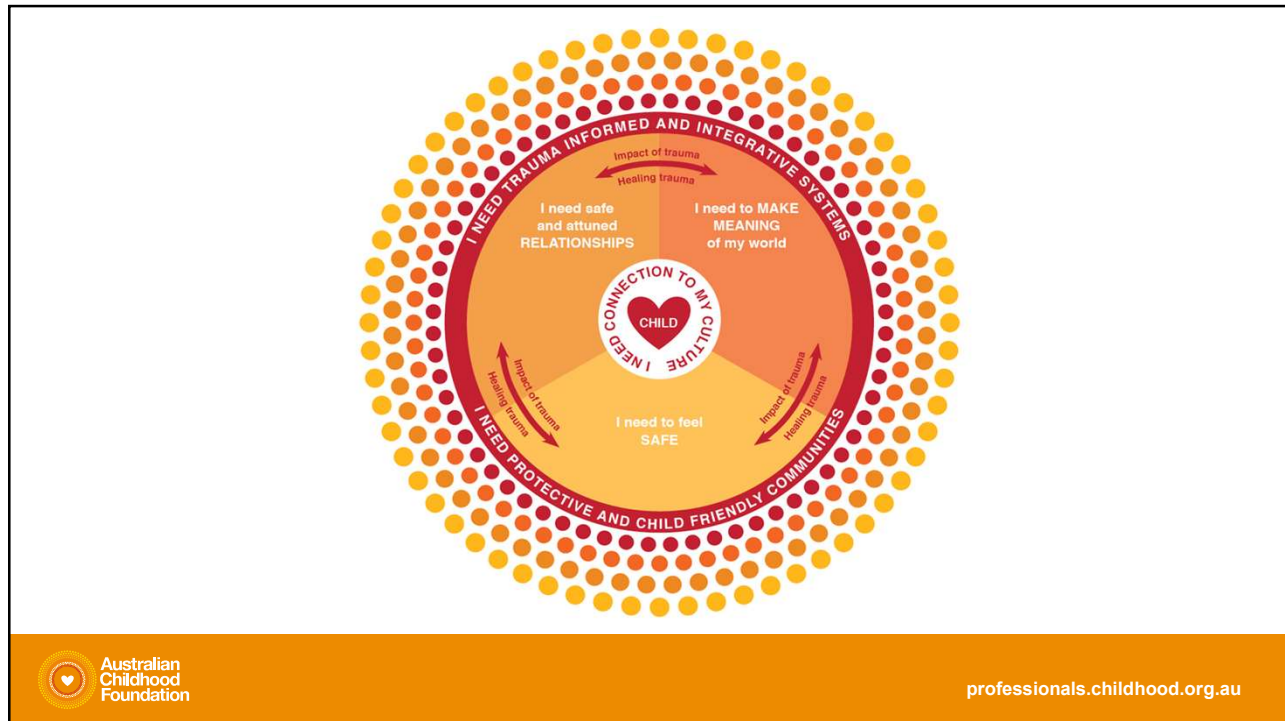
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Conceptual model of trauma responsive practice

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Impact of trauma- neurobiological and developmental

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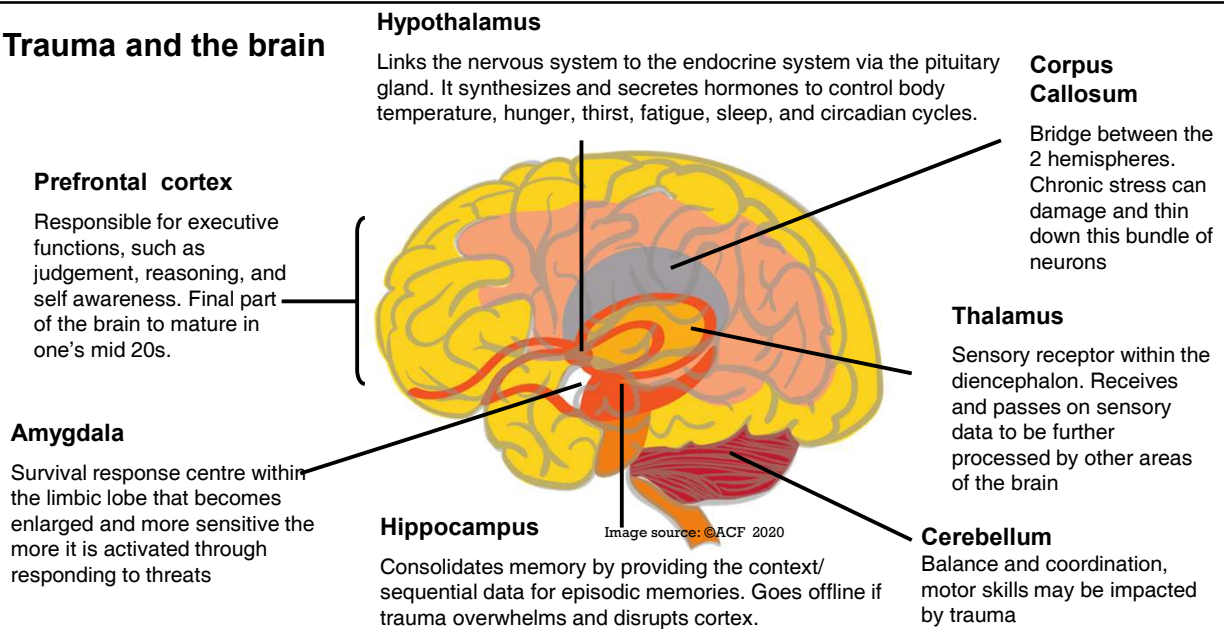
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Trauma impacts



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Trauma and the brain



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Strategies for building healthy brain development

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

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Impact of trauma-cultural

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The brain in culture

Changing the cultural environment shapes the brains of the next generation

The cultural context of our experiences with other people influence the brain's development

Sensory data is interpreted according to the parameters of the surrounding culture long before cognitive understanding of that culture

Culture organises interpersonal relationships and promotes neuronal connections that support a child's adaptability to the physical and emotional environment

Cultures are a means for sharing knowledge and skills of a community or population

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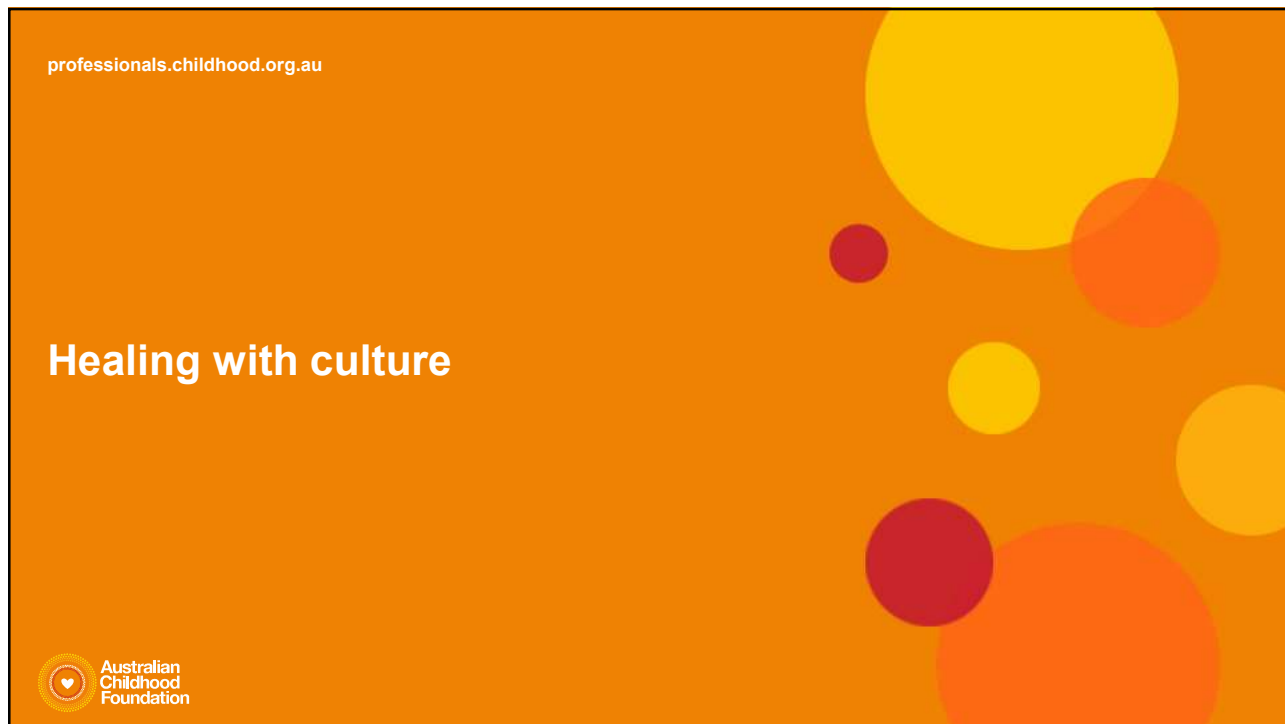
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Healing Intergenerational Trauma

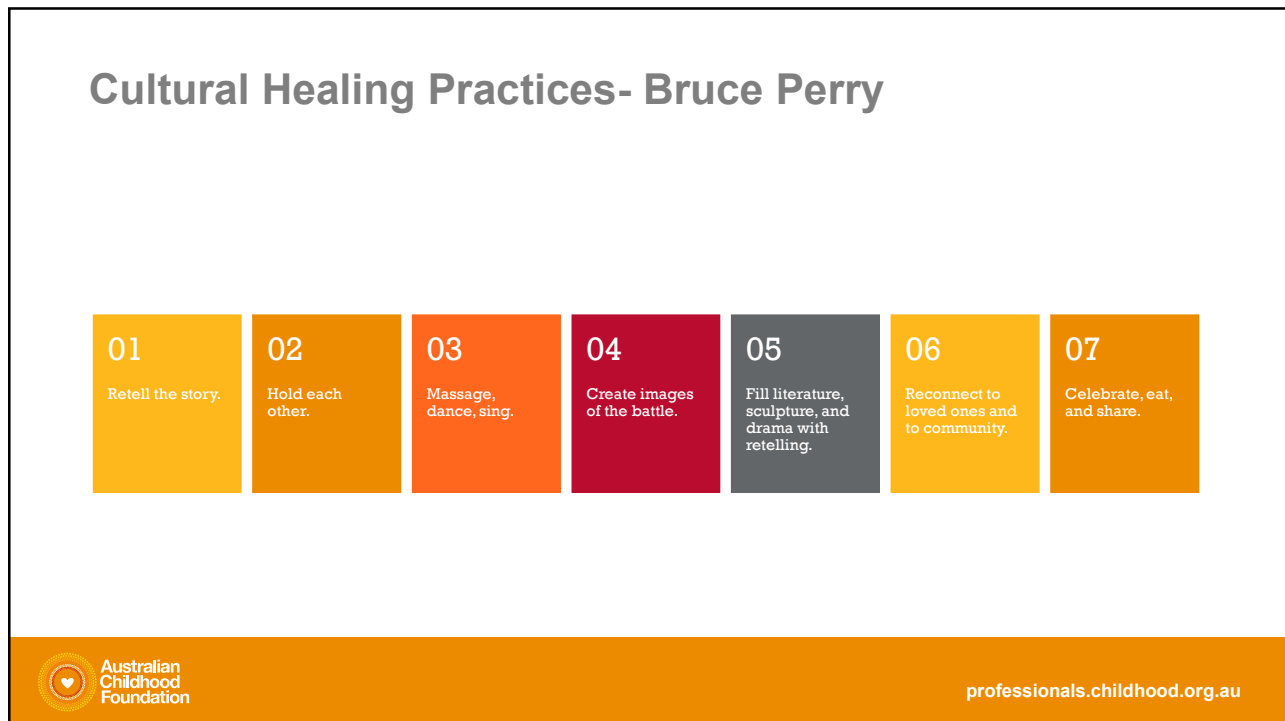
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1e45StCUhk>

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Cultural Healing Practices- Bruce Perry

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“The most remarkable quality of these elements is that together they create a total neurobiological experience influencing cortical, limbic, diencephalic, and brainstem systems (not unlike the pervasive neurobiological impact of trauma).”



Bruce Perry, in Malchiodi, A 2008, 'Creative Interventions and Childhood Trauma', in Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children, The Guilford Press, New York, pp. ix – xi)

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Collective regulation and safety



It is also important to understand the impacts of collective trauma as opposed to individual trauma. Research demonstrates that significant events that impact whole communities can lead to community breakdown. Disconnection from country, culture, family and community have had a devastating impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. As a result many communities prefer to engage in collective healing responses rather than individual treatment interventions.



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Collective regulation and safety

Given that communities often experience distress collectively, community healing initiatives are critical to creating real change. A failure to tailor healing efforts at the community level will see families continue to live in vulnerability without the strength of a healthy community to assist them.



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Healing Centered Engagement-using culture to heal

Dr Shaun Ginwright




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Framework: safety, connection, meaning

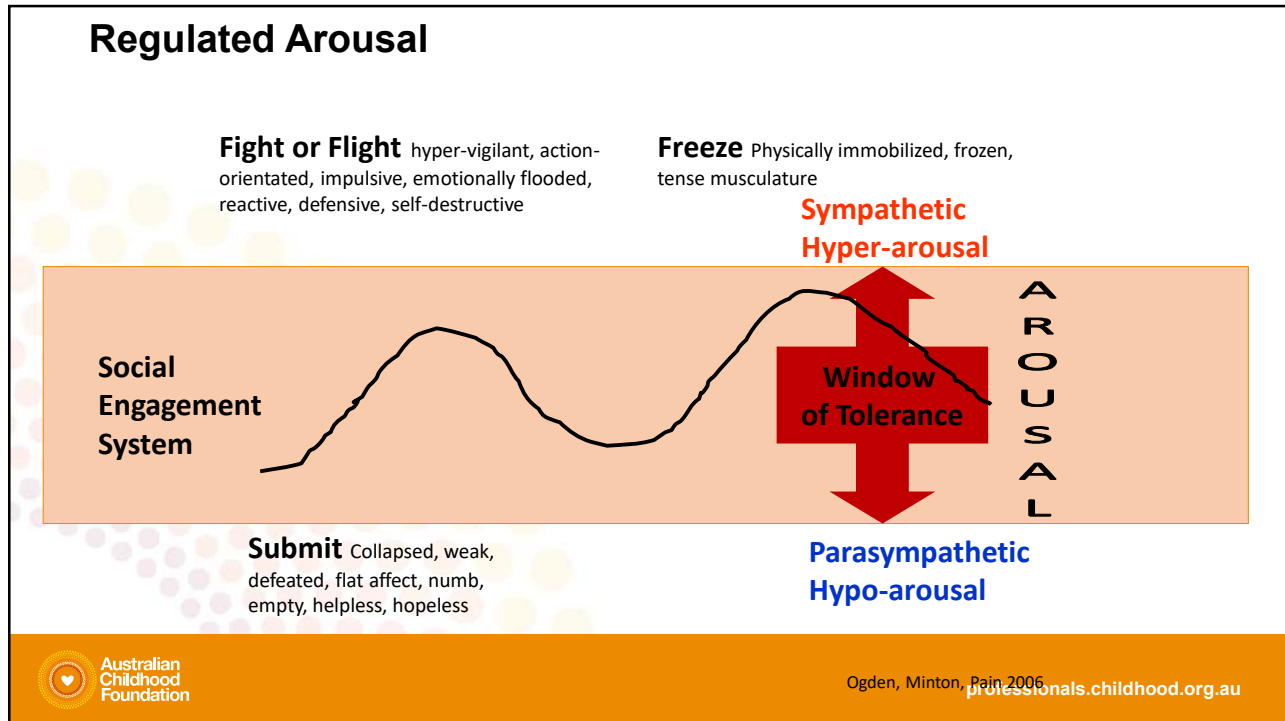


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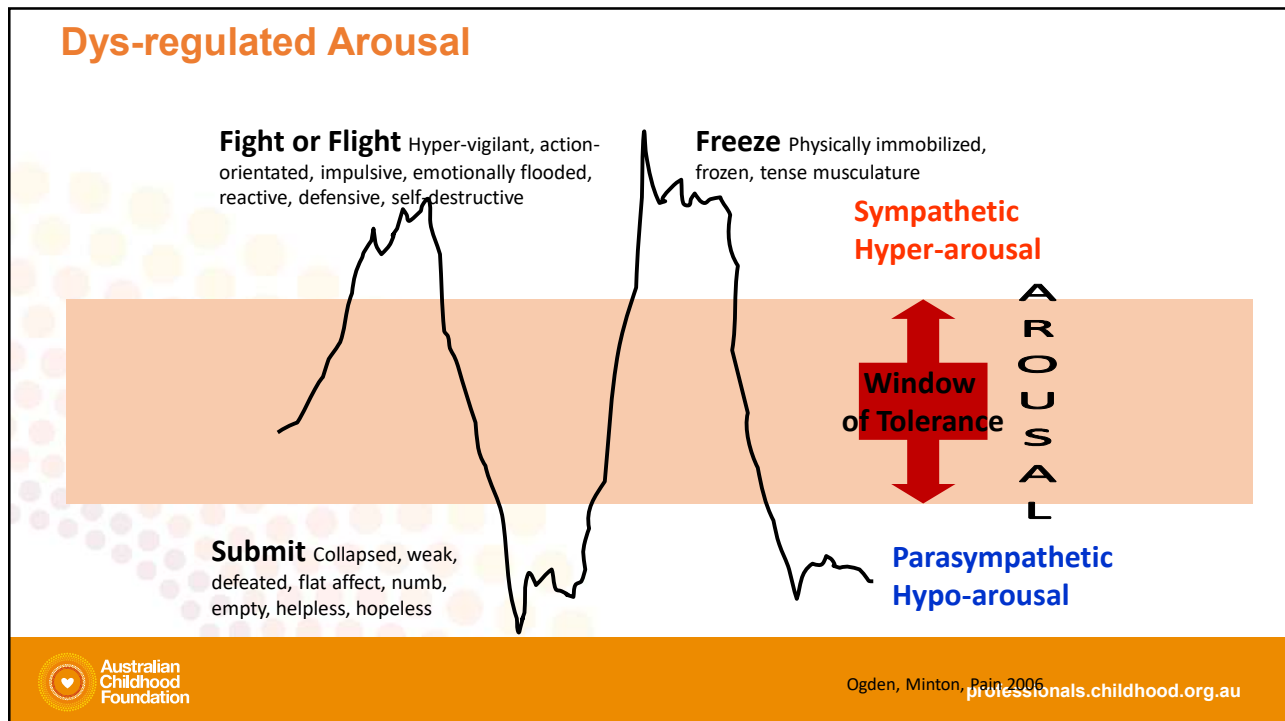


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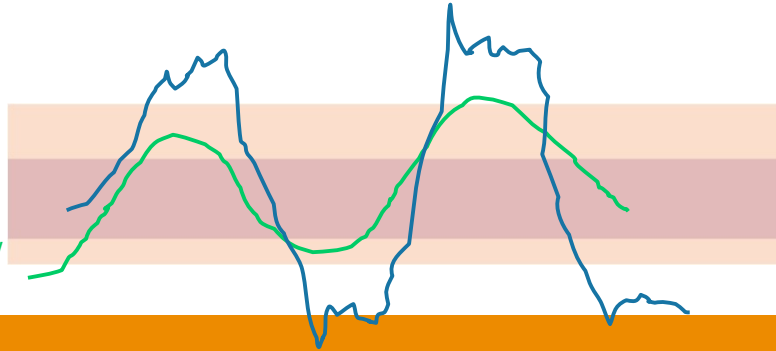
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Interpersonal Regulation

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

Child's movement in her/his window of tolerance

Movement in my window of tolerance

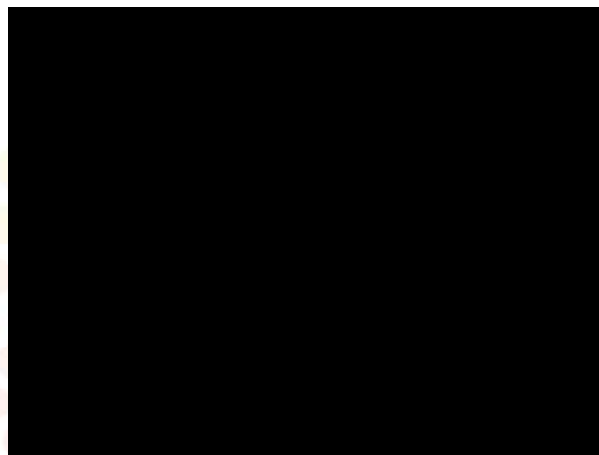


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Co-regulation – What does it look like?



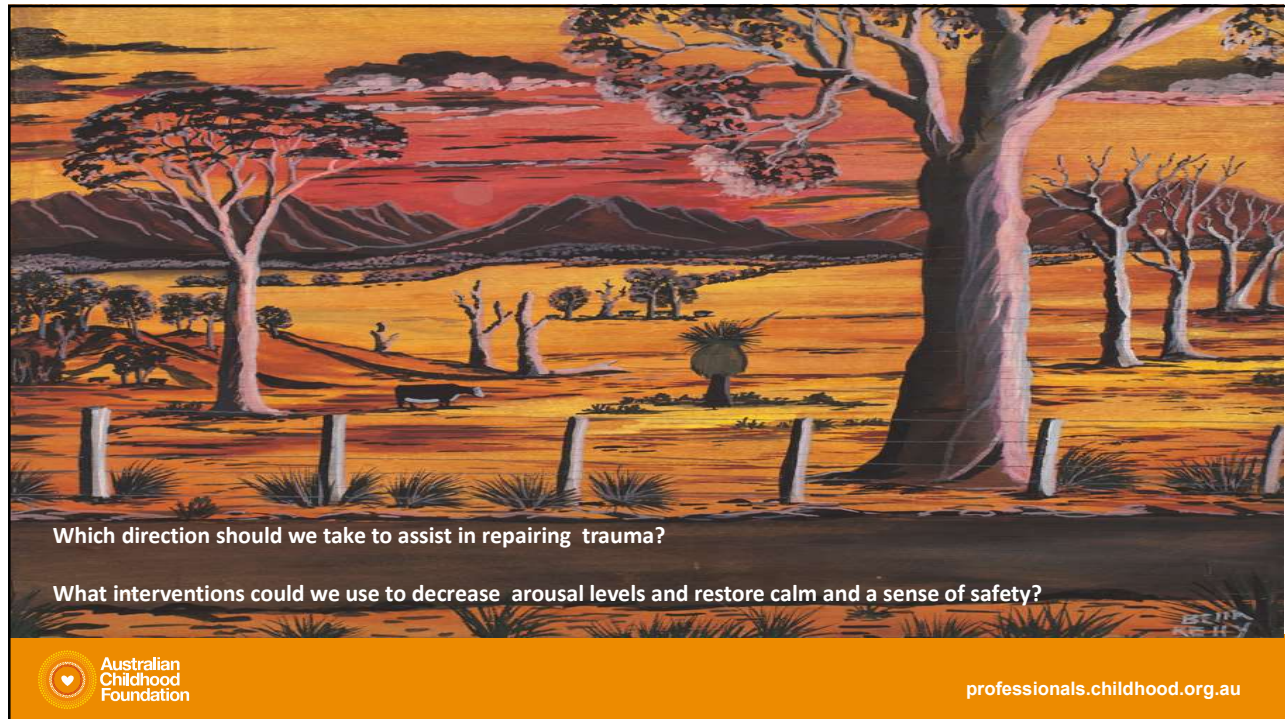
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek2sJDsd8c4>



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How do you promote safety, connection and meaning?

Discuss on your tables:

- When the child is amped up in fight/ flight mode?
- When the child is shut down in life threat mode?
- By communicating signs of safety through our tone, face and body movements, attitudes, understanding them and their needs, and developing relationship.

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Activities to support body awareness and interoception



With music in the background make the following opposite shapes with your body:

- Round - straight
- Sit - Stand
- Small - large
- Freeze - melt
- Push - pull
- Wide - narrow
- Left - right
- Hot - cold
- Fast - slow
- Light - strong
- Under - over
- Yes - no
- In - out
- Tall - short
- Loud - soft
- Up - down
- Happy - sad
- Near - far

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Olfactory



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Song and breath

- [Father singing to baby](#)

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Using Play as Neural Exercise

3 Components this strategy must have:

1. Risk
2. Relational
3. Rupture and Repair

Allows the young person to practice oscillating between states:

- Immobilisation
- Mobilisation
- Social engagement

This is reparative in nature and avoids win/lose power struggles.

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Movement and Rythm



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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



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Hope



Image source: istock

**What are your hopes
for the children,
young people and
families
you work with?**

**What are your hopes
for your
community?**



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Thank you for your participation!



We appreciate your feedback!

Image source: ©ACF 2020



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