

Making
SPACE
for Learning
 Trauma Informed Practice in Schools
Drouin South PS. 2022

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1

www.professionals.childhood.org.au

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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2

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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Key learning outcomes

To develop an enhanced understanding of complex abuse related trauma, with a particular focus on its effects on brain functioning

To develop a clear understanding of the manifestations of abuse related trauma on the general functioning of a child or young person

To be able to assess the impacts of abuse related trauma on the child or young person

To gain a knowledge of the strategies and activities that we may use in the classroom to assist a child or young person manage the impacts of abuse related trauma



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Key messages

Trauma can undermine children's ability to learn, form relationships, and function.

Schools are significant communities for children, and teachers.

Teachers are significant role models in these communities and must be given the supports they need to address trauma's impact on learning.

Otherwise, many children will be unable to achieve their academic and life potential.

Trauma-sensitive school environments benefit all children.

Those whose trauma history is known, those whose trauma isn't known, and those impacted by their traumatized classmates.

Together, we can ensure that all children will be able to achieve at their highest levels

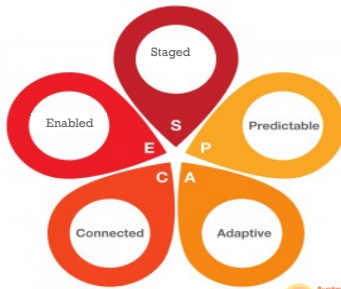


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5

SPACE


Schools can respond effectively to the needs of traumatised children and young people, using the five key dimensions of the acronym **SPACE**.



6

SPACE

- **Staged Strategies** -staged to follow the staged patterns of behaviour
- **Predictable**- routine/ reactions from others strategies which promote stability and reduce stress responses
- **Adaptive**- responses promote adaptability in children so they develop multiple meanings to behaviour and an openness to multiple options to intervention
- **Connected**- relationships with consistent adults and peer as a foundation for change
- **Enabled** to understand themselves, make meaning of their experiences and have stronger self identity



Children are special in every way, so I wish all the children here in Australia and around the world could all live happy, warm, loved, safe and not to worry about grown-up problems.

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Anchoring Activity



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8

When you were growing up...



In small groups share a 'lollipop moment' you had with a teacher when you were a child:

1. What do you remember most about them?
2. How did that person make you feel?
3. What did they do?
4. What didn't they do?



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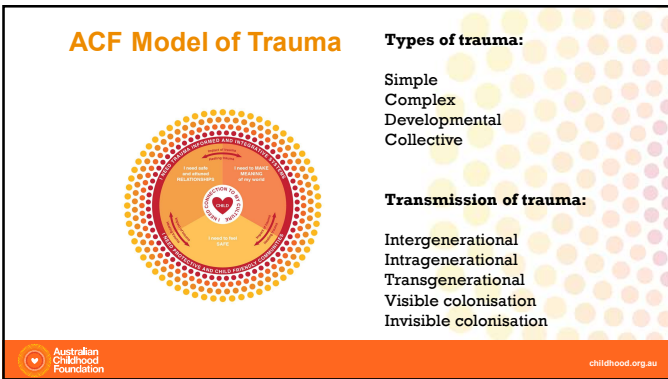
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11



12

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Learning Activity

14

Using the ACF model of trauma, in small groups, link what you see in the classroom to the impact of trauma.

Step 1: Can you talk about what you already know about the impact you see of trauma on relationships, the child's world and self views, and their felt sense of safety in the learning environment?

Step 2: Can you now talk about how you think trauma is transmitted in all sections of the model:

Culture Communities/families Schools/institutions

15

Understanding the developing brain

new born 3 year old adult

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16

Neurons-synaptogenesis & pruning

Brain's building blocks	At birth there are approximately 100 billion neurons;	However very few neural connections at birth
Child's brain – job is to lay down as many neuronal connections as possible	Adolescent brain – job is to strengthen those connections and increase processing speed	Neurons that fire together survive, those that don't, die ("use it or lose it")

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17

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18

Neuroplasticity is hope


- The brain is at its most plastic in early childhood
- In early childhood, the brain is most vulnerable to harm, but also has the greatest potential for healing
- Neuroplasticity gives us hope



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Sequential brain development – building blocks




The Thinking brain	3-5 Years
The Emotions and Memory Brain	Birth to 4 years
The Movement Brain	Birth – 2 years
The survival brain	Pre birth to 8 months

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20

Brainstem - basic life functions

- Basic life functions
- First part of our brain to develop
- This is the most developed brain part at birth
- Responsible for our heart beat, breathing, sucking, temperature control, blood pressure

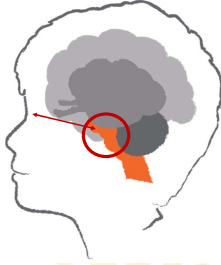


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21

Superior Colliculus

- Processes visual threats – looming objects identified by cells in the retina of the eye
- Retinal neuronal input received by Superior Colliculus which engages the body in **Avoidance and defensive behaviours**



22

Cerebellum- movement and balance

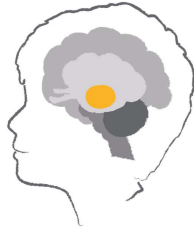
- Helps us to know where our body is in space
- Helps us with our posture and balance
- Helps us not to fall over and to control our movements
- Has its own connective pathways between the 2 halves- cerebellar vermis



23

Diencephalon - sorting & sending centre

- This area of the brain develops mainly after birth
- It sorts out messages coming into the brain and sends them
- It uses hormones to send signals to body
- Hormonal signals tell your body what it needs, eg, food, water, love



24

Limbic lobe- emotional gateway

- The part of the brain that helps us attach an emotion to an experience or memory
- This part of the brain is particularly involved with the emotions of fear and anger
- Also heavily involved in attachment processes
- This area develops mainly after birth



25

Hippocampus – Brain’s historian

- Explicit memory system
- Develops approximately 2-3 years of age
- Provides context to memory and embeds long term memory



26

Amygdala – smoke alarm


- Detects threat
- Develops from birth
- Learns by association
- Involved in implicit memory processes



27

Cerebral cortex- complex thinking

- The largest part of the brain
- Associated with higher brain function such as thought and action
- Examples of functions:
 - Reasoning
 - Logic
 - Judgement
 - Voluntary movement




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The prefrontal cortex- executive function

- Responsible for executive functions, such as judgement, reasoning, and self awareness
- Final part of the brain to reach maturity in one's mid 20s
- Under reconstruction in adolescents from the age of approximately 12 years




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Medial prefrontal cortex

- Associated with perceptions of self and similar others
- Known as centre for mindfulness
- Involved in maternal bonding – the parent child dyad and inter-subjectivity



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Adolescent Brain Development

Synaptogenesis, pruning & myelination

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31

Gendered differences in brain development

Left Inferior Frontal White Matter

Relationship between age and volume of white matter in the IFG for males and females. A significant linear relationship was found between age and IFG white matter for males (Blanton et al., 2004)

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Vulnerabilities

- Behaviours associated with an underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex
- Short attention span
- Impulsivity and increased risk taking
- Procrastination (lack of motivation or internal reward systems)
- Disorganisation (trouble working through long term goals)
- Poor judgement and problem solving
- Reduction in ability to see things from other's perspective


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Vulnerabilities

Behaviours associated with an overactive limbic lobe and under-active pre-frontal cortex



- Overactive emotional reactions
- Trouble reading facial expressions
- Ill-attuned communication skills



34

Summary of the impact of developmental trauma

- **Fear:** Sensitized to danger leading to distrust of others.
- **Hyper-vigilance:** External - scan for danger, anticipate abandonment or attack. Internal - I am bad, wrong. No spare energy for anything else. See danger where it doesn't exist. React to imagined dangers in ways that bring about situations that are feared.
- **Identity develops around shame.** Distorts experience of self and others. Feel flawed as a human being. Experience of badness can be kept out of consciousness because too painful to live with. Create barriers to relationships so others can't see what we see in self. Increases feelings of shame, isolation and loneliness.
- **Security of attachment is compromised.**
- **Safety is destroyed** and developmental attachment patterns become disorganized.
- **Intersubjective explorations are reduced and avoided.** They don't have the experiences that enable them to develop core beliefs or an internal working model that they are delightful, lovable and have a positive impact on the people around them.
- **Traumatic events are not explored and experienced in an integrative, coherent, intersubjective manner.** They are not assimilated into the autobiographical narrative.
- **Traumatic events can create dissociation,** as can subsequent memories or triggers of such events, thus causing rigid avoidance or "re-traumatization".


35

Learning Activity




36

How can we re-language deficit-based language to strength-based language?




Think about this in terms of what does the child need from us and the environment to feel safe when they are learning/relearning to build the capacity of their social relational systems and to safely experience very strong emotions? Remember, the science suggests they cannot do it on their own...

- Overactive emotional reactions
- Trouble reading facial expressions
- Ill-attuned communication skills

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Understanding lateral brain development



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Lateral brain development



Left Hemisphere

- Evaluates language content
- Optimistic hemisphere
- Understands beginning, end
- Learns from the past and present
- Looks for patterns

Right Hemisphere

- In the present moment
- Eye contact
- Facial expression
- Tone of voice
- Posture
- Gesture
- Intensity
- Is mute
- Grasps the whole

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Hemispheric integration

Both hemispheres required for healthy development and functioning

Connected through corpus callosum

Good integration leads to coherent life narratives

Abuse and trauma causes disconnection - results in 1 hemisphere dominating

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Hemispheric functioning during fear event

The child will struggle to process the content of our words (a left hemisphere task)

The child may not be able to speak (a left hemisphere task)

The child will be tuned into our tone of voice, not the content (a right hemisphere task)

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41

Hemispheric functioning during fear event

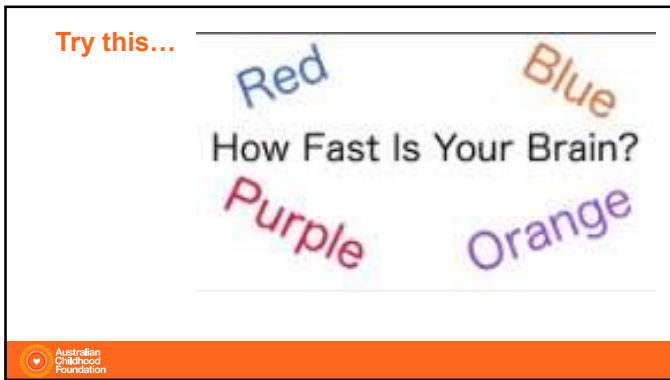
Monitoring	monitoring the intensity of our movements, primed to look for signs of threat
Acting	acting in the moment and won't have a strong grasp of future or past, therefore will not likely be able to grasp the potential consequences of their actions at the time
Processing	processing our postures and gestures, attuned for signs of danger
Registering	registering the way we try to use eye contact (e.g. demanding a young person look at us may escalate the situation)

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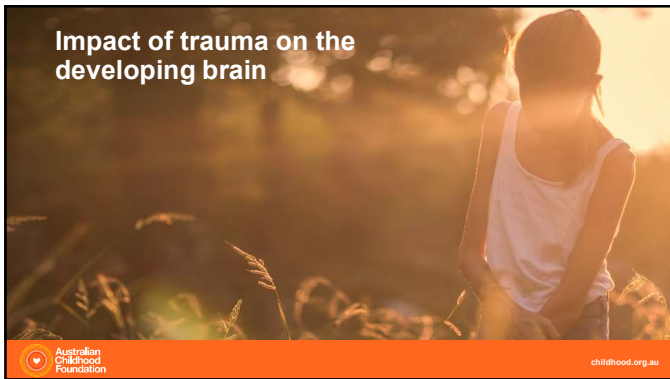
42



43



44



45

Trauma Impacts

Trauma can impact all elements of children's development: brain, body, memory, learning, behaviour, emotions, relationships.

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46

The developing brain

A neurobiological understanding of trauma offers explanations about the way it affects:

Memory	Emotional experience
Language	Regulation & arousal
Sociability & communication	Belief systems
Sensory & motor functioning	Attention

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Trauma and behaviour

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Trauma and behaviour

If we set out to change the behaviour, we are in danger of destroying the meaning which that behaviour holds (Cairns 2002)

The key to reshaping behaviour is to understand it and respond at its source rather than how it is expressed

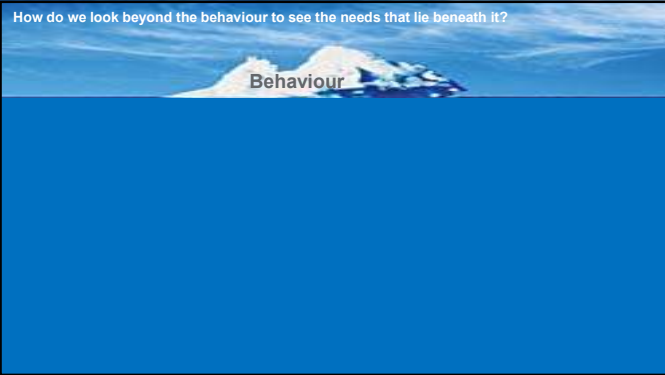


"If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions."
- Albert Einstein

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49


How do we look beyond the behaviour to see the needs that lie beneath it?



50

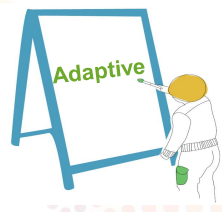
Reflective Activity

- Roots = Underlying needs
- Trunk = Known Trauma
- Branches = Triggers
- Leaves = Manifestations of trauma (Behaviours we may see in the school setting and internal responses)
- Fruit = Strengths of the child/young person



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51



- Traumatized children and young people rely on a limited set of behavioural routines to respond to the challenges of their context.
- These routines are sourced in the history of their physiological reaction to trauma and the experiences of relationships through which these reactions were interpreted and responded to.
- Strategies which promote adaptability in children and young people are those which are able to maintain multiple meanings for behaviour and remain open to multiple options for interventions.

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52

Three Core Concepts in Early Development

3 Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development

NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD
Center on the Developing Child HARVARD UNIVERSITY


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53

Cortisol

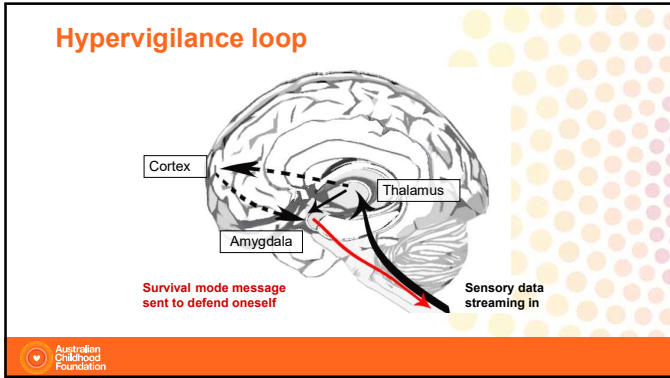
Can help:

- your body respond to stress or danger – **fight, flight, freeze, submit response**
- increase your body's metabolism of glucose
- control your blood pressure
- reduce inflammation

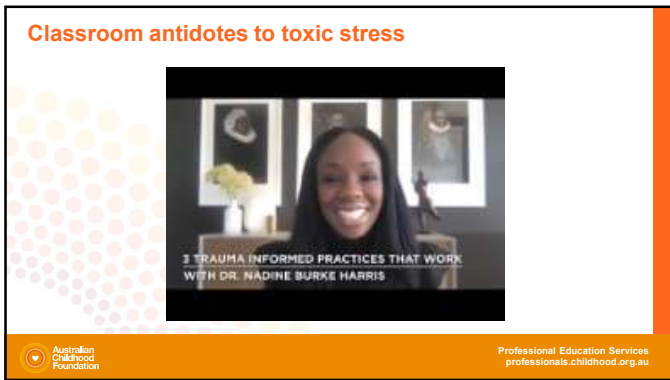


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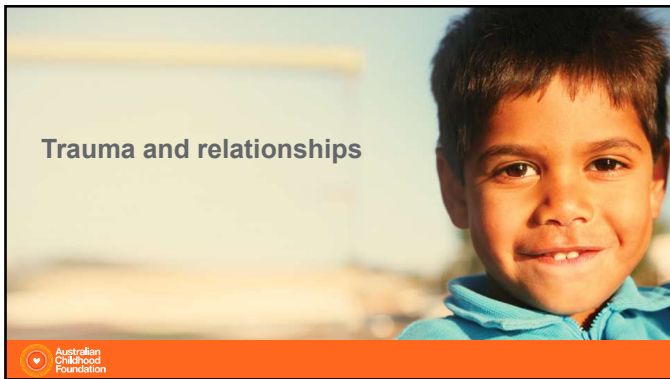
54



55



56



57

Healing developmental trauma



Safety



Self-Regulation



Self-Reflection



Relational Engagement

IF RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE SITE OF THE IMPACTS OF ABUSE RELATED TRAUMA, THEN IT TELLS US THIS WILL ALSO BE THE SITE OF HEALING.






58

The importance of you

- Relationships are the key way we learn to engage with the world around us
- Through meaningful connection Oxytocin is realised, a hormone that rejuvenates cell development in the brain
- The quality of relational right – brain to right brain interactions in childhood influence our development in all areas of life





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59

Relational Alliances with children


An analysis by the Review of Educational Research of 46 studies found that when teacher-student relationships are strong, improvements are seen in key areas.

↓

Student academic engagement, attendance, grades, disciplinary actions, and school dropout rates.

↓

Developing and nurturing trusting relationships between students and teachers is central to building a trauma-sensitive learning environment.




60

A secure relationship is central to how...



Image source: <https://unsplash.com>

- A child perceives themselves
- A child feels in their bodies
- A child focuses attention
- A child is able to learn
- A child feels safe and secure in the presence of others
- A child acts or behaves appropriately
- A child thinks and interacts with the world
- A child manages their feelings

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61

How do we...

- Build relationship with our students and learn their stories?
- Help them to make sense of their stories?
- How do we ensure there is relational repair after a conflict/rupture in our relationships with students?

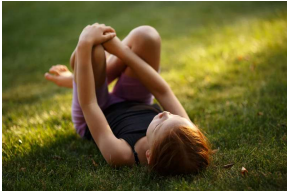


Image source: <https://unsplash.com>

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62

Handshake



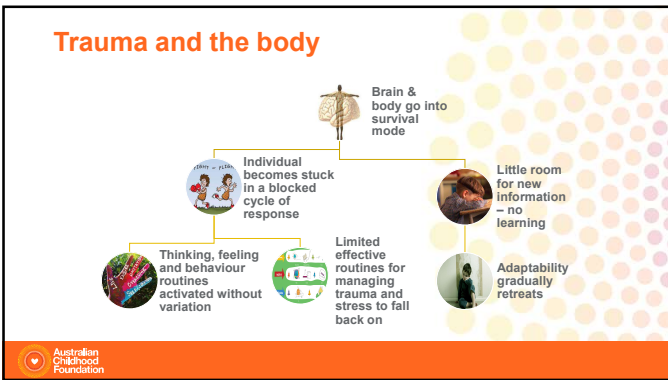
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JueN1eOH4>

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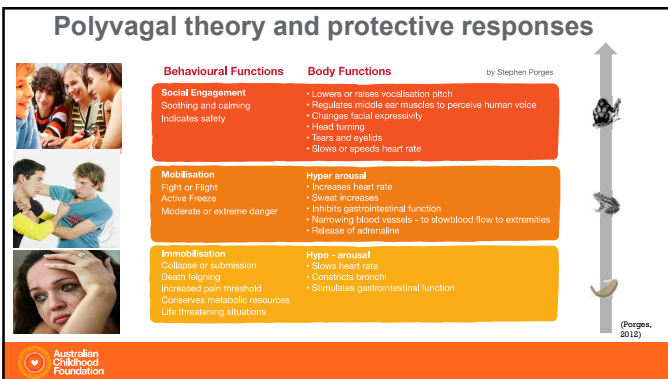
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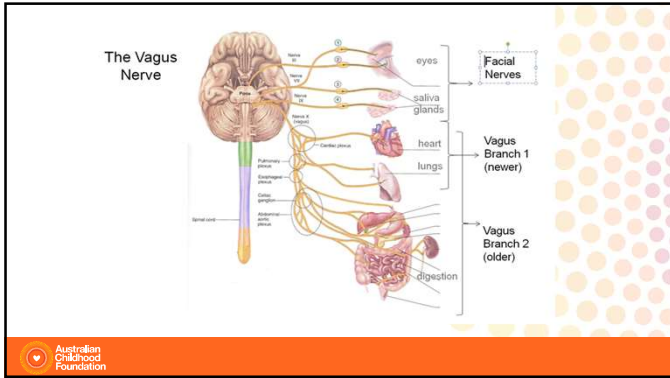
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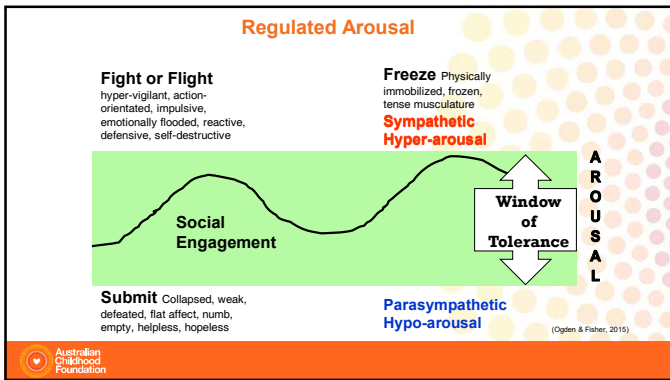
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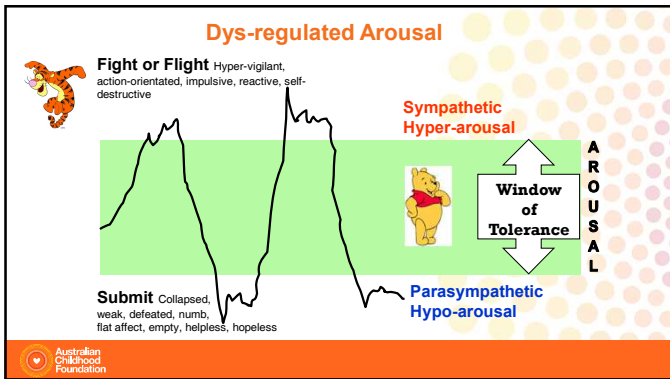
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67



68



69

Changes in Arousal States

Affect:	Shame, anger		A R O U S A L
Thought:	"I'm a screw up, this is unfair"		
Behaviour:	Hitting, running away		
Sense of self:	"I am bad, I am broken"		
Consciousness:	Hyper-focused, narrow, rigid	<p>frozen, emotionally reactive, racing thoughts, hyper-arousal, impulsive, aggressive</p>	
Affect:	Joy, pleasure		
Thought:	"This is fun, "I'm good at this"		
Behaviour:	Increased, sustained effort		
Sense of self:	"I'm competent, I can do this"		
Consciousness:	Focused and flexible		
Affect:	Shame		A R O U S A L
Thought:	"I don't care, I can't do it"		
Behaviour:	Collapsing, spacing out		
Sense of self:	"I am bad, I am broken"		
Consciousness:	Diffuse, spacey	<p>Numb, lethargic, collapsed, cognitively slowed, withdrawn, distant</p>	

(Adapted from Ogden & Fisher, 2015)

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Helping students return to their Window of Tolerance

- Point to something ____, touch something ____.
- Check the eye colour of the person next to you.
- 6 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you like doing

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71

Stress

Consider:	What do you see when children have too much energy?	What do you see when there is not enough energy for learning?	Where is the calm in our centre/school?	What helps us to get back into our window of tolerance?
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72

Stress




- 1**
Stand up
• Stand up. Write your first name with your right foot. Write your last name with your left foot ...
- 2**
Walk
• Walk once around your table without lifting your feet off the floor.
- 3**
Follow
• Follow the leader tapping tempo

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Regulation in the Covid Era




Teachers who taught their students skills in self-regulation, engaged in gradual release of responsibility and focused on content and deep learning had better outcomes.

Reimers and Schliecher, 2021, *Schooling Disrupted, Schooling Rethought: How the Covid-19 pandemic is changing education*

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74


Learning Activity



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75

Environmental and Collective WOT



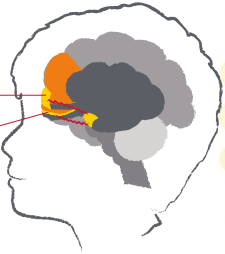
Consider what the baseline for the community might be.

Consider what the baseline for the school might be.

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76

2 ways to regulate



Medial Pre-Frontal Cortex
(the centre of Mindfulness/ Self awareness)

Right Orbitofrontal Cortex
(Regulation of Arousal)


- Mindful awareness/ meditation de-activates the amygdala
- Quality co-regulation de-activates the amygdala

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Descending cortical structures 'The Bridge'

Dan Siegel's research suggests we can build a 'bridge' from our MPC to our Amygdala that allows us to **respond** instead of **react**, **feel anger** but **express it safely** and to **feel fear** but **find safety**.



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78

Mindfulness in education



Students are becoming more focused, more compassionate, more self-regulated, and stronger academically.



79

Transforming regulation




Trauma has a disintegrative impact on our ability to regulate brain and body processes

Trauma impairs children's capacities to orient to, interpret and integrate sensory stimulation in an adaptive fashion

Regulation can be aided through :

- bottom-up, body-oriented work
- top-down, cognitive work
- holding attention in the moment
- experiences of positive, attuned co-regulation

daysparent.com/family/activities/simple-games-that-teach-your-kid-self-regulation/




80

Calming & engaging



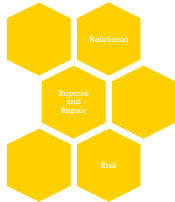


81

Mindful breathing




82

Play as a classroom collective regulation tool to up-regulate and build neural tone

83

Learning: Things to do

- Be predictable and consistent with routines and structure
- Prepare the student for any change in routine in advance
- Provide boundaries to help the student feel safe
- Be flexible and adapt to the student's needs
- Give the student short periods to practise independence
- Give consistent, clear and simple instructions
- Look for opportunities to build self-esteem
- Celebrate success and good choices, e.g. photographs

Woolley, M.A., 2014, p. 112

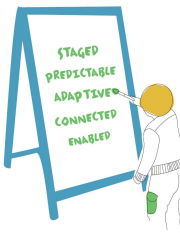
- 1 thing your school does well?
- 1 thing you do well?
- How do you do that well?



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84

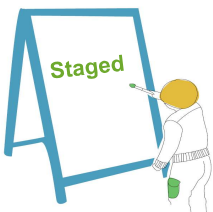
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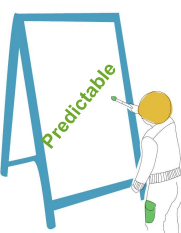
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- Brain development is sequential
- Brain functions are consolidated through repetition and practice
- Reparative strategies must follow this staged pattern of conceptualisation and implementation

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86

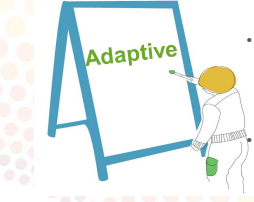


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    graph TD
      A[Changes to the routines are a source of stress to children and young people who have experienced trauma] --> B[Brain and body are constantly hyperaroused]
      B --> C[Predictability in their relationships and environment deactivate the stress systems]
      C --> D[This then promotes flexibility and adaptability]
      D --> A
  
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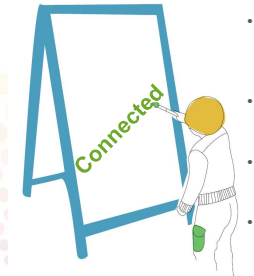
87



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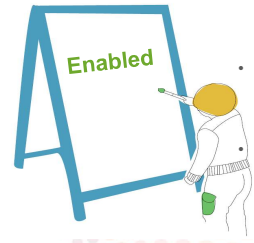
88



- Traumatized children and y/people develop insecure and unstable templates for forming and being in relationships.
- They have distorted or confusing internal maps to help them navigate intimacy.
- They avoid engaging fully in relationships for fear of being hurt or rejected again.
- Strategies to support traumatized children and young people emphasise relationships with safe and consistent adults and peers as the foundation for change.

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89



- Traumatized children and y/ people find the process of understanding themselves difficult. They are challenged in their capacity to identify their feelings, understand them and communicate them to others.
- They struggle to piece together a coherent narrative about their qualities, their attributes and their talents.
- Strategies for responding to traumatized children and y/ people in the school context will enable them to make linkages between and give meaning to their experiences of their past & present, feelings, thoughts and actions.

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90

Making SPACE for Learning – Site Audit Tool

This audit tool can be used to evaluate the policies and initiatives of a school that resource and equip different levels of the school structure to undertake trauma informed practice. In the following table, list strategies, policies or other processes currently undertaken that support traumatised students at your school.

	Whole Site	Staff	Classroom / Group	Small Group	Individual Student / Child
S STRONG					
P PREDICTABLE					
A ADAPTABLE					
C CONNECTED					
E ENABLED					

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91

Learning Activity

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92

Making SPACE for Learning – Site Audit Tool

This audit tool can be used to evaluate the policies and initiatives of a school that resource and equip different levels of the school structure to undertake trauma informed practice. In the following table, list strategies, policies or other processes currently undertaken that support traumatised students at your school.


	Whole Site	Staff	Classroom / Group	Small Group	Individual Student / Child
S STRONG					
P PREDICTABLE					
A ADAPTABLE					
C CONNECTED					
E ENABLED					

Making Space for Learning: Trauma Informed Practice in Schools

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93

How do we implement regulation as a whole-of-classroom approach?



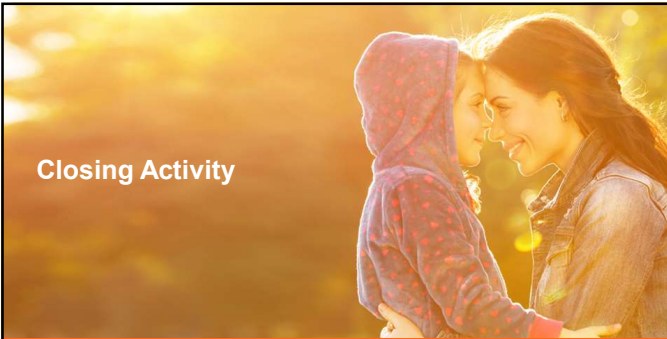

For slowing down?

For speeding up or releasing stress?



94


Closing Activity




95

Word Cloud

Say one word that reflects how you feel right now, let's take turns and create!



Inspired

96

Professional Education Services
childhood.org.au/training

Thank you for your participation!
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