


# Safety and Understanding and Responding to Behaviour

Golden Grove Primary School

March 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 3.30pm – 5.30pm – online training  
Trainer: Carolyn Grace

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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.

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## Key learning outcomes

- Explore the Window of Tolerance as a framework to guide observation, reflection and action, and provide an understanding for arousal
- Reflect on strategies to support regulation and dysregulation
- Understand the feelings and needs behind behaviour
- Understand the concept of the neuroception of safety and how to create safety



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## Neuroception and safety

**Relationships shape  
our sense of self and  
safety**

**“Before we can engage in  
social behaviour and  
learning we must first feel  
safe.”**



Image source: ©ACF2021

(Porges, 2015, p.115).



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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

(Porges, 2012)

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# Regulated Arousal

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

Freeze Physically immobilized, frozen, tense musculature

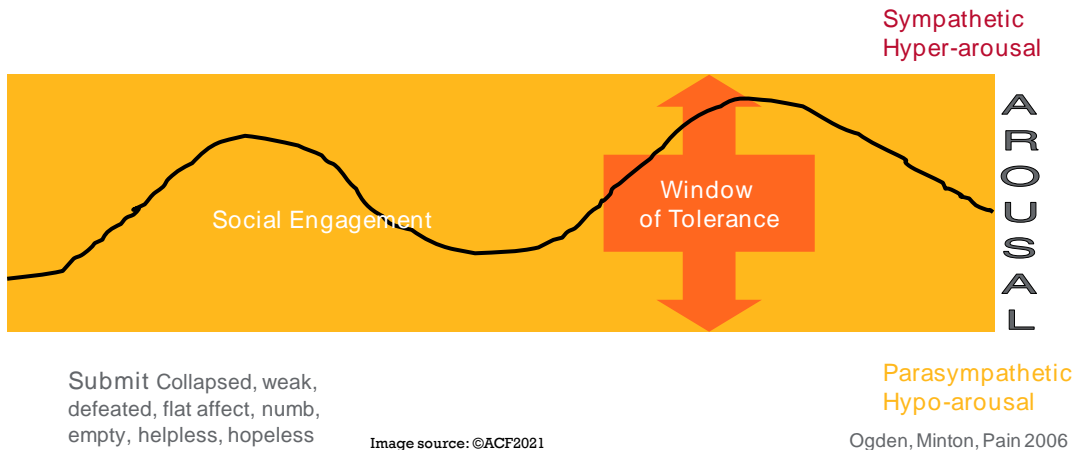


Image source: ©ACF2021

Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006



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# Dys-regulated Arousal

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

Freeze Physically immobilized, frozen, tense musculature

Sympathetic Hyper-arousal



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

Parasympathetic Hypo-arousal

Image source: ©ACF2021

Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006



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# Reflecting on Regulation

My 5 point scale

Feels like:		What it looks like:
MAD	5	
FRUSTRATED	4	
JUST RIGHT	3	
QUIET	2	
SLEEPY	1	

What zone am I in?



Use tools to get in the green zone.



5	I am not safe. I need to leave before anyone gets hurt.	
4	I am losing control. I need a Chillville break to calm down.	
3	I am not fully in control. I need to take deep breaths.	
2	Things are ok. I can handle it.	
1	I feel super	



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# Teaching students about the WOT

<p><b>Hyperarousal</b></p> <p>Fight Flight Active Freeze</p>	
<p><b>Social engagement</b></p> <p>When we feel and are safe we will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Play well</li> <li>- Engage well with others and our environment</li> <li>- Think well and make decisions</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Hypoarousal</b></p> <p>Feigned death Flop Collapse</p>	




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**Overshooting your Window of Tolerance:**

- Upset and hyped up
- Angry and agitated
- Frustrated
- Heart beating fast
- Tense and can't think clearly
- Unable to regulate your emotions




**Within your Window of Tolerance:**

- Feeling safe, calm and peaceful
- Happy and able to think clearly
- Ready to learn
- Settled and content
- Mindful and able to regulate your emotions



**Undershooting your Window of Tolerance:**

- Sad and tired
- Unmotivated with no energy
- Feel empty and withdrawn
- Don't want to listen, talk or play
- Can't think about learning



Making Space for Learning – Action Research Project - St Thomas More School, Elizabeth Park, S.A.

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# My Line of the Day

My Line of the Day

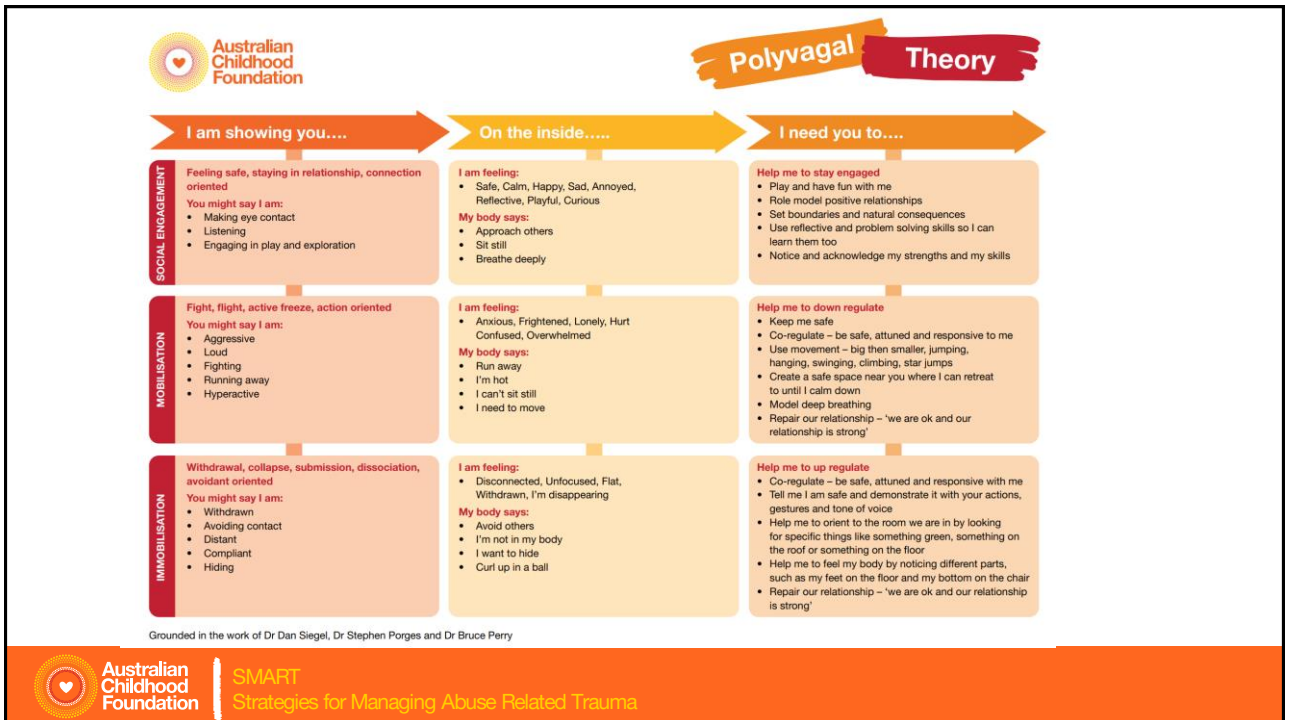
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If you had to draw your day with one continuous line, how would you draw it?

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## Understanding behaviour

**Rather than asking "What's wrong with you?", ask, "I wonder what happened to you?"**

- 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?



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# Trauma organised behaviour

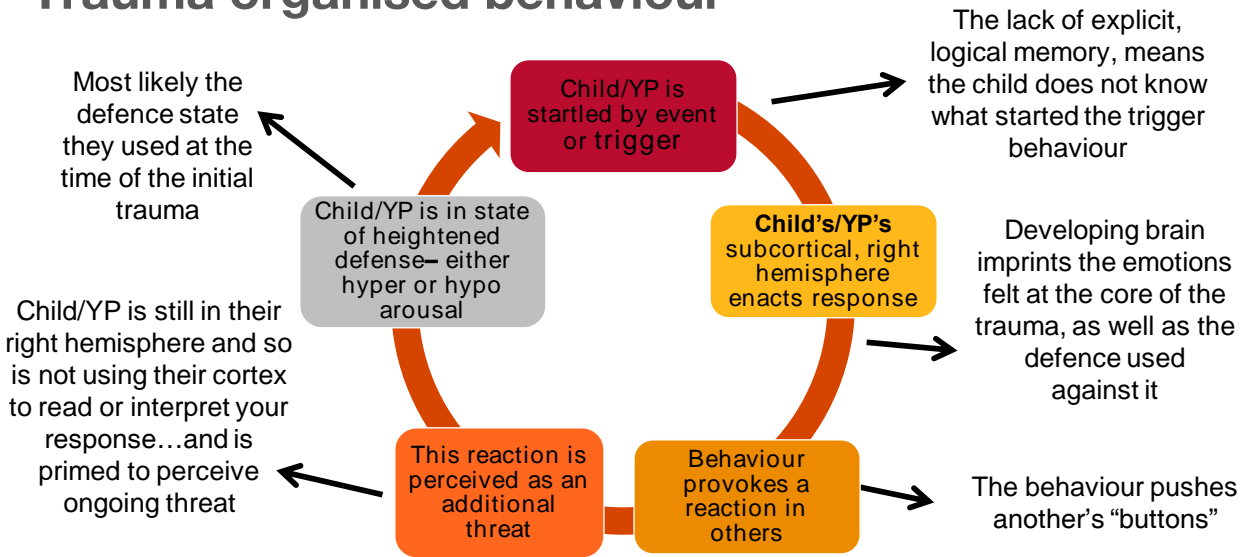


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# Behaviour

**REFOCUS FORM**

**REDO**

Name: Harold H.  
 Grade: 1st  
 Teacher: Mrs. Caber-Rude

I engaged in unacceptable behavior by: making copies of dog man comic in office

My behavior caused other students and teachers to: break out

How will my behavior change in the future? be more quiet when making copies of dog man comic in office.

I am ready to re-join the classroom. Yes  No

Why? too busy making dog man comic

Student signature: Harold H.

NO DRAWINGS

HOW MANY TIMES DO WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT THIS???



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# Understanding the feelings and needs beneath the behaviour



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## Group activity – behaviour

Observed behaviour	Assumed Meaning (how we might interpret the behaviour)	Possibly underlying cause/need (needs might include: safety, calm, connection/engaging)
Eg refuses to make eye contact when spoken to, despite being asked several times to look at the teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Defiance</li> <li>▪ Wants to assert dominance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physiological response to feelings of unsafety – their body won't allow them to make eye contact (NEED – safety)</li> <li>▪ Student has withdrawn and cannot hear/process instructions (NEED – connection/engaging)</li> </ul>

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## Strategies to help students remain in their WOT.

- Breath based activities
- Grounding activities
- Movement & Regulation activities
- Use of self



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## Creating Safety – the environment and use of self

### Creating safety – supporting the social engagement system

 <p><b>Environment</b></p>	<p>A safe environment is paramount. Consider physical, emotional and cultural safety. Is the environment free from violence and abuse, responsive to physical and emotional needs and inclusive of cultural needs. Also ensure the environment considers the sensory needs of the child. Spaces that have too much stimulation - loud noises, bright lights, strong smells or too many pictures on the walls can be overwhelming for children experiencing trauma. Understanding the child's individual needs and providing enough sensory stimulation for growth but not too much so that the child is overwhelmed is the key. Remember safety is an individual experience. What seems safe for one person may not be for another.</p>
 <p><b>Proximity</b></p>	<p>Consider the child's need for closeness or space. Each child is different. Take into account the context, your relationship and the developmental age of the child. Being attuned to the child will help you to navigate what the child needs. If a child is dysregulated always remain within the line of sight of the child, unless your safety or the safety of others is at risk. Remember time is rather than time out. Any direct contact with the child should be initiated by the child.</p>
 <p><b>Eye contact</b></p>	<p>Eye contact is an important aspect of social engagement and enables feelings of connectedness and validation. Eye contact can be threatening though to a child who has experienced trauma as their social engagement system is usually on high alert. Consider ways to engage with the child using minimal eye contact. Chatting while driving along in the car, creating art or shooting hoops is a great way to engage the child in conversation and is less threatening than sitting face to face. Remember, each child is different so be guided by the child.</p>
 <p><b>Facial expressions</b></p>	<p>Children who have experienced trauma can often have trouble reading facial expressions and will often interpret expressions as anger or disappointment. Be aware of your facial expressions when engaging with the child. Aim for contingent facial expressions that look to mirror the child's inner experience - this conveys empathy and helps the child to understand themselves and feel heard. When the child is regulated, look for opportunities to assist the child to develop emotional literacy by using cards/games that match faces to feelings.</p>
 <p><b>Tone of voice</b></p>	<p>Prosody is the rhythm, pitch and tone of the voice, like when a mother alters her voice to soothe her baby. Tone of voice can have a powerful impact on a child's sense of safety. In situations where a child is dysregulated, consider the tone and pitch of your voice. A soft and gentle voice is more likely to deescalate an overwhelmed child.</p>
 <p><b>Posture and gestures</b></p>	<p>Consider your posture and gestures. How you approach the child will determine how safe or unsafe they may feel. If your posture is puffed up with your shoulders back, the child may read you as defensive and primed to fight. A posture that is strong, yet open and welcoming will help to calm the child. The child's implicit memory system may interpret certain postures or gestures as threatening, so stay attuned to the child and again be guided by them. Mirroring (while staying within your window of tolerance) is also important. Mirroring can convey empathy and a sense of feeling heard and this will help with co-regulation.</p>

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## Creating an environment of SAFETY

**Physical environment:** Consider sensory factors – what promotes calm? What might trigger defensive/threat response?

**“Human” environment** How do we use our voice, face and bodies to communicate safety? Do our interactions with students embody empathy and acceptance? Do our relationships prioritise predictability and consistency?



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## What might safety look like in practice?

Safety is connected to predictability (Porges, 2012)

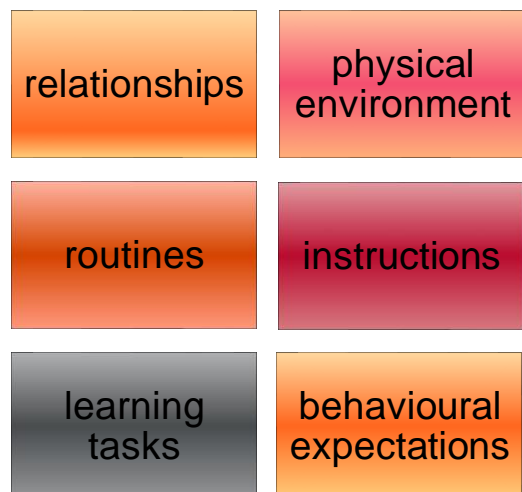


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# My Safety Map

The diagram features a central line-art figure of a person with arms outstretched. Five rounded rectangular boxes are arranged around the figure, each containing a question and a small icon:

- Top: "Who helps me feel the safest?" (Icon: three people)
- Right: "What objects/things help me feel safest" (Icon: a teddy bear)
- Bottom Right: "Where have I felt the safest in my life?" (Icon: a lifebuoy)
- Bottom Left: "Where do I feel the safest now?" (Icon: a house)
- Left: "When have I felt the safest in my life?" (Icon: a person sitting)

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# Holding Hope

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What are your hopes for the children/young people you work with?

What are your hopes for your school?

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**Thank you for your participation!**

**Keep in touch with us....**



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