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### Supporting Children & Young People to Heal from the Trauma of Family Violence

Anglicare Victoria  
Supporting Trauma Responsive Parenting



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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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### Learning together online

- Participation welcome
- Cameras on
- Mute yourself when not talking
- Hands up or use the chat button if you have questions
- Please use headphones if children are in your training space
- Confidentiality



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**Safety**

*The content of this training can evoke strong emotions and may trigger personal experiences of trauma.*

*Please be mindful of your own wellbeing during this training and if you need support please ask the facilitator.*

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**Learning Outcomes**

- Review a shared platform for understanding family violence and how we construct our understanding of its impact.
- Explore a framework that supports recovery for children, in the context of safety, reconnection, and nurture with their parents and carers.
  - Consider how we support parents to provide relationally reparative contexts in the aftermath of family violence.
  - Practical ideas to support reconnection and recovery.

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**Safe & Secure Intervention Framework**

<b>OUTCOMES</b>	SAFETY	STABILITY	DEVELOPMENT	
<b>DOMAINS</b>	Protect	Strengthen Connections	Enable Meaning Making	Promote Growth & Recovery
<b>FOUNDATIONS</b>	ADDRESS DYNAMICS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT NETWORK ENGAGEMENT & COLLABORATION ENSURE CULTURAL INTEGRATION			

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## Understanding the Impact of Family Violence



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### Children "Witnessing" family violence

Witnessing family violence includes when a child or young person is exposed to:

- Seeing the impact of the violence (bruising, distress, damaged property etc.)
- Witnessing their mother/father lying about how the mothers injuries occurred
- Sensing their mother's fear
- Living with the effects of violence on the health and parenting capacity of their mother
- Having their possessions destroyed. (*The Lookout.org.au*)



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### Perpetrator involving the child

A child or young person may be used by the perpetrator as a way to maintain power and control. Tactics include:

- Using the child as a hostage or as a means of ensuring the mother returns/stays home
- Forcing a child to watch or participate in assaults
- Interrogating or involving the child in spying on mother
- Undermining the mother by encouraging negative opinions of her abilities, character or appearance. (*The Lookout.org.au*)



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### Impacts of family violence on children

**Behaviours:** fight, flight, freeze or submit activation can lead to a range of behaviours.

**Development:** developmental delays

**Relationships:** impacts on attachment to primary caregiver

**Emotions:** heightened fear response and poor attachment to secure base can impact on child's sense of self, their emotions and mental health

**Learning:** heightened fear response impairs a child's ability to learn

**Cognitions:** impaired when in a constant state of fight or flight.

**Physical health:** psycho-somatic (Brain-body) symptoms caused by stress response can lead to physical ailments; potential injury from exposure to violence.

**Cultural identity:** fractures connections to family and culture

1800Respect.org.au



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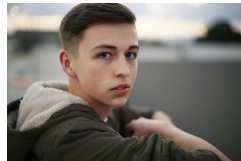
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### Impacts on young people

- Depression and/or anxiety
- Violent outbursts
- Low academic achievement
- Eating disorders
- Absconding from home/school
- Risk taking behaviours
- Substance use.
- Violence in their own intimate relationships.



The Lookout.org.au



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### Impact on parent – child bond

- Diminishes capacity for mother to be present for her child
- Often preoccupied with the perpetrator
- Little capacity to provide nurturing or strengthen attachment with child
- Mother likely to have a diminished sense of self
- Perpetrator often sabotages relationship with the child
- Perpetrating parent, who should be a source of safety is their source of fear



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### Impacts of family violence on parent-child relationship

- Reliance on self protection when safety is not provided
- Reliance on self-soothing when co-regulation is not available
- "irresolvable paradox" – biologically primed for dependence on the parent who is the source of terror (perpetrating parent) or unable to protect (non-offending parent)
- Parent locked into stress response (hyper or hypo-arousal) – unable to tune into and respond to child's cues, states and needs
- Role reversal – instrumental and/or emotional parentification



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### Beliefs a child or young person may hold as a result of family violence

- My needs are not important
- This is what relationships look like
- I have to look after others
- Its my fault
- It's mum's fault – she is crazy (Maternal alienation)
- This doesn't happen to anyone else
- I must be bad
- I can't get close to anyone or I will get hurt



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### Impacts of family violence during pregnancy

- High levels of toxic stress in pregnant mothers
- Elevated cortisol is transmitted across the placenta mimicking stress in the foetus.
- The infant is then born with an altered stress response.
- Low birth, premature labour and miscarriage
- Maternal substance abuse and smoking
- Maternal depression/anxiety/post-natal depression



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### Trauma impacts

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### Trauma and the brain

**Prefrontal cortex**  
Responsible for executive functions, such as judgement, reasoning, and self awareness. PFC development and integration impacted by chronic trauma/stress

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

**Hypothalamus**  
Links the nervous system to the endocrine system via the pituitary gland. It synthesizes and secretes hormones to control body temperature, hunger, thirst, fatigue, sleep, and circadian cycles.

**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

**Thalamus**  
Sensory receptor within the diencephalon. Receives and passes on sensory data to be further processed by other areas of the brain. Chronic trauma can lead to sensory processing difficulties

**Cerebellum**  
Balance and coordination, motor skills may be impacted by trauma

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### Dys-regulated Arousal

**Fight or Flight** hyper-vigilant, action-oriented, impulsive, emotionally flooded, reactive, defensive, self-destructive

**Freeze** Physically immobilized, frozen, tense musculature

**Submit** Collapsed, weak, defeated, flat affect, numb, empty, helpless, hopeless

Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006

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**Impact of trauma on arousal**



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**Creating safety – discussion**

**In groups, discuss:**

- How can we support a child and their parent/carer to experience felt safety?
- How would we know that a child is beginning to feel safe? What might we see?



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**Trauma and loss**

Family violence can lead to experiences of loss on multiple levels for children. These include a loss of:

- sense of safety and connection
- predictability and familiarity
- contact
- Routines
- belongings
- Connection to culture, belonging & identity



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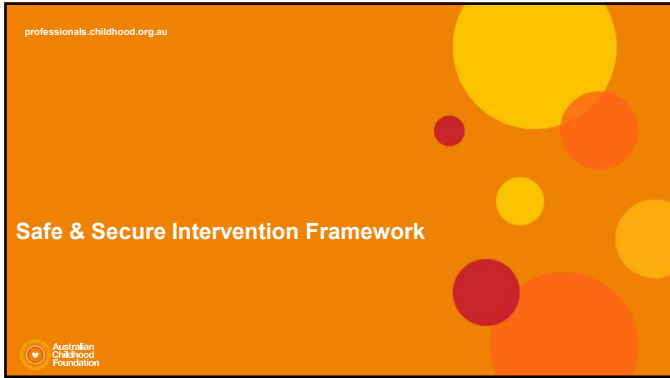
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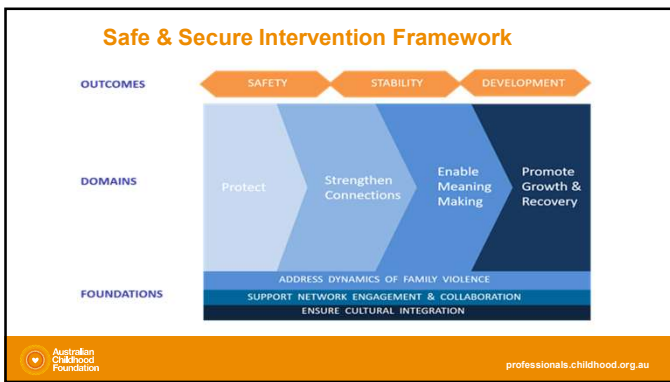
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### Foundations of Intervention

ENSURE CULTURAL INTEGRATION

- Considerations of family's cultural background
- Address needs within the context of culture and community
- Maintain contact and seek to work positively and constructively

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### Foundations of Intervention

ENSURE CULTURAL INTEGRATION



Principles of Healing Practices & Models (SNAICC 2010)

- Safe Space – Physical and Relational
- Ownership
- Holistic and Relationship Worldview
- Flexible
- Imparting cultural knowledge and pride
- Strength based approaches – ‘prevailing strengths’
- Address Causes

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### Foundations of Intervention

SUPPORT NETWORK ENGAGEMENT & COLLABORATION



- Children and young people benefit from a collaborative approach by agencies
- Shared understanding of the issues
- Build a platform for communication and coordination of responses
- Mediated and run through structures such as care teams



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### Foundations of Intervention

ADDRESS DYNAMICS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE




- Specific underlying dynamics that lead men to engage in violence
- Men’s psychological, attitudinal, social and cultural issues need to be addressed
- Strategies which hold men accountable for their violent behaviour

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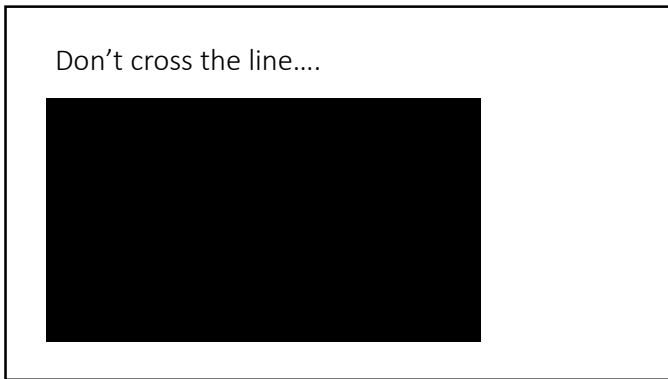
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### Domains of Intervention

- The domains of intervention specifically relate to work that is undertaken directly with children, their mothers and important adults in their network.
- The domains are:
  - Protect child and create safety
  - Strengthen the relational connections around the child
  - Enable meaning making
  - Promote growth and recovery



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### Domains of Intervention

#### Protect Child and Create Safety

- Children's recovery starts with being afforded safety, and **feeling safety** reverberating through them.
- Safety is a shared experience between children and their mothers.



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### Neuroception

- "The removal of threat is not the same as the presence of safety" (Porges, 2014)
- We need to help children who have experienced trauma detect more features of safety in their environment.



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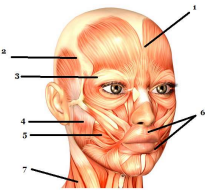
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**Detecting safety – A face, voice, heart connection**

- Middle ear muscles
- Facial muscles
- Muscles of mastication
- Laryngeal and pharyngeal muscles
- Head turning muscles
- Eyelids
- Heart rate



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**Domains of Intervention**  
**Protect Child and Create Safety**

Safety for children is experienced in:

- The predictability of their routines
- The felt experience of their physical environment
- Attuned relationships with their mothers and other important adults
- No longer fearing that the violence will return
- Having their needs understood and responded to

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**Domains of Intervention**  
**Strengthen Connections**

- Relationships that are committed, nurturing, acknowledging and responsive
- Strengthen the connection between the child and important carers

**Some helpful guiding frameworks & models:**

Theraplay ©	Circle of Security ©
Dan Hughes – PACE; Parenting Systems	Bringing up Great Kids
Dan Hughes – DDP ©	Mothering from the Inside Out
Coherent Narrative	Lighthouse Parenting ©

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**P.A.C.E – Playful, Accepting, Curious, Empathic**



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**Domains of Intervention  
Strengthen Connections**

**Relationships that support recovery and healing in children:**

- Are tuned into children's needs
- Show children that they are understood
- Offer comfort and resources for co-regulating children's internal arousal system
- Give children a sense of being understood
- Define violence and threats of violence as unacceptable

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**Developing relationships (Kim Golding 2007)**

- Repeated experiences of safe and predictable relationships
- REPAIR after ruptures
- Caregiver can contain big emotions
- Caregiver understands impacts of trauma
- Opportunities for social development (community, school, friendships)
- Ongoing connection to biological family (non offending family members)



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### Domains of Intervention Enable Meaning Making

- Multiple opportunities, in collaboration with safe adults
- Development of stories between children and safe adults
- Learning how the body responds to sensations of stress & arousal
- Supporting children to access strengths within their culture or beliefs
- Helping children create & hold onto meanings that incorporate safety and hope

If we share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive.  
-Brene' Brown

www.CasportTreatmentCenter.com

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### "My family" – drawings from therapy



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### Domains of Intervention Promote Growth and Recovery

- Support traumatised children to address developmental needs and delays
- Includes referral to specialist services
- Support children to consolidate, translate and generalise the progress they are making

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**Domains of Intervention**  
Promote Growth and Recovery

Incorporate strategies that focus on:

- Facilitating the achievement of developmental milestones
- Consistent and stable patterns of soothing and regulation
- Cognitively and emotionally re-shaping early relational patterns
- Reinforcing children's emerging sense of self

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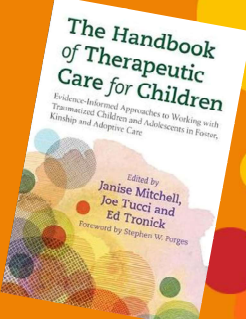
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**A valuable resource**

Includes chapters from:

- Martin Teicher
- Ed Tronick
- Allan Schore
- Bruce Perry
- Dan Hughes & Jon Baylin
- Kim Golding
- Cathy Malchiodi
- Joe Tucci
- Janise Mitchell
- Glenda Kickett
- Noel Macnamara



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**Resource List**

- Brown, Brene (2012) Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead.
- Coffey, D (2009) Parenting After Violence: A guide for practitioners. Institute for Safe Families. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Hughes, D and Baylin, J (2012) 'Brain Based Parenting- The neuroscience of caregiving for a healthy attachment'.
- Hughes, D (2006) Building the Bonds of Attachment: Awakening Love in Deeply Traumatized Children
- Odgen, P (2006) Trauma and the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy. WW Norton and Co: US
- Porges, S (2014) The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-regulation. WW Noton and Co: US
- Siegel, D (2007) The Mindful Brain. WW Norton and Co: US
- Siegel, D & Payne Bryson, T (2011) The whole-brain child. Scribe Publications: Australia

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**Facilitator:**

**Jennifer Knoll**  
Senior Advisor  
Professional Education Services

[jknoll@childhood.org.au](mailto:jknoll@childhood.org.au)



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