

Understanding and responding to stress and trauma in the early years

Lake Tyers Early Learning Centre and Kindergarten

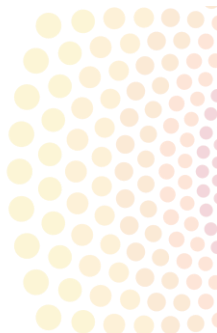


The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians and owners of this land and waters. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and to the children who are their leaders of tomorrow. We acknowledge their history and living culture and the many thousands of years in which they have raised their children to be safe and strong.



Introductions

- Who are you?
- What is your role?
- How are you doing?





Understanding vicarious trauma



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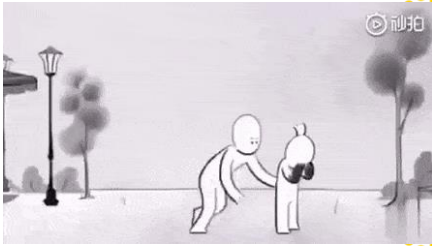
Impacts of working with trauma

Personal:

- Experiencing current stressful life circumstances
- Blurring the lines between home and work
- Forgetting to take time out or undertaking activities that are pleasurable, relaxing and fun



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Signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma

Symptoms that may present:

- Fatigue
- Impaired immune system
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Anxiety
- Hyper vigilance/control issues
- Memory issues
- Increased sick days, late to work



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Impacts of working with trauma

Professional:

- Hearing stories of children's and family's trauma and abuse
- Lack of experience, training and understanding of children who have experience trauma
- Not accessing supervision



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Behaviours we might see

Signs that may present:

Decreased

- communication with colleagues
- ability to accept change or adapt
- ability to try new things/explore
- self esteem
- attendance in staff meetings, PD, other functions



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Supporting each other

- Recognise signs and symptoms in others
- Provide education about vicarious trauma
- Support and value each other
- Ensure the workplace culture acknowledges and accepts vicarious trauma as a real condition
- Encourage taking time out and taking leave



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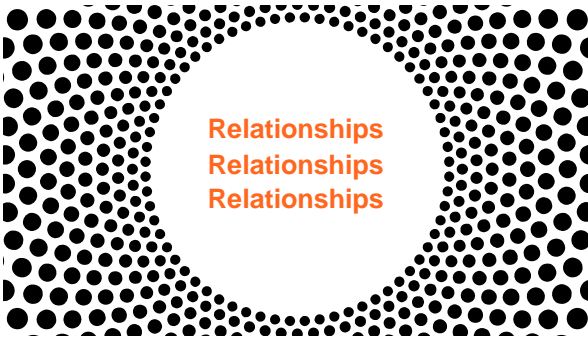
What do you do to look after yourself



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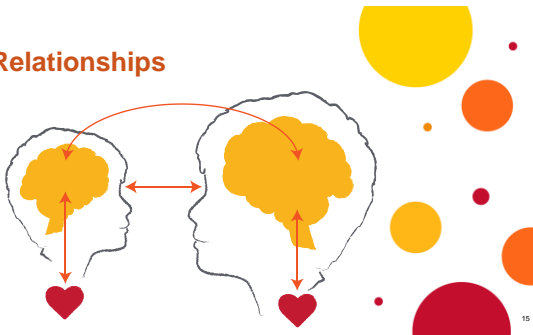
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Prescription (My medicine/activity)	Dose (How long?)	Frequency				
		Daily	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Yearly
Call or visit a friend or family						
Practice breathing / muscle relaxation						
Walk, play sport or exercise						
Have a bath						
Read a book or magazine						
Have one-to-one time with your partner						
Watch a movie						
Listen or dance to music						
Write, paint or play an instrument						
Cook your favourite meal						
Go out for dinner						
Do some gardening						
See a counsellor						
Go away for a weekend						
Go on holiday						



Relationships
Relationships
Relationships

Relationships



Trauma and relationships

As we know a secure relationship is central to the development of:



- a positive sense of self
- empathic and sensitive interaction
- adaptive and flexible emotional regulation skill.

How are you going to.....

- Build relationships?
- Be playful?
- Be empathic?
- Engage?
- Be curious?
- Be accepting?





"It's connection not control that cultivates cooperation, trust, love, resilience and independence. Connection is at the heart of our relationship."
Kerry Spina

Positive Parenting Connection

Engagement



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Defining Trauma

Trauma and me

- *Where has trauma touched my life?*
- *What does it mean for me, to be working with children affected by relational trauma?*



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Developmental trauma

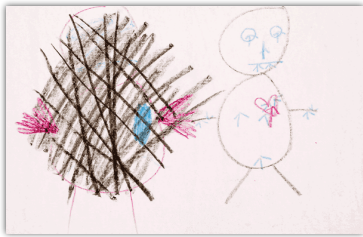
- The better integrated the different parts of the brain are the more adaptive we can be to our environment
- Developmental trauma is dis-integrative, disconnecting, and disruptive to both brain and body



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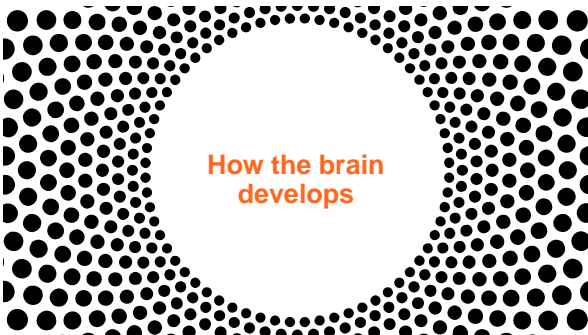
Defining trauma?

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

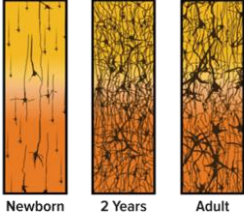


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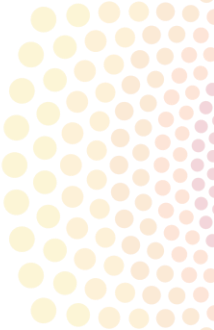
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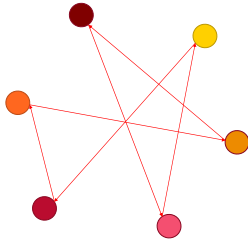
Neuronal connection



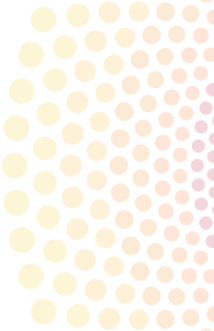
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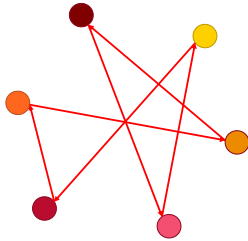
Traumatised brain



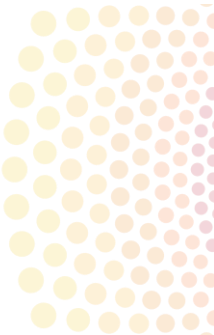
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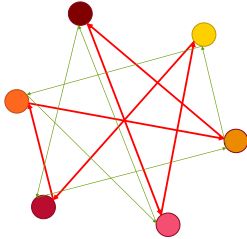
Traumatised brain



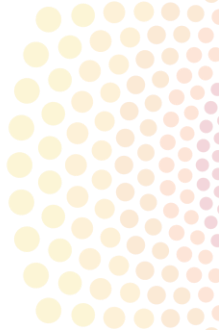
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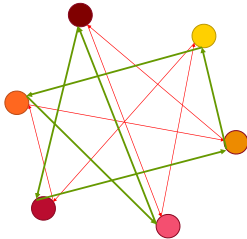
Nurtured brain



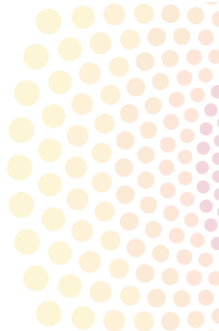
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Healing brain



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Trauma and the Brain



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. (Schoe, 2003)
- A secure attachment relationship facilitates right brain development and promotes efficient affect regulation.



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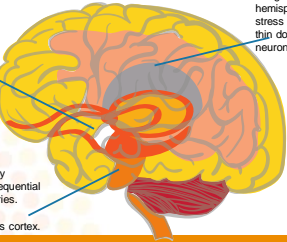
Where trauma affects the brain

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.



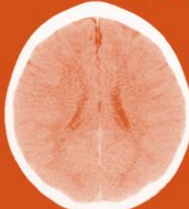
Corpus Callosum

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

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3 Year Old Children



Normal



Extreme Neglect

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Internal working model of traumatised child



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Living in survival mode



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Polyvagal theory and protective responses

Behavioural Functions

Body Functions

by Stephen Porges



Social Engagement
Soothing and calming
Indicates safety

- Lowers or raises vocalisation pitch
- Regulates middle ear muscles to perceive human voice
- Changes facial expressivity
- Head turning
- Tears and eyelids
- Slows or speeds heart rate



Mobilisation
Fight or Flight
Active Freeze
Moderate or extreme danger

- Hyper arousal**
- Increases heart rate
 - Sweat increases
 - Inhibits gastrointestinal function
 - Narrowing blood vessels - to slow blood flow to extremities
 - Release of adrenaline



Immobilisation
Collapse or submission
Death feigning
Increased pain threshold
Conserves metabolic resources
Life threatening situations

- Hypo - arousal**
- Slows heart rate
 - Constricts bronchi
 - Stimulates gastrointestinal function



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The 'Still Face' experiment

Ed Tronick



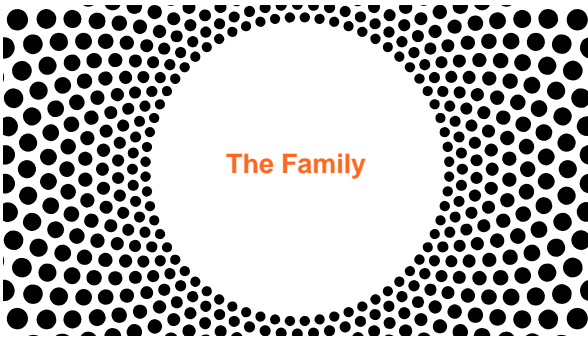
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Behaviour is a story



Recognising Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours





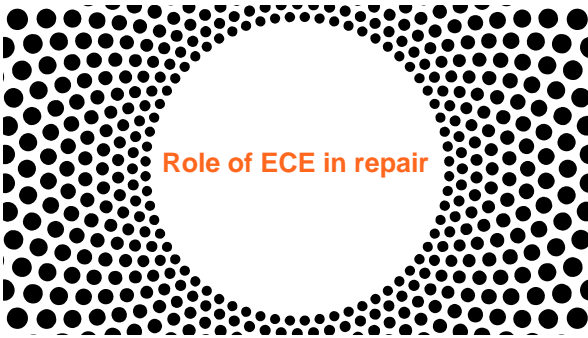
The Family

The paradox of the family

We look to it for
nurture and care



It is the institution in society where most violence occurs



Neuroplasticity



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



Following the child's lead



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Building predictability



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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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Transitions

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?

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



What might you change to ensure the following in your work with children:

- Predictability
- Consistency
- Safe transitions
- Engagement

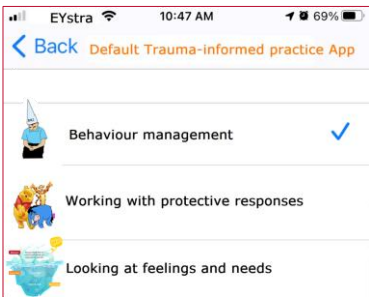






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Working with protective responses

Fight or Flight
Hyper-vigilant, action-orientated, impulsive, reactive, self-destructive

Mobilisation

Social Engagement

Immobilisation

Submit
Collapsed, weak, deflated, flat affect, numb, empty, helpless, hopeless

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Adapted from Ogden, Minton, Pain 2008 55

Working with protective responses

1. Mobilisation

- Rhythm
- Containing
- Grounding

2. Immobilisation

- Orientation to space
- Orientation to senses
- Engaging the spine

3. Social Engagement

- Prosody
- Breathing

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Working with MOBILISED responses

Fight



What it might look like

- Angry, aggressive, irritable
- Confrontational, controlling, shouting
- Blaming others, pushing others away, argumentative

Working with MOBILISED responses
Fight



Supportive responses

- 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



Working with MOBILISED responses
Flight



What it might look like

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

Working with MOBILISED responses
Flight



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



Working with 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

Working with MOBILISED responses
Freeze



Supportive responses

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





Working with IMMOBILISED responses
Submit



What it might look like

- Low, sad, flat mood
- Quiet, compliant
- Alone, withdrawn



Working with IMMOBILISED responses
Submit



Supportive responses

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



Maintaining Social Engagement



What it might look like

- Engaged in activities
- Chatty, talks to adults and peers
- Interacts with peers in play

Maintaining Social Engagement



Supportive responses

- Prosody
- Using the sing-song, story-telling voice
- Using breathing techniques





Smell the flower



Blow the pinwheel

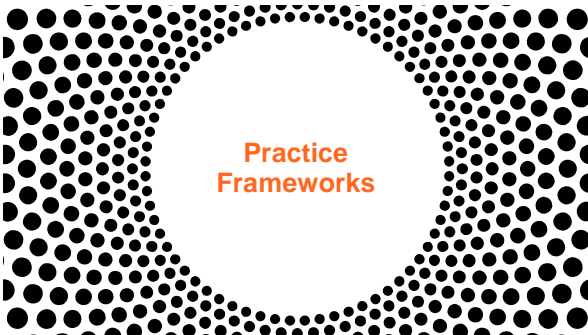


Social engagement:

How does their window of tolerance look for each of your traumatised children?

What can you do to widen their window of tolerance?





Undertake a sensory audit



Implications for our learning environments



Implications for our learning environments



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Implications for our learning environments



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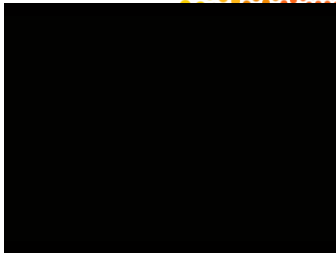
chf@od.org.au

Models of trauma informed practice

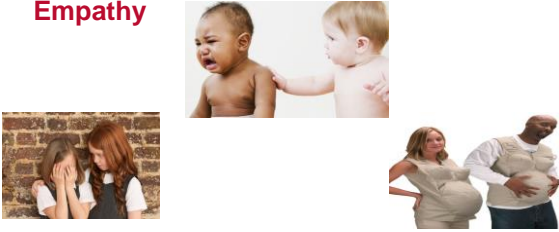
- Playful
- Accepting
- Curious
- Empathic

P.A.C.E
(Dan Hughes)

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Empathy

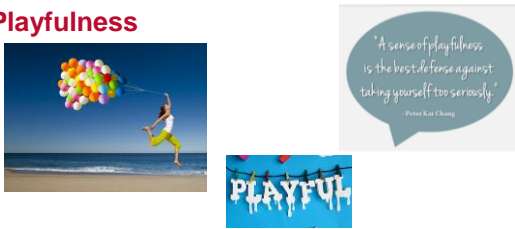


"I'm sorry that happened" "that must be really hard", "that must feel really bad".

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Playfulness



"I really prefer it when you call me by my name rather than swear at me!"

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Acceptance



"Thanks for telling me about what happened. I feel sad that you've had such a difficult time."

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Curiosity



"I wonder if you might be feeling sad because mum left you today?
Do you think that might be what's going on?"

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Self Reflection



What could get in the way of us using PACE?

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Models of trauma informed practice

Needs

- Unconditional positive regard
- Re-frame child's perceptions
- Time in & repair
- Use words for child's experience
- Reflect back child's feelings
- Enjoy play together



N.U.R.T.U.R.E

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Challenging and reconstructing the child's model of relationships



Being PACEful with ourselves

Playfulness

- "We take our work seriously, not ourselves!"
- Find lightness, despite the dark... look for hope and moments of joy



Acceptance

- Of the person, not necessarily their actions
- With compassion and understanding, knowing they are probably doing the best they know how
- What is possible and what is not possible (be the calm in the chaos)

Curiosity

- Rather than assuming, be open and ask
- "I wonder..." "How are you travelling?"



Empathy

- Be understanding and compassionate

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



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Calming and regulation

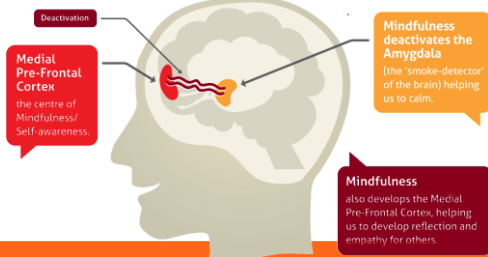
- Traumatized children find it difficult to regulate their own feelings of stress/distress.
- The best way to help the extremely dysregulated child is to remain calm and regulated yourself.



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Mindfulness



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Working with traumatised children

Relationships:

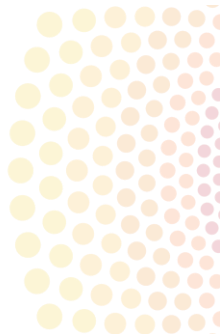
- Respect and empathy
- Connection and sense of belonging
- Personal competence



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Outcomes for children

- Develop connection and belonging
- Experience trust and respect
- Develop a sense of personal competence



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Safe harbour

'Be my anchor when I'm all at sea'
 PREDICTABLE PERSON

'Ferry me to calmer waters'
 SING-SONG VOICE
 RHYTHMIC, REPETITIVE ACTIVITY
 SENSORY INPUT



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Story time



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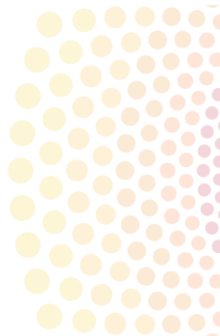
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