

Making
SPACE
for Learning
Trauma Informed Practice in Schools

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

Safety *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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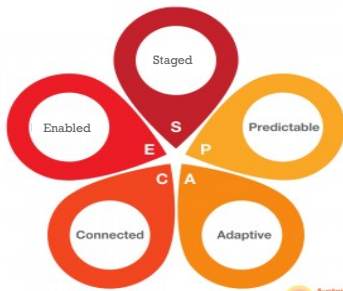
- Trauma can undermine children's ability to learn, form relationships, and function.
- Schools are significant communities for children, and teachers.
- Teachers are significant role models in these communities and must be given the supports they need to address trauma's impact on learning.
- Otherwise, 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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SPACE

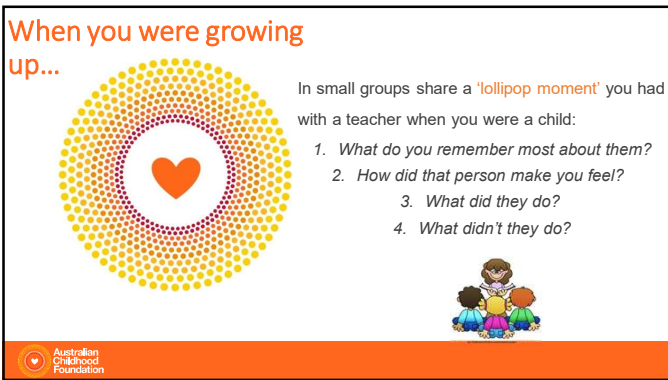
Schools can respond effectively to the needs of traumatised children and young people, using the five key dimensions of the acronym SPACE.



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Defining trauma

- ANY SINGLE, ONGOING OR CUMULATIVE EXPERIENCE WHICH
- FEELS/IS OUTSIDE OUR CONTROL
- OVERWHELMS OUR CAPACITY TO COPE
- EVOKES A PHYSIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SET OF RESPONSES BASED ON FEAR OR AVOIDANCE
- A RESPONSE TO A PERCEIVED THREAT; RESPONSE IS USUALLY BASED IN SURVIVAL

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Types of trauma:

- Simple
- Complex
- Developmental
- Collective

Transmission of trauma:

- Intergenerational
- Intragenerational
- Transgenerational
- Visible colonisation
- Invisible colonisation

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ACF Model of Trauma and SPACE

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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

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Understanding the developing brain

new born 3 year old adult

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Neurons

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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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 6 months



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Brainstem - basic life functions

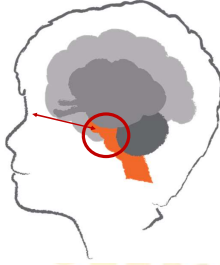
- Basic life functions
- First part of our brain to develop
- This is the most developed brain part at birth
- Responsible for our heart beat, breathing, sucking, temperature control, blood pressure

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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**



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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



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Diencephalon - sorting & sending centre

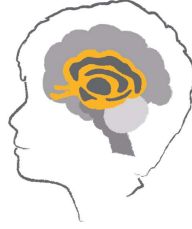
- This area of the brain develops mainly after birth
- It sorts out messages coming into the brain and sends them
- It uses hormones to send signals to body
- Hormonal signals tell your body what it needs, eg, food, water, love



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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



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Hippocampus – Brain’s historian

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



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Amygdala – smoke alarm


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



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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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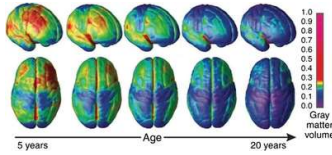
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Adolescents - The remodelling brain: Synaptogenesis, Pruning & myelination in the teenage brain



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Adolescents – Increased density of grey matter

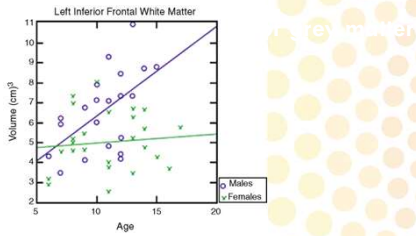


F. D. Gennatas et al. "Age-related effects and sex differences in gray matter density, volume, mass, and cortical thickness from childhood to adolescence." *Journal of Neuroscience*, Vol. 37, May 17 2017, p. 5065-5074. doi:10.1523/JNEUROSCI.3550-16.2017.



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Gendered differences in brain development



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

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Learning Activity




A woman with long dark hair is smiling warmly and hugging a child from behind. The child is wearing a purple hoodie with a pattern. They are outdoors, and the background is a soft, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is affectionate and supportive.

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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...so how can we help?

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

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Risk taking and impulse control





- Heightened sensation seeking
- Under-developed self-regulatory control
- Increased RISK TAKING

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Understanding lateral brain development



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Lateral brain development

Left Hemisphere

- Evaluates language cont
- Optimistic hemisphere
- Understands beginning, i
- Learns from the past anc
- 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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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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Learning Activity

A woman with long dark hair is smiling and hugging a young girl from behind. The girl is wearing a purple hoodie with a pattern. They are outdoors with a warm, golden light in the background, possibly from a sunset or sunrise.

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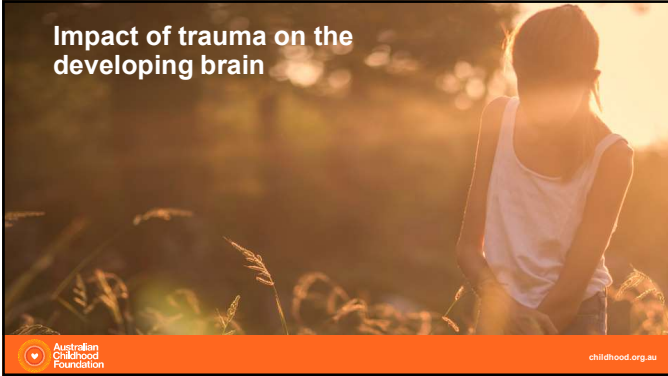
Try this...

Red Blue
How Fast Is Your Brain?
Purple Orange

A graphic with the text 'How Fast Is Your Brain?' in the center. The words 'Red', 'Blue', 'Purple', and 'Orange' are arranged around it, each in a different color and slightly tilted. The background is white with a thin black border.

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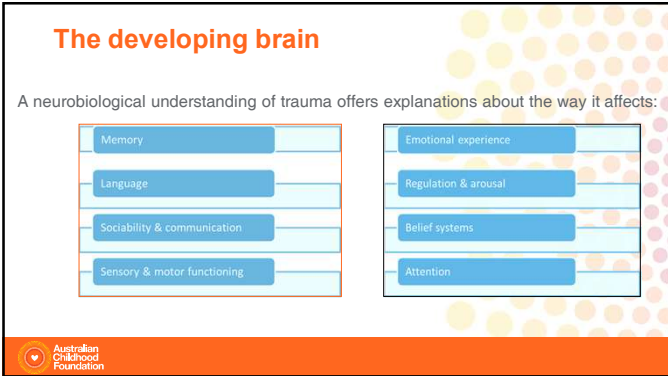
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Three Core Concepts in Early Development

3 Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development

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

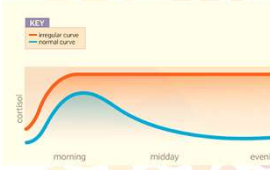



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Cortisol

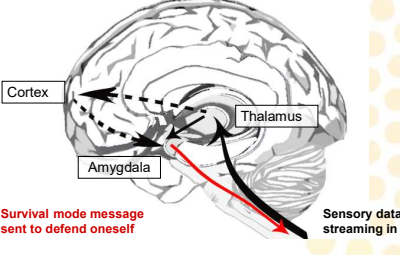

Can help:

- 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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Hypervigilance loop

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Classroom antidotes to toxic stress



3 TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICES THAT WORK
WITH DR. NADINE BURKE HARRIS

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Trauma and relationships



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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.



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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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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.

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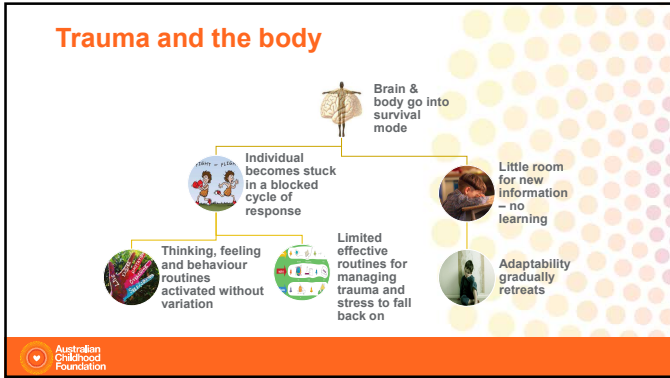
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How trauma impacts the body

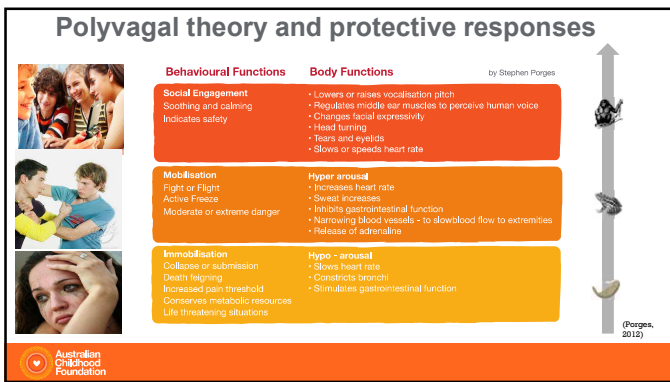


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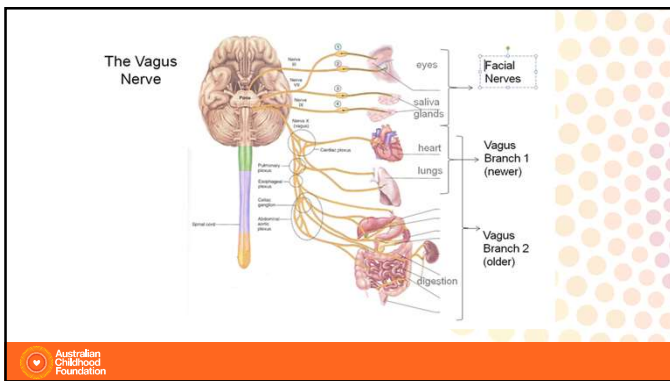
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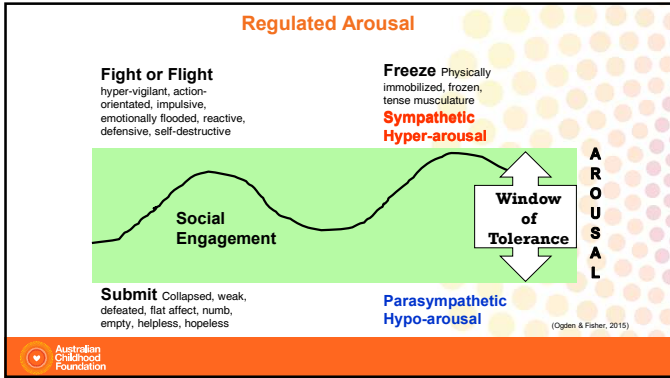
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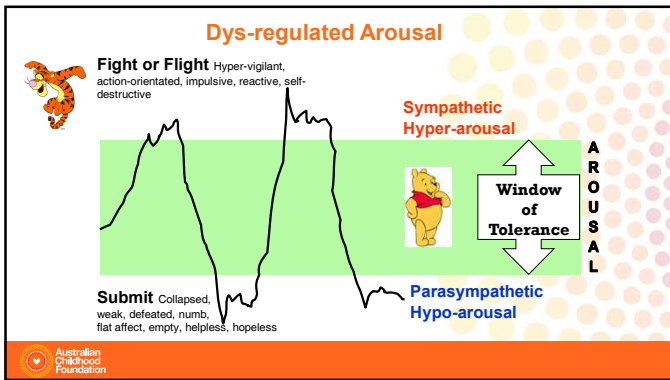
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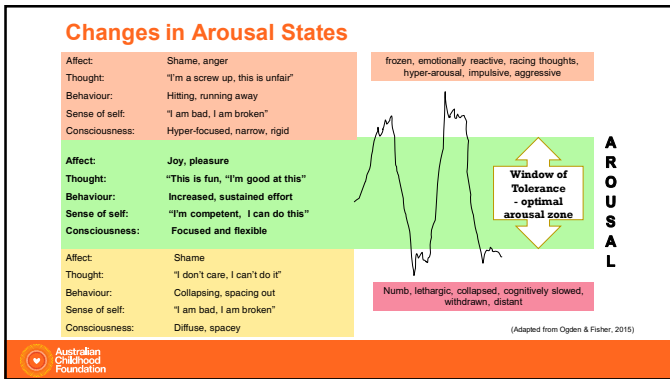
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Helping students return to their Window of Tolerance


- Point to something ____, touch something ____.
- Check the eye colour of the person next to you.
- 5 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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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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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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Learning Activity



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Environmental and Collective WOT



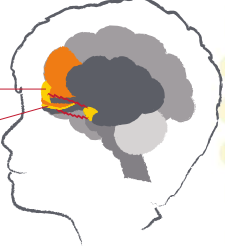
Consider what the baseline for the community might be.

Consider what the baseline for the school might be.

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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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Mindfulness in education

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



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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/

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Calming & engaging



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Mindful breathing



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

A diagram consisting of three yellow hexagons arranged in a triangle. The top hexagon is labeled 'Relational', the bottom-left is labeled 'Regulate and Repair', and the bottom-right is labeled 'Risk'. The hexagons are interconnected, suggesting a holistic approach to regulation.

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Energising & Releasing

A photograph of a baby crawling on a carpeted floor. The baby is wearing a blue shirt and is looking towards the camera with a happy expression. The background shows a play area with various toys.

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Learning Activity

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a denim jacket, smiling and hugging a child from behind. The child is wearing a purple hoodie. They are outdoors, and the background is a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise.

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



For slowing down?

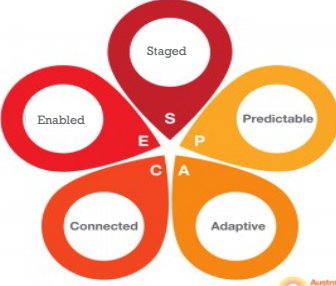
For speeding up or releasing stress?

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SPACE

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



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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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Predictable

- Changes to the routines are a source of stress to children and young people who have experienced trauma
- Brain and body are constantly hyper aroused
- Predictability in their relationships and environment deactivate the stress systems
- This then promotes flexibility and adaptability

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Neuroception

Cues of risk and safety are continually monitored by our nervous system (Porges, 2015).

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Predictable

- Changes to the routines are a source of stress to children and young people who have experienced trauma
- Brain and body are constantly hyper aroused
- Predictability in their relationships and environment deactivate the stress systems
- This then promotes flexibility and adaptability

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Predictability increases our sense of safety

- Focus on creating an environment that is predictable
- Build a reliable framework of activity that becomes familiar over time
- Always prepare young person for what is coming up next
- Build a supportive pattern of one-to-one communication that explains the immediate and short-term future
- Be particularly sensitive to transitions
- The more predictable the response the more confident children become in understanding the world around them.

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Predictability increases our sense of safety

- relationships
- physical environment
- routines
- instructions
- learning tasks
- behavioural expectations

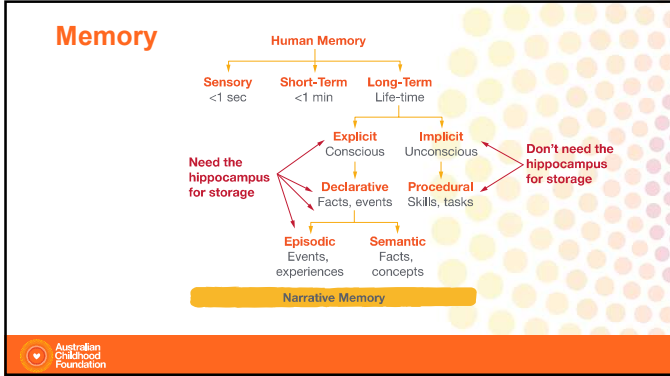
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Trauma and memory

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Trauma, memory & learning

Much of the traumatised child's memory is implicit or subconscious

Children may struggle to remember life events

Working memory can become paralysed (for example, their ability to remember instructions is poor)

As recurrence and intensity of trauma increases

Narrative memory is lost
Children lose an ability to make sense of their experiences

Episodic memory is fragmented
Children cannot remember events that occurred in the days after the event. They do not remember what happened with them, but do not remember what they learn.

Working memory is paralysed
Children are being given more information long enough for to be judged to be unable to learn, to properly learn.

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Memory

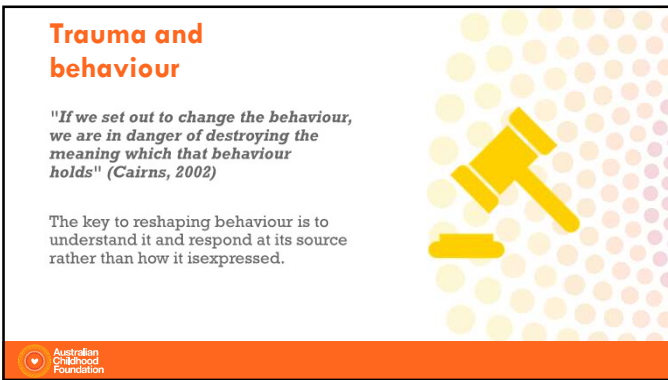
How can educators help keep memory systems active?

What can we do to assist children and young people build positive memory systems?

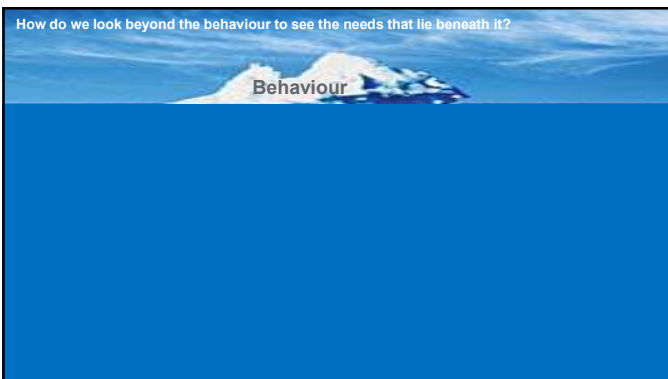
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Reflective Activity

- 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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Adaptive

Traumatised 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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Trauma and behaviour

Strategies for addressing trauma-based behaviour will be most successful when they are applied purposefully across multiple settings in which children and young people live, play and learn

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Responding to trauma organised behaviour

Ask yourself:

- What is the behaviour telling me?
- What might have triggered this behaviour?
- How does this behaviour serve to protect the child/young person and help him/her survive?
- What is the impact on me? What do I need at this time?

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Behaviour: Things to do

- Discipline with empathy and not anger
- Help the young person to calm before anything else
- Teach the behaviours you want to see
- Use predictable consequences for unacceptable behaviour
- Be clear while being supportive and empathic
- Use time in rather than time out
- Wonder aloud
- Don't take behaviours personally
- Reflect on the possible underlying cause

(Golding, et al., 2016, p. 107, 112)

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

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Connected

Traumatised 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 traumatised children and young people emphasise relationships with safe and consistent adults and peers as the foundation for change.

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Ed Tronick - Still Face Experiment



How might we unknowingly parallel still face in the school environment?



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Experience Feeling safe in relationship







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Finding it difficult to stay (want to be) connected?

Open Flexible and Adaptive Closed and Rigid

Well-Connected Brain
Utilizing the front part of the brain

Stressed out Brain
Utilizing the more primitive middle region of the brain

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Misunderstanding

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Activity- Heart felt

- What I believe to be true about myself is....
- What I believe to be true about the world is....
- What I believe to be true about relationships are...

abuse makes kids invisible

The invisible Princess

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Internal working models

	Positive internal working model	Negative internal working model
View of self	I am lovable I am worthy	I am unlovable I am unworthy
View of the world and relationships	Others are responsive Others are loving Others are interested in me Others are available to me The world is relatively safe	Others are unavailable Others are neglectful Others are rejecting Others are unresponsive The world is unsafe

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Enabled

Traumatised 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 traumatised 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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Emotional support: Things to do

- "Tune in" and be available
- Develop ability for fun and joy
- Initiate and supervise games, activities and conversations between students
- Fix relationships after they break down
- Provide a calm area for rest and relaxation" (Adapted from Golding, et al., 2016, p.107, 112)

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

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Trauma and learning

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Trauma and learning

- Traumatized children's memories have been impaired
- They struggle to stay engaged in the classroom
- They have little SPACE left for learning
- Traumatized children often have a limited sense of self

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Trauma and learning

The capacity of traumatised children for learning is compromised:



```

    graph TD
      A[Their neurobiology is stressed] --> B[Their relationships can feel unstable]
      A --> C[They find it difficult to stay calm]
      B --> D[Change is perceived as dangerous]
      C --> D
      D --> E[Their emotional state is in flux]
      D --> F[Their memory is under pressure]
      D --> G[They are disconnected from themselves and time]
      D --> H[New experiences and new information easy threat and uncertainty]
  
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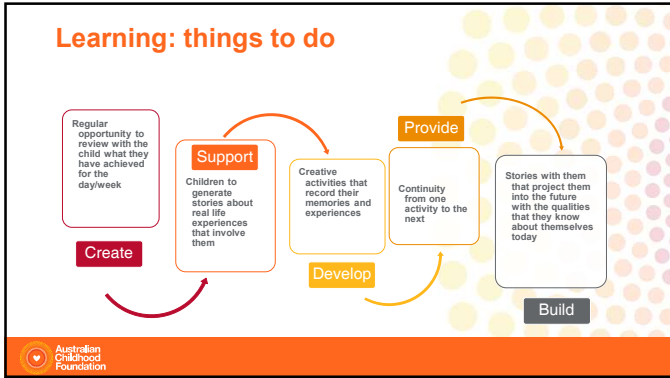
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Dan Siegel – hand model of the brain



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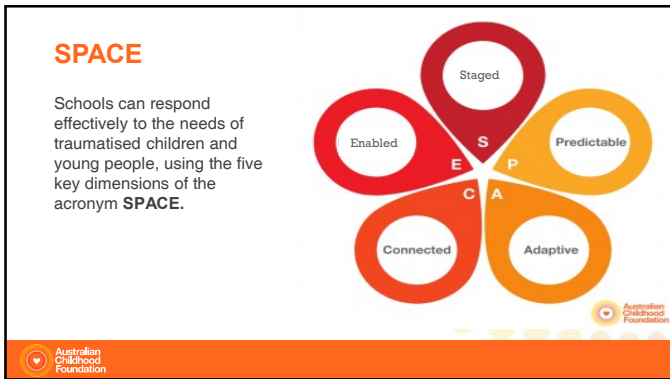
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- ### Learning: Things to do
- Be predictable and consistent with routines and structure
 - Prepare the student for any change in routine in advance
 - Provide boundaries to help the student feel safe
 - Be flexible and adapt to the student's needs
 - 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
- (Golding, et al., 2016, p. 113)
- o 1 thing your school does well?
 - o 1 thing you do well?
 - o How do you do that well?
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Creating spaces

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Staged

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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Predictable

Changes to the routines are a source of stress to children and young people who have experienced trauma

Brain and body are constantly hyper aroused

Predictability in their relationships and environment deactivate the stress systems

This then promotes flexibility and adaptability

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Adaptive

Traumatised 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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Connected

Traumatised 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 traumatised children and young people emphasise relationships with safe and consistent adults and peers as the foundation for change.

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Enabled

Traumatised 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 traumatised 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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Things you can do

Be	Be predictable
Be	Be consistent
Be	Be connected
Be	Be present
Promote	Promote understanding
Help	Help them make meaning of their experiences
Help	Help children develop calming tools that make sense to them and that they can use
Grow	Grow with them!

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Making SPACE for Learning - Site Audit Tool

This tool can be used to evaluate the policies and practices of a school that measure and manage different levels of the school's readiness to undertake various demand practices. In the following table, list examples, policies or other processes currently undertaken that support vulnerable students at your school.

	Whole-Site	Staff	Classroom / Group	Small-Group	Individual Student / Child
S STABLE					
P PRACTICAL					
A ADAPTIVE					
C CONNECTED					
F FLEXIBLE					

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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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**Thank you for
your participation!**

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