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# Trauma Responsive Practice.

## NT Families

May 2022

*Understanding the neurobiology of trauma, safety, regulation and self-care*



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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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### Take care of you today....

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 do what you need to do to feel safe. We are happy for you to talk to the facilitator if you need to.

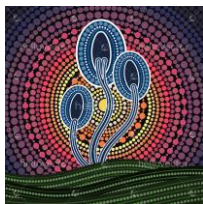


Image: Hellovector.com

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**Our journey today....**

- Importance of relationships and culture
- Brain development
- Understanding the impacts of trauma
- Creating Safety
- 5 Parenting Systems
- Repairing the impacts of trauma
- Self Care



Image: Aboriginal Art Store

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**Importance of relationship and culture**



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**A collective view of relationships**



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I need connection to my CULTURE

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The Importance of Culture

A protective factor

Safety: Belonging  
Relationships: Connection  
Meaning making: identity

Our culture influences our brain development.  
How has it influenced yours? Think about:

- Sense of safety
- Relationships
- Meaning making

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Brain Development

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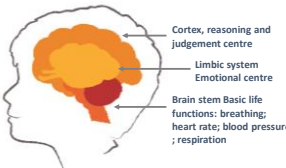
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### Brain development

- Brain development is sequential
- One of the ways our brain develops is vertically, from the bottom to the top
- Some neurodevelopmental delays such as those effected by trauma can cause brain changes. However with the right support the brain can be repaired through neuroplasticity.



Children's brains need support to grow and learn      My brain grows upwards, step by step.

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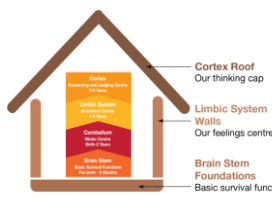
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### Brain development metaphor - My Brain House

- We build our brain from the bottom to the top- like building a house
- We reinforce parts of our house as we grow, with our roof continuing to develop into our mid 20s.
- A student who is calm and focused at school will likely be functioning with a strong standing brain house, from foundation to roof.
- In times of great stress bits of our brain house can come down and require repair. This is achievable and our brain house can stand strong again.



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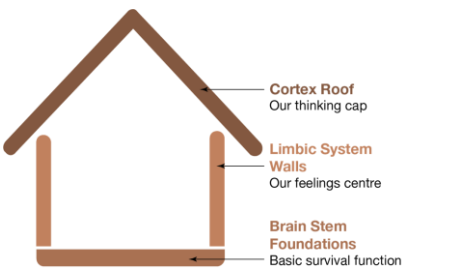
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### Staged/Safe- A brain development metaphor - My Brain House

- Our brain house can experience adversity. This can effect its structural integrity. If we get rattled our thinking cap roof can come off, leaving our feeling walls exposed. This can lead to strong emotions coming out without our thinking cap to help us contain our feelings.
- When this happens we can struggle to find words to communicate as our words flew off with our thinking cap roof.
- If we are deeply shook our roof and walls might come down and leave only our foundation. Our foundation is very strong and reliable. In these times we have our basic life functions to focus on to get us through- eg. our breathing, our heartbeat.
- Everyone's rooves blow off from time to time. Given we have all built our own brain houses, we are all equipped to support each other to repair our houses together.

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### Understanding the impacts of trauma

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### Experiences of trauma.....Discuss in pairs...

What does trauma:

- Look like
- Sound like
- Feel like

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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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### Developmental trauma

Occurs when the foetus in utero, baby, child or adolescent experiences trauma, from abuse and neglect during these stages of development



Image source: ©ACF2021

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
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### Intergenerational Trauma

- The prefix 'inter' is from the Latin meaning between, or among, together or mutually together

Inter-generational trauma is passed down directly from one generation to the next



- Inter-generational trauma occurs directly through experiencing the trauma or from seeing or hearing about it

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### Transgenerational trauma

- The prefix 'trans' is from the Latin word meaning **across or crossing, through, beyond or on the other side**
- Trans-generational trauma is transmitted across a number of generations



"This type of trauma occurs without direct stimulus but is instead transmitted from a parent who has experienced a traumatic event"  
(Davidson & Mellor 2001 as cited in Goodman, West & Cicicic, 2008)

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### Transgenerational transmission and cultural impacts

Duran and Duran (1995) suggest that:

**"...historical trauma becomes embedded in the cultural memory of a people and is passed on by the same mechanisms by which culture is generally transmitted, and therefore becomes 'normalised' within that culture."**



**Culture and development**

- Our culture influences our brain development
- Our relationships influence our culture and our culture influences our relationships
- Sensory data is interpreted according to our culture long before our ability to think about and understand our culture

Atkinson, J., *Trauma Trails: Recreating Song Lines*, 2002

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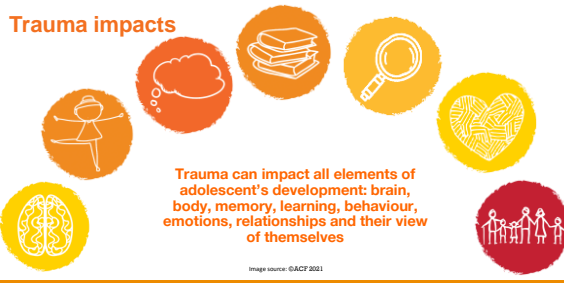
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### Trauma impacts



**Trauma can impact all elements of adolescent's development: brain, body, memory, learning, behaviour, emotions, relationships and their view of themselves**

Image source: ©ACPF 2021

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Three Core Concepts in Early Development

# 3 Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development

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## Medial Pre-frontal Cortex and the Right Orbito-frontal Cortex

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

Image source: CAFCP 2011

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## Creating Safety



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Behavioural Functions	Body Functions
<b>Social Engagement</b> Soothing and calming Indicates safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lowers or raises vocalisation pitch</li> <li>Regulates middle ear muscles to perceive human voice</li> <li>Changes facial expressivity</li> <li>Head turning</li> <li>Tears and eyelids</li> <li>Slows or speeds heart rate</li> </ul>
<b>Mobilisation</b> Fight or Flight Active Freeze Moderate or extreme danger	<b>Hyper arousal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increases heart rate</li> <li>Sweat increases</li> <li>Inhibits gastrointestinal function</li> <li>Narrowing blood vessels - to slow blood flow to extremities</li> <li>Release of adrenaline</li> </ul>
<b>Immobilisation</b> Collapse or submission Death feigning Increased pain threshold Conserves metabolic resources Life threatening situations	<b>Hypo - arousal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slows heart rate</li> <li>Constricts bronchi</li> <li>Stimulates gastrointestinal function</li> </ul>

by Stephen Porges

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### Creating Safety

A young person's cortical capacity is impaired by trauma-as a result subcortical functioning becomes dysregulated

In order to regain cortical capacity, essential for learning, we must restore emotional regulation.

How do we create:

- Regulation (calm)
- Engagement
- Connection
- Control

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### polyvagal Theory

I am showing you...	On the inside...	I need you to...
<b>ORBITAL/FRONTAL</b> Feeding, talking, interacting, relationships, connections, awareness No threat, safe, calm • Feeding • Talking • Interacting • Feeding, talking and interaction	Safe, calm, happy, clear, aroused, reflective, playful, curious • Safe • Playful • Curious • Reflective	Help me to interact • Play and have fun with me • Be curious and playful • Use reflection and problem solving skills so I can learn from you • Help me acknowledge my strengths and my skills
<b>VENTRAL/VENTRAL</b> Fight, flight, active freeze, action oriented No threat, may calm • Fighting • Running away • Submission	Safe, but • Active, engaged, aware that I'm not safe • Not safe • Not calm • Not playful • Not curious	Help me to be engaged • Be safe • Be engaged - use skills, attention and responses to me • Use resources that I've created, perhaps language, sensory, thinking, etc. I can't • Connect with me when you're not safe • Be playful • Be curious • Be kind and helpful • Be safe and independent - use me as and our relationship to learn
<b>POSTERIOR/POSTERIOR</b> Fight, flight, freeze, submission, dissociation, withdrawal, collapse No threat, may calm • Withdrawal • Fighting • Collapse • Feigning	Safe, but • Dissociated, withdrawn, flat, withdrawn, no responding • No body state • No attention • No eye contact • No facial expression • No vocalisation	Help me to be engaged • Be engaged - use skills, attention and responses with me • Be safe and protected - I'm not safe • Be kind and helpful • Be safe and independent - use me as and our relationship to learn

Based on the work of Dr. Steve Porges, Dr. Stephen Porges, and Dr. Bruce Perry

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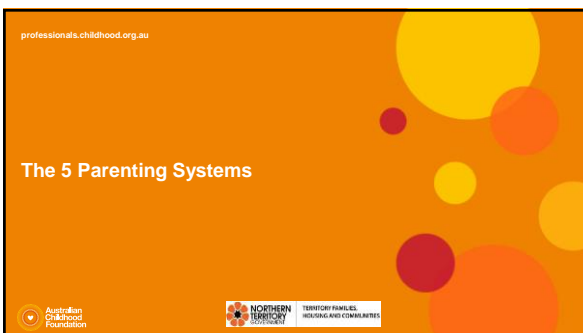
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### Relationship is the key! .....Brain systems that support parenting

**Parental Approach System**

- Get close to the child without becoming defensive.

**Parental Reward System**

- Enjoy interacting with the child.

**Parental Child Reading System**

- Understand the mind of the child.

**Parental Meaning Making System**

- Make sense of our experiences with the child and our social life.

**Parental Executive System**

- Regulate interpersonal conflicts between approach and avoidance, pro-social and defensive reactions.




Image source: Dreamtime

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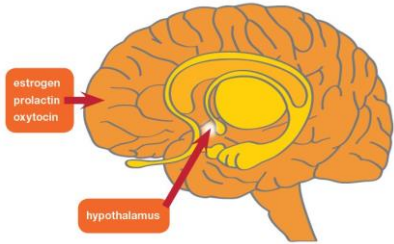
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### Approach System



estrogen  
prolactin  
oxytocin

hypothalamus

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### Early Adversity impacts our Parenting ability

The environment we grow up in can shape how we use our right and left brain systems of avoidance and approach. If we begin life exposed to insensitive caregiving our right brained harm avoidance system is likely to be used a lot. Instead of feeling protected and connected with our caregiver, we are more likely to need to shift into a defensive state of protest or collapse in order to try to protect ourselves.



Left side of brain | Right side of brain

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### Reward System

1. We become a parent which generates hormones that talk to our hypothalamus.

2. Our hypothalamus releases oxytocin (the love hormone) which activates the reward system.

3. The reward system works by this area: sending dopamine to the orbitofrontal cortex and the nucleus accumbens.

Orbitofrontal cortex plays a key role in processing rewarding experiences and helps us create positive parenting memories.

When the Nucleus accumbens is activated we become highly motivated to approach things that have led to reward in the past. It can become activated in response to expectations of positive interactions with our child.

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### Child Reading System

Facial Expression  
Tone of Voice  
Body Language  
Gestures

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### Meaning Making System

Well-Connected Brain  
Utilizing the front part of the brain

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

Open Flexible and Adaptive | Closed and Rigid

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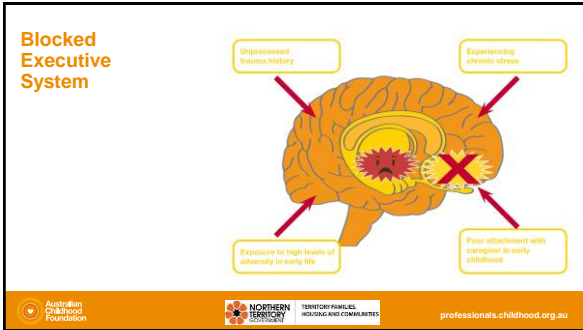
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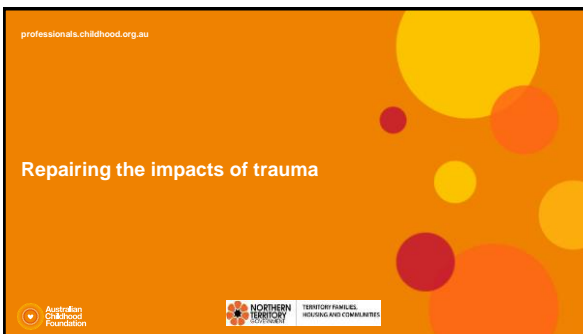
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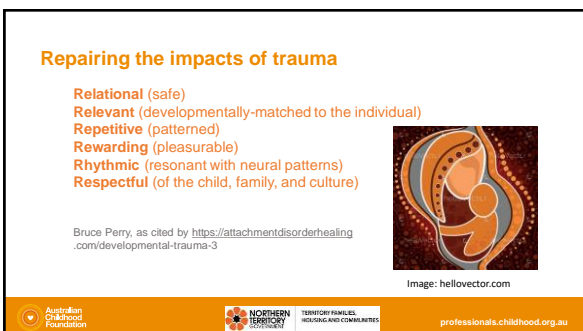
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**Safety and listening the child**

- Model attunement
- Ensure that the child is seen and kept in focus throughout the assessment and that account is always taken of the child's perspective
- Are they ready-how long can you sit and wait
- Validate what the child is feeling
- Check meaning
- Make sense of what is happening for the child
- What will have meaning



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**PACE**

- Playfulness
- Accepting
- Curious
- Empathetic





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**PACE Helps**

- The social engagement system come online
- Connect the prefrontal cortex (thinking brain) to the lower regions of the brain (emotional and survival brain)
- Calm the threat sensing amygdala by sending a message of safety.
- Connect children and their caregivers
- Aid the growth of regulation skills.
- Build the ability to reflect
- Develops the child make meaning of themselves, their stories and their behaviour.

**PACE uses all 5 parent brain systems (approach, reward, child reading, meaning making and executive)**



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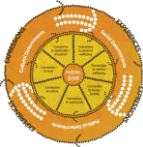
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**Key considerations**

- There is no magic wand!
- It takes time and patience: persistence and repetition is a must
- You matter in this work!
- Your relationship with the child is key
- Each child is individual which adds to the complexity
- Trial and error is common
- A titrated approach is important





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**Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount**

Respecting diversity should be taken to mean 'having the same aims for people's wellbeing and safety but findings different ways to achieve them' that are more appropriate to the person's different perspective.

Being child-safe respects cultural difference:

- thinks about safety and wellbeing concepts from a cultural perspective
- takes steps to develop cultural competence to respond in a culturally appropriate manner
- takes guidance from experienced others (for example, seek advice from recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisations in regards to the needs of children from these backgrounds), and
- approach family cultural contexts with sensitivity.



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Looking after ourselves....

Self-care





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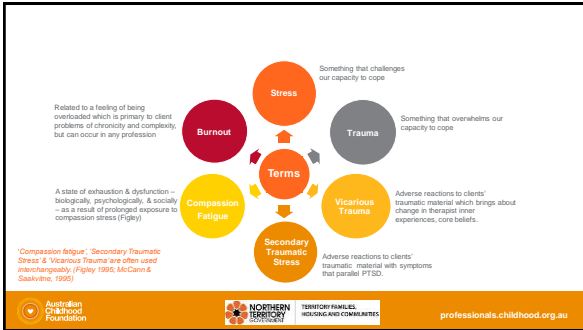
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### Impact of working with trauma

**Signs and symptoms**

How this might look at work:

- Decreased communication- staff putting notes up to advise of things
- Decreased ability to accept change or adapt- holding information
- Decreased ability to try new things/explore
- Increased sick days, late to work
- Decreased focus on tasks
- Memory issues
- Avoidance working with traumatic material

Logos for Australian Childhood Foundation and Northern Territory Health and Communities are at the bottom.

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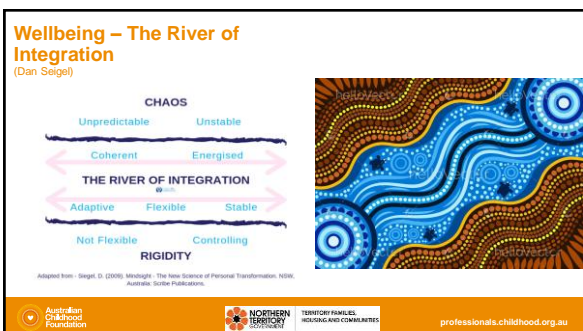
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**Importance of supervision**

- Compared to case conferences, one-on-one supervision better supports the critical reasoning required for child safety (Munro 1999)
- Reflective regular supervision promotes staff well-being
- Reduces staff turnover
- Identify specific and ongoing training
- Formal and informal supervision provide space and permission for workers for workers to reflect on emotional responses to the work
- Peer supervision and support enable the reduction of isolation, promotes safety and develops greater transparency to identify risk and opportunity
- Models of supervision

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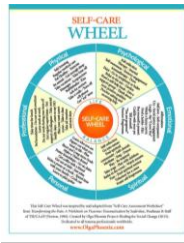
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**Prevention: Personal level**

- Maintaining self care and prioritising healthy lifestyle/personal wellbeing
- Life outside of work incorporates: social, relaxing, spiritual, fun aspects
- Supportive and healthy relationships
- Work-life balance : maintaining healthy boundaries
- Personal & professional values align with the work
- Personal wellbeing plans are well-integrated & effective



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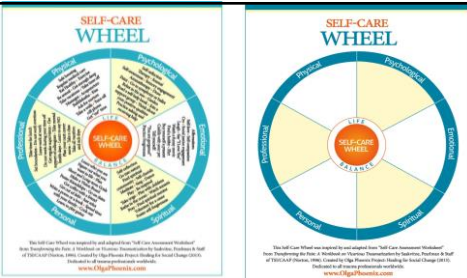
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**A Handful of M&Ms**

 Share one thing you do for yourself emotionally	 Share one thing you do for yourself mentally
 Share one thing you do for yourself physically	 Share one thing you do for yourself professionally
 Share one thing you do for yourself spiritually	 Share one thing you do for yourself relationally

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**Tree of Hope**



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Thank you for coming today...





Image: Pinterest

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