Safety and Understanding and Responding to Behaviour using the SMART PRACTICE Audit Tool

Mount Gambier North PS
Trauma Aware Schools Initiative Project

June 20th 2022
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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Success Criteria – Part 1

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

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Success criteria – Part 2

- Expanded our knowledge of the SMART PRACTICE Framework.
- Built our knowledge of how to assist sites in their understanding how to use the SMART Audit Tool to complete a review of current trauma responsive practices;
- Considered our responses and strategies to support students and build a plan of action to enable effective support and healing outcomes; and
- Reflected on how to develop a plan for ongoing monitoring and review

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Part 1 - Safety and Understanding and Responding to Behaviour

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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."

(Porges, 2015, p.115).

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Polyvagal Theory

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Polyvagal theory and protective responses

by Stephen Porges

Behavioural Functions	Body Functions
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 slowblood 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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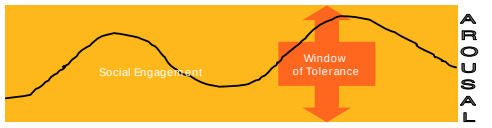
Regulated Arousal

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

Freeze Physically immobilized, frozen, tense musculature

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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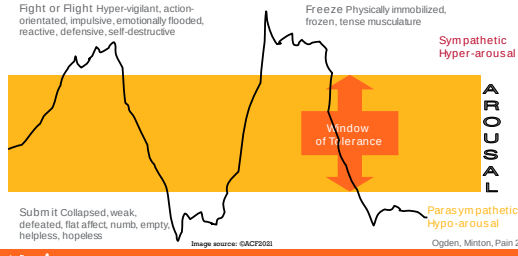
Dys-regulated Arousal

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

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Teaching students about the WOT

Hyperarousal

Fight
Flight
Active Freeze

Social engagement

When we feel and are safe we will be able to:
- **Play well**
- **Engage well with others and our environment**
- **Think well and make decisions**

Hypoarousal

Feigned death
Flop
Collapse

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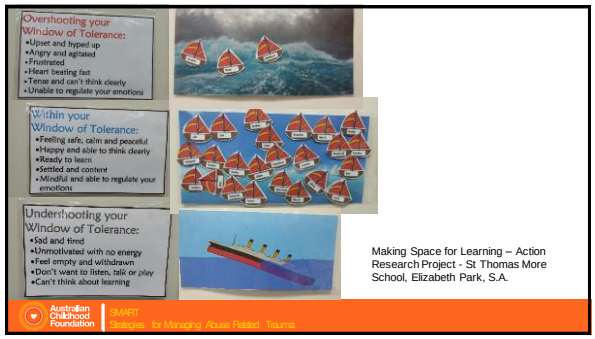

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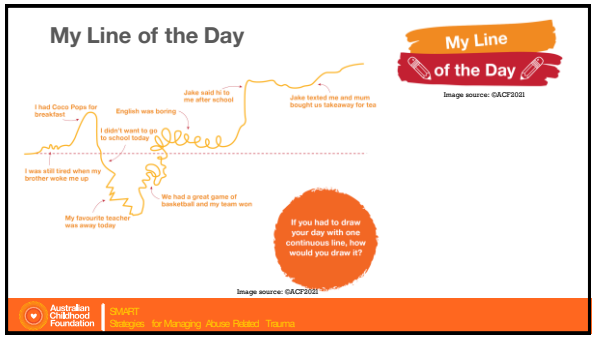
My Line of the Day
My Line of the Day
Image source: ©ACF2021
I had Coco Pops for breakfast
English was boring
Jake said hi to me after school
Jake texted me and mum bought us takeaway for tea
I didn't want to go to school today
I was still tired when my brother woke me up
We had a great game of basketball and my team won
My favourite teacher was away today
If you had to draw your day with one continuous line, how would you draw it?
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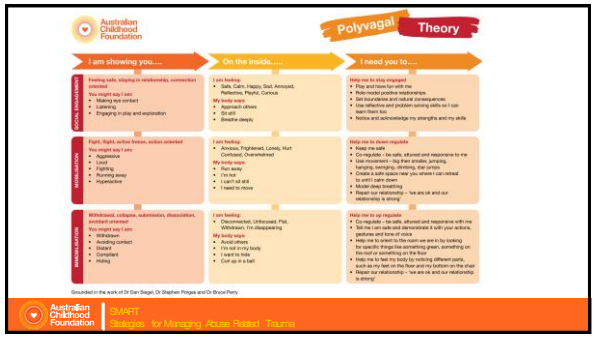
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Polyvagal Theory
I am showing you....
On the inside....
I need you to....
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
MOBILISATION
IMMOBILISATION
Grounded in the work of Dr Dan Siegel, Dr Stephen Porges and Dr Bruce Perry
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Understanding behaviour

Rather than asking "What's wrong with you, ask, 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

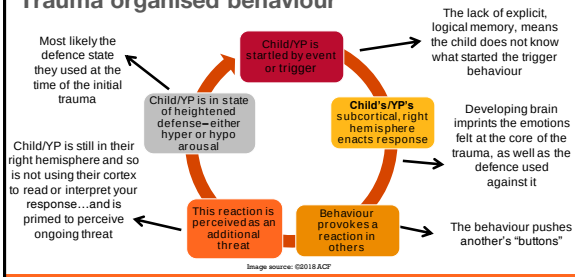

Image source: ©2018 ACF

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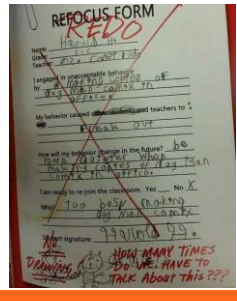
Behaviour



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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	• Defiance • Wants to assert dominance	• Physiological response to feelings of unsafety – their body won't allow them to make eye contact (NEED – safety) • Student has withdrawn and cannot hear/process instructions (NEED – connection/engaging)

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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

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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?

Image source: ©ACF2021

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What might safety look like in practice?

Safety is connected to predictability (Porges, 2012)

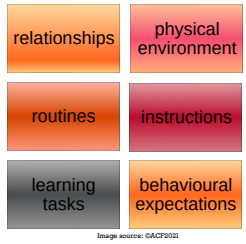

Image source: ©ACF2021

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My Safety Map
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Part 2 – Responding to Behaviour using the SMART PRACTICE Audit Tool
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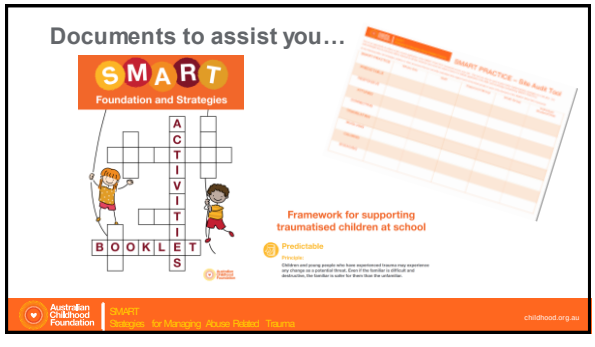
Documents to assist you…
SMART
Foundation and Strategies
ACTIVITIES
BOOKLET
Framework for supporting traumatised children at school
Predictable
Australian Childhood Foundation
SMART Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma
childhood.org.au

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SMART Discussion Papers

Australian Childhood Foundation | SMART Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma | childhood.org.au

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Reflection

Discussion Paper Reflection

Section 2. Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How does this knowledge facilitate further understanding of a specific student at your school?
2. Does this knowledge change the ways in which you would work with this student?
3. Which element(s) of SMART PRACTICE are of most value when working with the ways that trauma can affect children's memory functioning?
4. What have you utilized as an effective strategy for working with students to support their memory functioning? Is this a strategy specifically for the individual student or a whole class or whole school plan?
5. Do you have a challenge you would like to share with colleagues in looking for a different support path?

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Reflection

Section 2. Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What do you see as the biggest issue that influences the level of collegiate support for SMART at your site - be it positively or negatively?
2. Which of these questions is of most relevance to your site and your work? Why?
3. How have you engaged your colleagues effectively with the SMART PRACTICE framework?
4. Please share one example of a collaborative process or strategy that has worked well for your site.

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PRACTICE Frameworks

What are practice frameworks?

How do they guide your practice?

What practice frameworks guide your practice?

What does a developmental trauma-informed practice framework offer us?

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A practice framework is a co-ordinated articulation of a set of aspirations of professionals working together to make a difference to the people they are supporting. It allows professionals to know that their approach is in keeping with the values and principles of the organisation. It guides decision making and reflects the outcomes that are being aimed for – particularly when working with children and young people.

Dr Joe Tucci, CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation

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What is the SMART PRACTICE Framework

- The SMART PRACTICE Framework and Site Audit Tool is a framework to **guide practice** through a trauma-informed lens
- This framework is a starting point for **responding** and outlines the key points in terms of effective and healing work with traumatised children.
- The framework should inform best **practice** when supporting children and young people who have experienced trauma.

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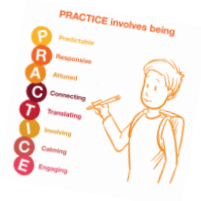
PRACTICE Acronym

The PRACTICE acronym was developed:

- in conjunction with the Department of Education and ACF.
- to provide people a way to remember the areas of responding.



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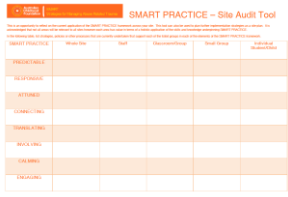
Site Audit Tool Reflection



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Using the Site Audit Tool – celebration and reflection….

The Site Audit Tool INVITES Educators, Leaders and Support Staff to celebrate and reflect on their current practices, policies and processes

Invite your participants to consider their main area of influence/work and what processes/policies and strategies support staff and students.

- **Leadership** – Whole Site and Staff
- **Classroom Teachers** – Classroom/Group and Individual Student/Child
- **Specialist Teachers/SSO's/BSSO's** – small groups and Individual Student/Child

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Implementing trauma responsive practice

- What do you already do well across your school/site in terms of trauma responsive practice?
- Is the focus of that practice on individual students, small groups, classroom groups, year levels or whole of school?
- In thinking about these practices, we know that:
  - many are already being implemented
  - these practices are relationally based
  - these actions are not always reflected in policies and procedures
  - consistent application is key

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Opportunity for review and planning

Utilisation the SMART PRACTICE Framework provides an opportunity to consider what is already being done and how it can be enhanced or improved.

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Transforming trauma through PRACTICE

How might you use the PRACTICE Site Audit Tool to reflect on your site's and your own practice?

The next slides provide you with an opportunity to reflect on each element of the PRACTICE Framework, and ideas to encourage you to consider in your own practice.

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SMART Audit Tool

SMART PRACTICE – Site Audit Tool

SMART PRACTICE	Whole Site	Staff	Classroom/Group	Small Group	Individual Student/Child
PREDICTABLE					
RESPONSIVE					
ATTUNED					
CONNECTING					
TRANSLATING					
INVOLVING					
CALMING					
ENGAGING					

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Predictable

Section 1: Reviewing the SMART PRACTICE framework

Predictable

Traumatised children experience any change as a possible threat. Building an environment that is as sensorily familiar as possible reduces threat responses.

Reflection: *In your school or workplace, what processes or procedures do you have in place to help traumatised children manage staff changes?*

Specific strategies to support this element might include:

- Induction processes for new staff and TRT's reflect the consistent model of responding to children at the site.
- Set up a "shadow board" of items student/child will need for each session or class.
- Transition warnings could be multi-modal eg: music, cue cards, colours.
- Involve the child/ren in any room changes

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Responsive

Responsive

Responses to children's behaviour should always stem from an understanding of the trauma-based origins of that behaviour. This may mean a disciplining framework is not always the best path.

Reflection: *How have you specifically responded to a child or young person's behaviour while maintaining your relationship with them?*

Specific strategies to support this element might include:

- Provide a space for calming down that contains reminders of the individual teacher or key person eg: photos, pieces of clothing, specific pen etc.
- Explore and incorporate the idea of "time in" rather than "time out". What will it look like in the context of your school/centre?
- Utilise restorative principles and questions but clear about expectations. In many instances, you may need to lead the restorative responses.
- Notice attempts at behaviour changes, not just successes. Provide positive feedback quietly and non-effusively.

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Attuned

Attuned

Because trauma is fundamentally a disintegrative process, children are often disconnected from their own emotional and physiological responses. The more we can understand patterns and processes of responding, the better able we are to understand the child and help them to understand their own reactions.

Reflection: *In reflecting on the children with whom you work, what patterns of emotional responding have you identified? How did you undertake that tracking process?*

Specific strategies to support this element might include:

- Reflect on teaching strategies that seem to escalate behaviour and equally, that support calm. Feed this back to the whole staff team.
- Set up a feelings feedback loop between school/centre and home and/or after care.
- Support the child to understand experiences of happiness and joy- and any patterns associated with those.
- Ensure that attunement incorporates physiological responses and is not just a linguistic exercise.

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Connecting

Connecting

To begin the healing process, traumatised children need to start with a process of feeling reconnected to themselves- their feelings, their physical responses and their strengths.

Reflection: *Children who have experienced trauma need to build a repertoire of success, rather than a litany of failure. How often do you help these children experience success? How?*

Specific strategies to support this element might include:

- Build a symbolic emotional vocabulary considering accessing all the senses eg: textures, sounds/music, colours.
- Use photography to connect the child's inner sensations with external representation.
- Make specific links between activities and capacity or skills.
- Understand the child may feel overwhelmed by their own emotional responses so provide an environment that enables them to experience regulation.

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Translating

Translating

The way we structure a story of understanding about our experiences is a crucial integrative process for engaging with life. Children who have experienced trauma struggle to build those stories of understanding because of the impacts of that trauma.

Reflection: *How do you provide a record of the children's time with you to each individual child? How often do you review it with the child?*

Specific strategies to support this element might include:

- Link current work/activities to possible futures.
- Meaning making does not need to be language based.
- Provide fun experiences for all children "just because"- not as a reward for a particular behaviour.
- Do calendar activities leading up to significant school/centre events eg: excursion, camp, concert.

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Involving

Involving

Children who have experienced trauma often struggle with relationships with their peers. However, these relationships can be a source of healing and nurturing when developed and supported.

Reflection: *What strategies or programs do you have in place that build friendship skills, tolerance, respect and safety?*

Specific strategies to support this element might include:

- Building social groups around areas of interest not social capacity.
- Consider developmental sequencing of play. Provide opportunities for parallel play- regardless of the age of the child (including into adolescence)
- Provide structured activities for recess and lunchtime- this does not have to be teacher directed and does not have to include implements.
- The value of staff modelling social skills cannot be underestimated.

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Calming

Calming

Invariably, traumatised children are in a constant state of high arousal. To facilitate positive outcomes for these children at all levels (ie: educationally, socially, emotionally etc) we need to provide and support experiences of calm on a consistent and repetitive basis.

Reflection: *Within your role and your site, how can you provide consistent, rhythmic experiences of lowered arousal which is non-verbal? Does this mirror the soothing actions we might use with a very young child?*

Specific strategies to support this element might include:

- Provide rhythmic repeated calming activities or environments that mirror early soothing.
- Utilise calming activities that focus the child's attention eg: fishtank, mindfulness, yoga poses.
- Be very clear of your own calmness levels to maintain your own capacity to think clearly and effectively.
- Work specifically around understanding what calm "feels like".

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Engaging

Engaging

As with calming, the element of engaging children in relationship is fundamental to our work with traumatised children. The experience of appropriate, supportive adult-child relational exchanges is instrumental to supporting children who have experienced abuse related trauma.

Reflection: *How do you ensure that all adults in your workplace respond in a consistent way to traumatised children?*

Specific strategies to support this element might include:

- How do staff access support in their work with traumatised children? Is it with external agencies and/or processes within the school/centre?
- Understand the child's experience of relationships within the school/centre.
- Ongoing support and T&D for staff is important for consistency of response.
- Link to all other relationship based policies and processes eg: anti-bullying, code of conduct.

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Reflective questions – review, gap analysis and action plan

- In reviewing the audit tool, what can you include regarding what you already do?
- Where are the gaps or areas for improvement based on the Audit Tool?
- What do you need to be able to reinforce what you already do and to address the identified gaps or work on the areas for improvement?
- What is your action plan?

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Holding Hope

Image source: ©ACF 2021

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….

www.childhood.org.au

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