

## DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA; SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Human brains develop largely through relationships and experiences; these factors shape our development.

We understand ourselves based in part on how others experience us and feed that back to us in the way they connect with us.

Our relational and world view templates are being developed in the *first 2 to 3 years of life*. This is the foundation we work from to navigate through our environments.

Age, gender, and type of traumatic events influence how the trauma will be experienced, the degree of impact, and the types of subsequent cognitive, emotional and behavioural expressions within a child.

Trauma is a deep violation of relational safety and therefore healed through safety in relationships.

Epigenetics is about how past generations experiences can influence future generations even if they never meet through gene expression triggered or modified and then passed on.

Behaviour is driven by seeking safety and unmet needs such as a sense of connection, therefore understanding what is driving the behaviour should guide our responses, not the behaviour itself.

Our brains develop and adapt to the world we are born in to for the greatest chance of survival. If the world we initially experience is scary, lonely, painful, or confusing then our brains adapt to survive that. Those adaptations are then carried into other environments.

Neuroplasticity allows us to create new connections (learning) and cull unused ones, however, it takes time with ongoing opportunities to practice.

When we are in a survival state (in a threat response – fight, flight, freeze and submit) our higher brain regions go offline. We cannot learn or connect with others when sensing threat (*real or perceived*)

When children are feeling threatened, they are not making conscious decisions based on cognitive thought processes, they are reacting from subcortical brain regions with survival of threat as the focus.

Developmental trauma can disrupt physical, cognitive and emotional development therefore children may differ in cognitive and emotional age from their chronological age.

As professionals we aim to bring a child into their Window of Tolerance (Dan Siegal) / Social Engagement state (Stephen Porges) before doing anything else so that they are better able to access all regions of their brain that support learning and engagement.