

Making Space for Learning

Our Lady of La Vang Catholic School

25th July 2022

Trainer: Carolyn Grace



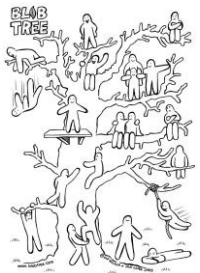
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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of this land and we pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future.



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How are you travelling at the moment?



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Principles guiding this session

Your emotional safety is paramount
Our learning is about shared wisdom
Curiosity and learning build our brains



Image source: G2021_ACF

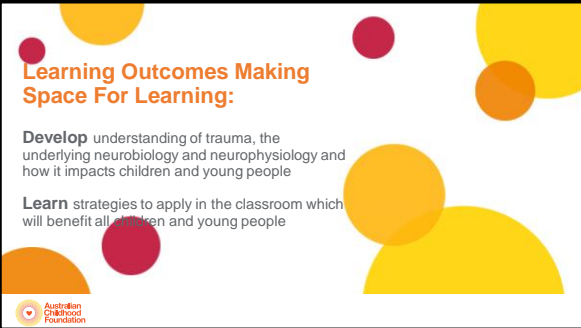
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Learning Outcomes Making Space For Learning:

Develop understanding of trauma, the underlying neurobiology and neurophysiology and how it impacts children and young people

Learn strategies to apply in the classroom which will benefit all children and young people



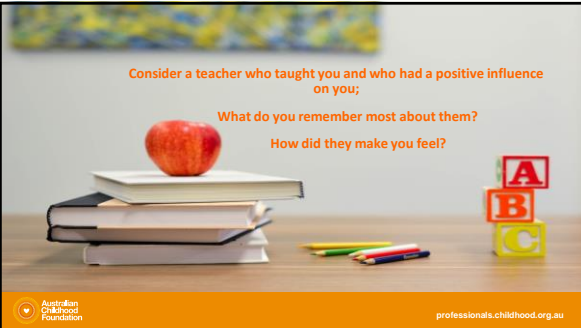
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Consider a teacher who taught you and who had a positive influence on you;

What do you remember most about them?

How did they make you feel?



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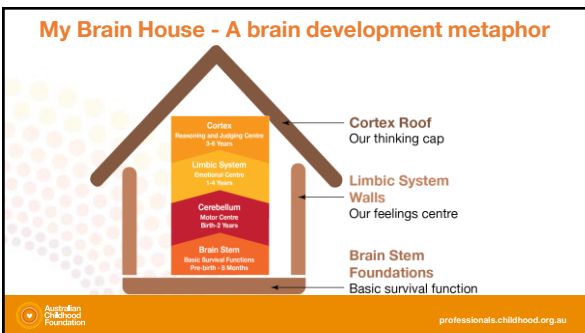
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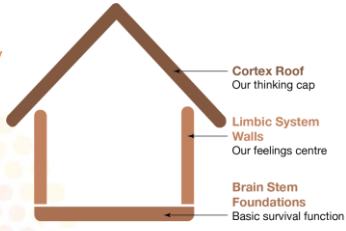


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A student's Brain
House needs safety and support from attuned and connected relationships in order to grow and learn
(Grace, 2022)



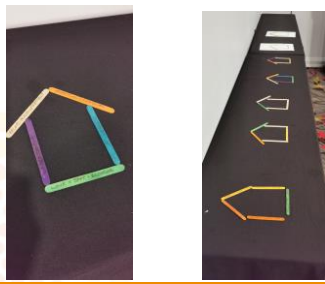
Cortex Roof
Our thinking cap

Limbic System Walls
Our feelings centre

Brain Stem Foundations
Basic survival function

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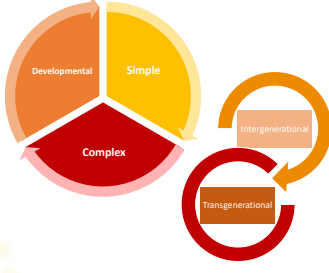
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Trauma

Any single, ongoing or cumulative experience which:

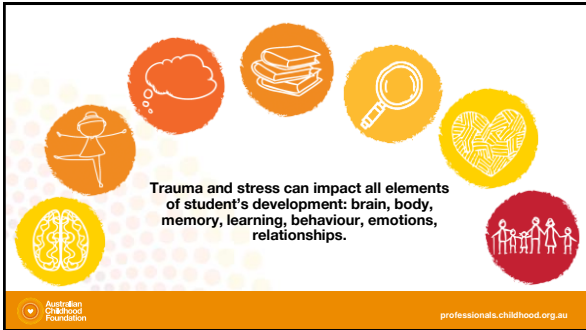
- is a response to a **perceived threat**, usually to survival
- **overwhelms** our capacity to cope
- feels/is **outside our control**
- often evokes a **physiological** and **psychological** set of responses based on fear or avoidance



Developmental Simple Complex Intergenerational Transgenerational

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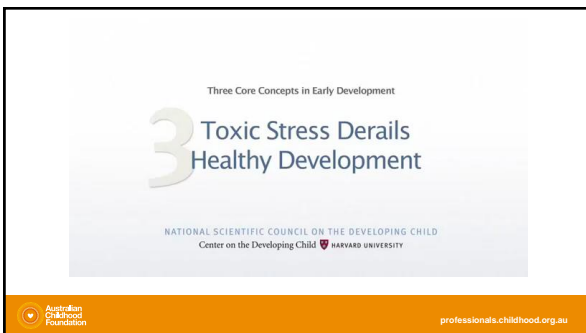
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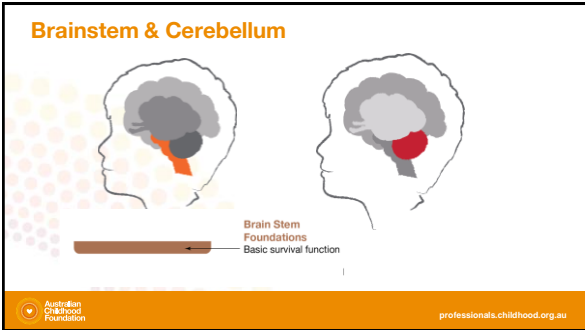
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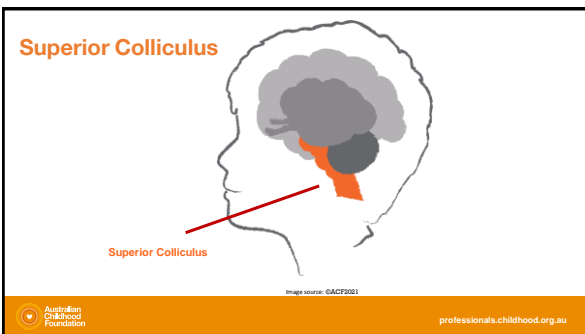
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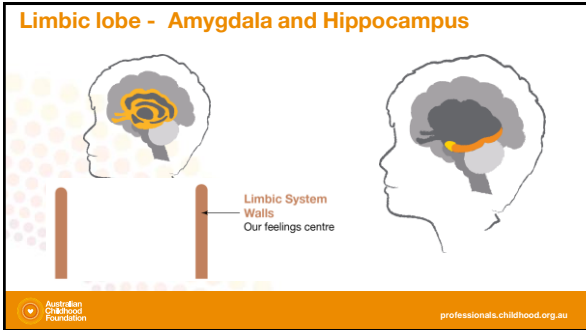
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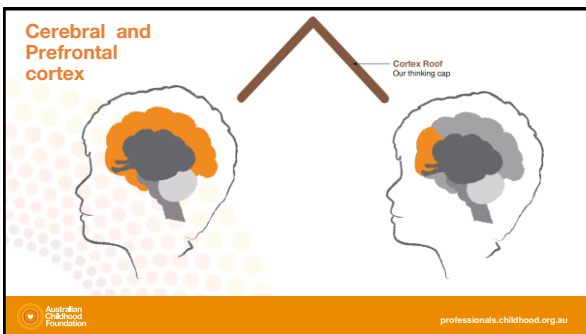
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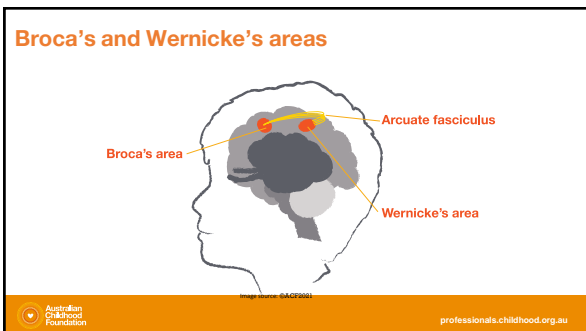
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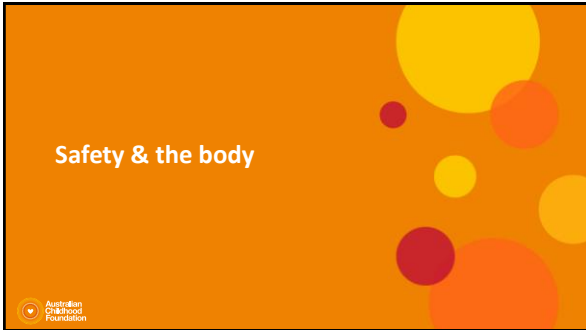
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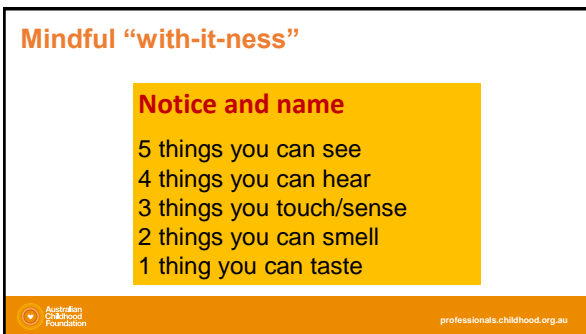
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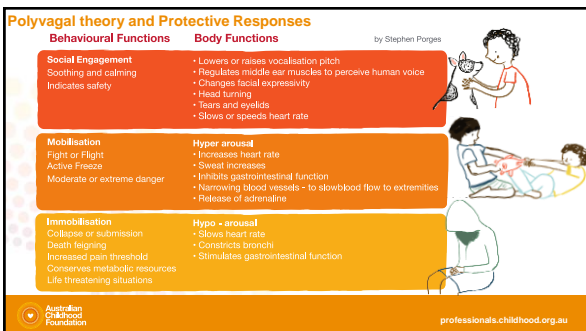
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Neuroception

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

Forgas, 2015, p.115b

Image source: ©ACTF2021

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Polyvagal Theory & Sensing Safety

Mobilisation Fight, Flight, Active Freeze	I don't feel safe	I am filled with energy I need to move I need to act now	Red Faced, hot and sweaty Fast beating heart Muscles tensed Moving body, hard to find stillness
Social Engagement	I feel safe	I am all set to play and explore I am ready to connect I am open to your ideas	Making Eye contact Orienting towards those around Listening Relaxed, loose, flowing body
Immobilisation Flop	I don't feel safe	I am numbed out I am retreating inside I am collapsed, small, and distant	I have cold extremities Glaazed eyes, distant stare Slow movement Lethargic & passive body

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Detecting Safety with our Social Engagement System

- We feel safe together in this state.
- This is a calm behavioral state
- Often characterized by mirroring and reciprocation.
- Tell tale signs-- people are orientated towards one another with engaged faces

Neuroception of Safety
Neuroception = the way our neural circuits quickly and implicitly work out if situations or people are safe or dangerous

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What trauma or stress response can look like

Cognitions & Behaviours:

- Asking lots of questions
- Bravado (speech or actions)
- Attention, concentration and memory difficulties
- Black & White thinking, negative thoughts
- Generalised worries
- Rigid thinking & behaviours
- Compulsions/ repetitive behaviours
- Ruminating – what if's, should, cyclic thoughts

Mobilised Responses:

- Hypervigilant
- Edgy/jumpy
- Irritable – easily annoyed
- Poor recovery from distraction
- 'silly', loud, over-excitement
- Unsettled, sleep difficulties
- Outbursts, aggression
- Defensive, taking things personally
- Increased expectations of self and others
- Inflexible, 'controlling'
- Sensitive to sensory input

Immobilised Responses:

- Flat, numb affect
- Disengaged, disinterested
- Withdrawn
- "boredom"
- Lethargic, unmotivated
- Disconnected from peers
- Developmental regression – e.g. with abilities to self-soothe, self-care/hygiene, toileting
- Changes to appetite

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Using the WOT in the classroom - An example from a Catholic Primary in SA

Overshooting your Window of Tolerance:

- Upright and popped 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

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My Day feeling safe and unsafe

Mobilised
I don't feel safe zone

Socially Engaged
I feel safe zone

Immobilised
I don't feel safe zone

My Day →

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Strategies

- 1. Mobilisation**
 - Rhythm
 - Containing
 - Grounding
- 2. Immobilisation**
 - Orientation to space
 - Orientation to senses
 - Engaging the spine
- 3. Social Engagement**
 - Prosody
 - Breathing

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Strategies - MOBILISED responses - *Fight*

What it might look like

- angry, aggressive, irritable
- confrontational, controlling, shouting
- blaming others, pushing others away, argumentative

Supportive responses/strategies

- Help me stabilise my hyper-aroused nervous system
- Rhythm, containing and grounding
- Match my energy before helping me calm down
- Hanging, swinging, climbing, marching
- Stomping, jumping on the spot, drumming

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Strategies - MOBILISED responses - *Flight*

What it might look like

- Anxious, silly, manic
- Running away, hiding, disruptive
- Difficulty with free play, silly voices, distracting

Supportive responses

- Be kind and patient when "finding" or collecting me
- Offer me an easy task/chore to do
- Help me settle my body – weighted blankets, heat packs
- Engage senses
- Encourage me to hang/swing/carry something heavy

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Strategies MOBILISED responses – Freeze

What it might look like

- Arousal is high, but movement is inhibited
- May look confused or distracted
- Scanning the room, dilated pupils, wide eyes

Supportive responses/strategies

- Be curious about the freeze state- places that are less frozen than others?
- Gently facilitate movement eg, Wiggling one finger
- Play with metaphors like thawing ice
- Encourage breathing
- Engage senses



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Strategies - IMMOBILISED responses - Submit

What it might look like

- low, sad, flat mood
- quiet, compliant
- alone, withdrawn

Supportive responses

- Orienting to the space/grounding exercises
- Orienting the senses
- Alignment- engaging the spine



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Brain break



Aligning the Spine Activities

Our midline extends down our spine and when it is aligned there is no collapse or compression of the spine.

Under stress it is hard to maintain spinal alignment

Think, too, about seating options for students.

Movement breaks help

Activities to try:

- Move like you have a tail
- Tick lock like a clock until you find your centre
- Imagine being lifted by a hook from the top of your head, while feeling the pull of gravity on the tail of your spine.
- Zip yourself up or pull yourself up with an imaginary string
- Walk with a toy balanced on your head
- Stretch up and become a tree or a tall tower



Image source: ©ACPF2021



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Strategies for keeping students in their WOT.

- Routine and predictability
- Breath based activities
- Grounding activities
- Movement & Regulation activities
- Use of self – social engagement




Image source: ©ACF2021

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Supporting Social Engagement

Strategies to help students and young people to regulate and maintain or return to a neuroception of safety:

- **Prosody** – gentle calm voice (*brainstem/limbic*)
- **Facial expressions** - (*vagus nerve/ANS*)
- **Body language** - (*vagus nerve/ANS/right brain*)
- **Check in** with your own emotions/triggers (*right brain to right brain, co-regulation*)
- **Connection** relating (*limbic/cortex*)
- **Draw on strengths** (*limbic/cortex*)
- **Empathy** (*brainstem/limbic/cortex*)
- **Humour** (*limbic/cortex*)

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SPACE

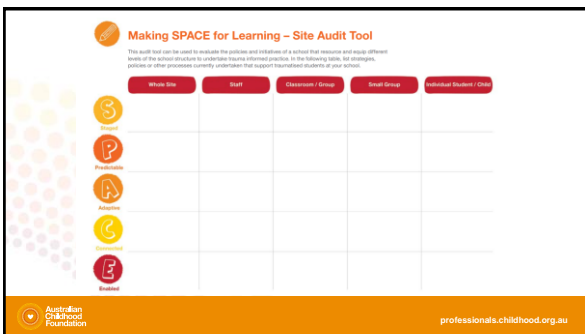


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Domains	Domain Explanation	Translated into needs statements
Staged	The brain develops sequentially. Sophisticated functions only emerge after basic functions are consolidated. We should resource children in line with what their developing brain's need.	Children's brains need support to grow and learn My brain grows up/wards step by step.
Predictable	Uncertainty and unpredictability can disrupt emotional wellbeing and threaten social competence. Strategies which promote stability and familiarity enhance social and emotional wellbeing.	Children need to know what they can count on I feel better when I know what is coming next.
Adaptive	Familiar behavioural routines are more likely to be enacted in response to life challenges than new ones. Familiar routines may not always be constructive. Strategies which promote adaptability in children's behavioural routines are ones that meet children creatively with multiple options for intervention.	Children need support to grow up healthy and strong There are things I need to grow up healthy and strong.
Connected	Children's internal maps for forming, maintaining and being in relationships are affected by their experiences of relationships throughout their lives. Negotiating relationships at school can be a source of stress when children have found them hard or unsafe in the past. Relationship with safe and consistent adults and peers form the foundation for change.	Children need to feel like they are connected. I need to feel like I am connected. Children need to feel safe and know about what makes a safe connection. I need to feel safe. I need safe connections in my life.
Enabled	All children can benefit from engaging in the process of understanding themselves more deeply. The capacity to identify feelings and learn how they relate to the body, thoughts, and behaviours is a worthwhile life skill. Learning to communicate feelings with each other enriches social cohesion. Making sense of our stories helps us to build coherent identities over time.	Children need to know more about what makes them who they are. I grow stronger as I learn more about what makes me, me.

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Staged

Children's and young people's brains need support to grow and learn

My brain grows upwards step by step

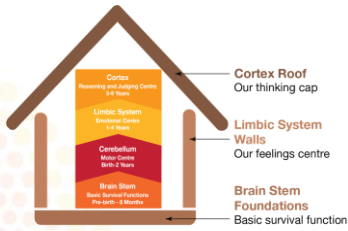
I need you to help me regulate me step by step...this helps me to feel safe



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Staged- A brain development metaphor - My Brain House



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Predictable

Children and young people need to know what and who they can count on

I feel better when I know what is coming next

I need predictable people and routines in my day...this helps me feel safe



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Creating Safety - Routine and Predictability

relationships	physical activities	MORNING	
routines	instructions	MIDDAY	
learning tasks	behavioural expectations	AFTERNOON	

Image source: (ACTE01)


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Predictable You

“I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.”

Hiam Ginott



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Adaptive

Children and young people need support to grow up healthy and strong

There are things I need to grow up healthy and strong.

I need both familiarity and adaptability in my **routines each day**...this helps me to feel safe


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Behaviour

- What is the behaviour telling me?
- What does this student need?

Rather than asking "What's wrong with you, ask, what do you need from me?..."



The diagram, titled "Behaviour Ant Hill", shows an ant hill with a central mound. A vertical line divides the mound into two sections. The top section is labeled "Behaviour" and the bottom section is labeled "Needs". Below the mound, the words "Feelings" and "Needs" are written. A speech bubble icon is in the top right corner.

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An illustration of a large, white, ant-like character with a single eye and antennae, standing on a brown ground surface. A red heart icon is in the top right corner.

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Connected

Students need to feel like they are connected.

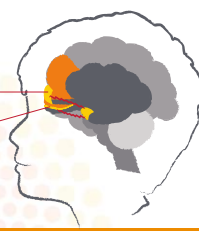
I need to know how to feel safe and know about what makes a safe connection.

I need to feel like I am connected to **myself and others around me....this makes me feel safe**

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Connection – using co-regulation



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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Group Activity – Connection



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Enabled

Children need to know more about what makes them who they are.
I grow stronger as I learn more about what makes me, me.

I need to know and learn more about who I am and why.

I need to feel like I am **enabled and able...this makes me feel safe**

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Mapping movement – a teacher’s example

An example from a 2022 Graduate Certificate in Developmental Trauma DFE SA student currently using this strategy with her students to map out their movement

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Holding hope

What are your hopes for your students?

What are your hopes for your school?

Image source: ©2022 ACF

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