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Practical Strategies for Trauma Responsive Group Facilitation:

Linking Day 1 with Day 2

ASeTTS 3rd November 2021




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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 outcomes



- Learn and practice some key skills for group facilitation that are linked to 'trauma responsive principles' of session 1
- Learn and practice some key skills for responding to clients who present with 'challenging behaviours' or emotional dysregulation in a group space
- Learn about the life cycle of a group
- Learn about and practice strategies to support group members to engage and feel safe




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Recap: Trauma responsive practice in group work is...


- Understand **trauma and its impacts** (individual and collective impacts)
- Promote **safety and stability** for group members
- Ensure we practice **cultural humility** as group facilitators
- Provide opportunities for group members to build **relationships** and social connections
- Provide opportunities for group members to **have a voice** in decision making
- Belief in **hope based recovery**
- Provide opportunities for group members to connect with their own **Power and Strength**
- Worker **Self care**

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RECOVERY GOALS: ASeTTS Model of Recovery

- To restore safety and enhance control and reduce the disabling effects of fear and anxiety
- To restore attachment and connections to other human beings and a sense of belonging
- To restore meaning, identity and justice
- To restore dignity and value and reduce shame and guilt

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'Collective Trauma'

A terrible event, experienced by an entire society, that lives on in 'collective memory':

- The memory is reproduced and relived by the collective
- The memory is shared and reconstructed in order to make meaning from it

Hirschberger G (2018)

'Collective Healing' through groups

Healing together allows people to find meaning in their experience together. Working collectively to support shared needs has been shown to reduce the impact of trauma.

"Working together to help one another increased altruism, social support, cohesion, and positive social beliefs and values."

<https://www.verywellmind.com/effects-of-collective-trauma-5071346>

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Traditional Cultural Healing Practices – Judy Atkinson

Trauma responsive practices have always been part of traditional healing practices in First Nations communities:

- Art
- Music
- Dance
- Theatre
- Body work
- Nature Discovery

Judy talks about growing ‘communities of care’ within First Nations communities.



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Trauma responsive practice with groups Judith Herman

Outcomes of Trauma responsive groups

- Relieves shame
- Reduces isolation
- Builds reconnection
- Promotes mastery
- Promotes empowerment
- Modelling of healthy relationships
- Safe space for remembrance and mourning
- Here and now – set in the present tense



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Supporting the Social Engagement System

The social engagement system is 'on' or engaged when we have a 'neuroception' of safety:

- Involves facial expression, vocalisation (prosody) and listening
- Regulated or calm behavioural states
- Able to connect to self and be 'in the body'
- Able to connect with others and to be in the present moment
- Able to communicate verbally with others in a clear way



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Supporting Social Engagement

Strategies to help clients regulate and return to a neuroception of safety:

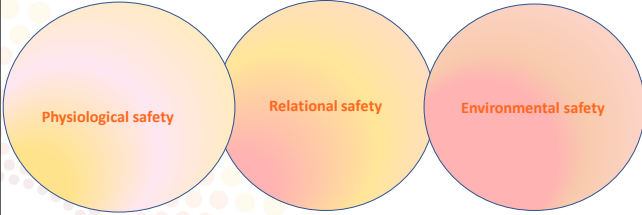
- **Prosody** – gentle calm voice (*brainstem/limbic*)
- **Facial expressions** – (*vagus nerve/ANS*)
- **Body language** – (*vagus nerve/ANS/right brain*)
- **Offer a glass of water**, cup of tea (*brainstem*)
- **Breathing** breath work (*brainstem, limbic*)




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Strategies to promote a neuroception of Safety



Physiological safety Relational safety Environmental safety



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Supporting the Social Engagement System

Be aware of our facilitation and leadership style.
Why?

Structure our group session with purpose
Why?

How?
 Use PACE...

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PACE – Togetherness

- ‘Communication’ is more than talking
- The deepest meanings are conveyed nonverbally
- Right brain to right brain ‘I feel you and you feel me, we get each other on an emotional level’
- Maintains the social engagement system – allowing us to stay open to each other
- Creates safety and connection, mutual joy and feelings of satisfaction and competence with self, and each other.
- Helps children feel safe thinking about their story.

Dan Hughes

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Working with people who show 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

- Be curious with the person about the freeze state-are there any 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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Working with people who show MOBILISED responses - Flight

What it might look like

- Anxious, silly, manic
- Running away, hiding, disruptive
- Difficulty connecting with others, using silly voices, distracting

Supportive responses

- Be kind and patient
- Offer me an easy task/chose 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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Working with people who show MOBILISED responses - Fight

What it might look like

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

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, jumping



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Reflective questions: Working with Difficult Behaviour in Groups

Reflection questions:

- 1) What was the behaviour that I found challenging?
- 2) What led up to the behaviour?
- 3) How did this experience make me feel?
- 4) What did I do/how did I respond?
- 5) What would I like to do differently next time?


Doel, 2005

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Working with people who show immobilised responses



What it might look like

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

Supportive responses

- Orienting to the space
- Orienting the senses
- Alignment-engaging the spine

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Orienting to the space

- **Point to something** green/plastic/soft.....
- **Encourage the person to look up and out** rather than down- hang an interesting object at height in the space
- **Name out loud**, objects in the room
- Open a window
- Move outside if you're inside and inside if you're outside
- Take shoes off and **feel feet on the floor**




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Working with Immobilisation – Orienting the senses

- Notice and name 4 things you can see
 - 3 things you can **hear**
 - 2 things you can **feel/touch**
 - 1 thing you can **smell**
- Blinking hard/squeezing toes
 - Eat a peppermint/sour lolly/crunchy food
 - Hug a pillow/toy
 - Listen to singing bowl
 - Cool drink/suck ice



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Working with Immobilisation – Engaging the spine


- When the spine is aligned there is no collapse
- Stretch gently
- Tick tock like a clock until you find your centre
- Zip yourself up
- Walk with a book balanced on your head
- Grow yourself from a seed to a tree



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Tuckman's Model for Understanding Stages of Group Development



[HD] Pixar - For The Birds | Original Movie from Pixar
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nY1t1ndrjg>

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What do members of the FASSTT network have to say?

"It's incredibly rewarding when we witness young people taking what they have learnt back to their own families and communities. The group work gives them an opportunity to create some relationships that may have been missing in their lives. We are constantly seeing strong connections form and older kids taking on mentoring roles for the younger ones."

– Youth Specialist Worker, ASeTTS

"When you come here, being part of this group, you feel you are part of a family, you are with people you know. You trust, you feel comfortable; you share stories, relax and enjoy. I feel that everyone here is my sister."

– FICT Participant

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What do members of the FASSTT network have to say?

"I am more secure after coming to the group. Before I was vulnerable. The group has become part of my family because I had no support from family when I came. Now I have support to continue parenting in this country."

– Safe and Secure Parenting Group participant

"The men's group was so important to me, because it is the only time I can laugh."

– Wangarra Men's Group participant



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Staying regulated during our client work

• **IN THE MOMENT:**

- Physical check in (regulate our body systems)
- Mental check in (keeping our cortex online)



• **AFTER THE MOMENT:**

- Debrief (social engagement system!)
- Physically - regulate body systems (movement helps)



• **BEFORE THE MOMENT** (and all the time)

- Effective self care (nourish to flourish)
- Organisational culture (collective actions)



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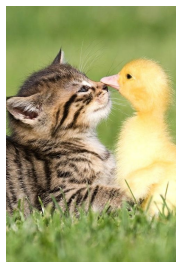
Being **PACE**ful with ourselves

Be playful – sing, be silly, dance, hug yourself, laugh.

Be accepting – I am doing my best. Sometimes that doesn't feel like enough, but I know I am enough.

Be curious – what might be going on for me right now?

Be empathic –it's ok that I am finding it hard, this is hard.



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Remember to track your own nervous system – Where are you in your 'window' or on your 'ladder'?

In relationships (even in groups), our ability to regulate our window of tolerance will affect another person's ability to regulate their own window of tolerance

Child's movement in her/his window

Movement in my window

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Relationships of safety and trust are protective

Safety is fundamental

Connection is fundamental

Children, young people and adults alike need to co-regulate within safe relationships

Our sense of self and capacity to self-regulate big emotions (distress, worry, panic, fear, disgust, anger, sadness) is developed and enhanced in relationships

Our capacity for empathy is developed and enhanced in relationships

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