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Working with children who have experienced trauma

October 2022




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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.



Safety




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At the end of today we will have:

Developed an understanding of:

- the story of brain development and the impact of trauma
- the importance of safety in responding to trauma and healing

Explored:

- the story behind behaviour
- activities and strategies that can help support children and young people who have experienced trauma



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Children and young people are like trees



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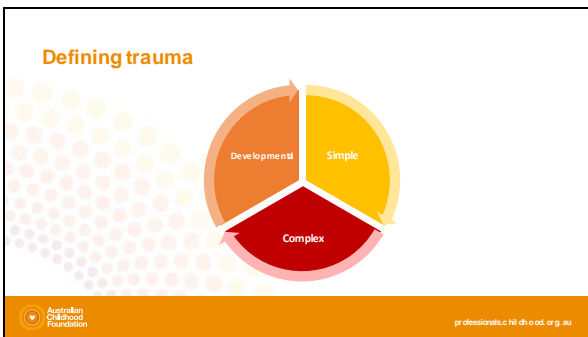
Children's brains grow in relationship with others

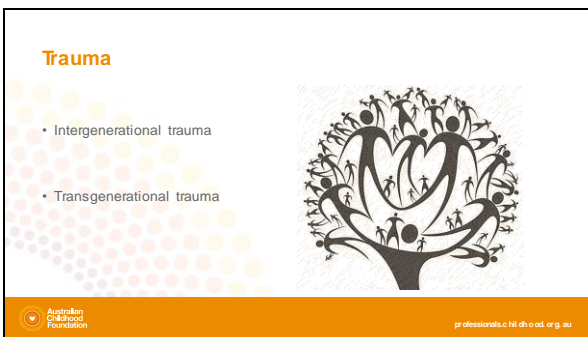
Carers, family
Community
Culture

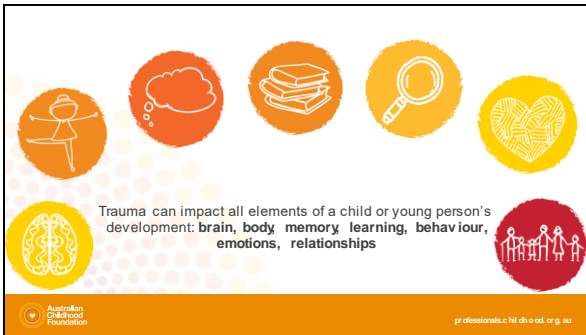


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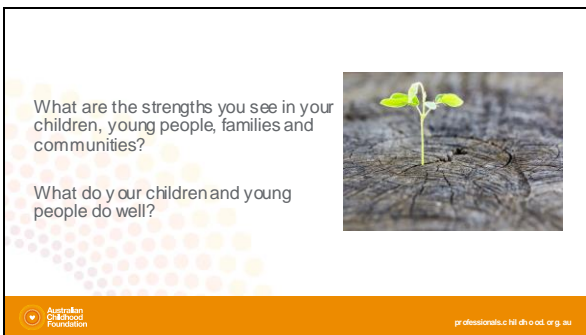







Infographic with icons for a person, a thought bubble, books, a magnifying glass, a heart, a brain, and a family. Text: "Trauma can impact all elements of a child or young person's development: **brain, body, memory, learning, behaviour, emotions, relationships**".

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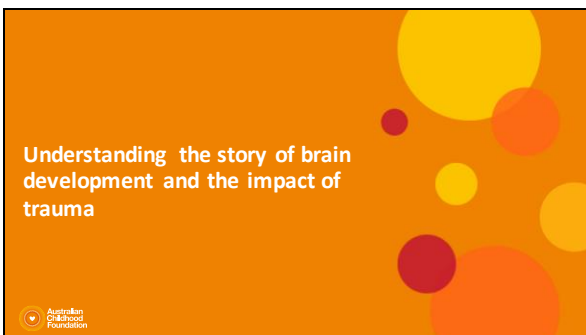


What are the strengths you see in your children, young people, families and communities?



What do your children and young people do well?

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Understanding the story of brain development and the impact of trauma

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How fast do our brains grow?

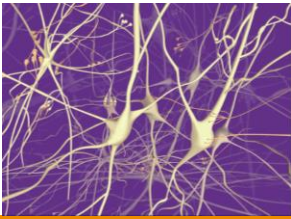


Newborn 400 grams 3 yearsold 1.1 kgs Adult 1.4 kgs



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Brain parts talk to each other through wires



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Growing and shedding pathways



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Neuroplasticity- Our brains' capacity to change



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Hand model of the brain (Dan Siegel)



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Basic life functions- Brainstem

- Basic life functions
- First part of our brain to develop
- This is the most developed brain part at birth
- Responsible for our heart beat, breathing, sucking, temperature control, blood pressure



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Brain stem under stress and trauma

- may experience fast or slower heart rate
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- sleep disturbances and unsettledness
- sucking and swallowing and digestion difficulties
- may feel hot or cold or not notice changes in temperature



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Movement and balance- Cerebellum

- Helps us to know where our body is in space
- Helps us with our posture and balance
- Helps us not to fall over and to control our movements



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Cerebellum under stress and trauma

- difficulty in maintaining posture, balance coordination
- difficulty in doing tasks that require balance
- don't know where our bodies are in space
- difficulty with voluntary movement tasks – walking or writing



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Sorting & sending centre- Diencephalon

- develops mainly after birth
- sorts out messages coming into the brain and sends them to the rest of the brain and body
- uses hormones to send signals to body
- hormonal signals tell your body what it needs, eg. food, water, love



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Diencephalon under stress and trauma

- can't sort the information coming into the brain
- can't send information to the memory and thinking parts of the brain – that pathway shuts down
- children and young people may not know what they need eg thirsty, hungry
- it sends messages to the amygdala which is the part of the brain that helps keep us safe



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Emotions centre- Limbic centre

- The part of the brain that helps us attach an emotion to an experience or memory
- This part of the brain is particularly involved with the emotions of fear and anger
- Involved in attachment processes
- This area develops mainly after birth



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Amygdala & Hippocampus


Amygdala

- the 'smoke alarm' of the brain
- is mature at birth
- processes & stores implicit memories

Hippocampus


- matures between 2-3yrs of age
- provides the story to memories & puts them into long-term memory



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The amygdala under stress and trauma

- can be over active or under active
- reminders and flashbacks of the trauma
- difficulty in managing emotions
- difficulty in reading facial expressions
- Constantly 'firing' – can hijack the thinking brain (cortex)

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The hippocampus under stress and trauma

- Can't place memories in time or place
- Working memory, retention and recall (retrieval) capacity is severely impacted
- Narrative/autobiographical memory is affected

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Complex thinking- Cortex

- The largest part of the brain
- Responsible for thought and action
- Examples of what it does:
 - Reasoning
 - Decision making
 - Logic
 - Judgement
 - Voluntary movement
- Last part of the brain to fully mature



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Cortex areas under stress and trauma

Unable to:

- use foresight and anticipation, focus or sustain attention
- plan, organise or prioritise or make decisions well
- reflect or have self-awareness
- be enthusiastic, motivated or persist with activities
- use impulse control

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Rhythmic, Repetitive, Relational

Desktop drumming with Hoani and James

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-MpzjxEVBU>


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Safety & the Brain



Safety
 Choose three words that help you feel safe and three words that make you feel less safe. Add any of your own words.

authentic flexible serious detailed patterns privacy
 sensory noisy retreat confidential freedom
 calmness soft colours bright colours disorder
 messy space fun windows artwork views
 concealed legroom breathing space playful shapes
 breath soft outside movement solitude
 play crowded secluded company silence




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Feeling safe-Neuroception

'Before we can engage in social behaviour and learning we must first feel safe'
 (Porges, 2015, p.115)


<http://www.nature.com/nrn/brain/2017/03/engranger0.jpg>




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Polyvagal theory and Protective Responses by Stephen Porges


Behavioural Functions	Body Functions
Social Engagement Soothing and calming Indicates safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slows heart rate Constricts bronchi Stimulates gastrointestinal function





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Line of my day




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I feel safe



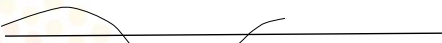


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I don't feel safe- Fight, Flight and Freeze



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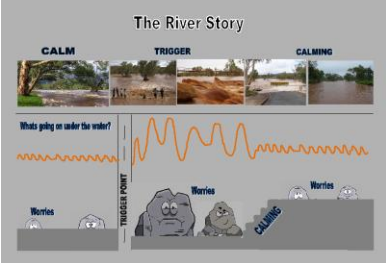
I don't feel safe- Collapse



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The River Story

CALM TRIGGER CALMING



What's going on under the water?

Taren Williams, Ntaria 2018

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Supporting healing

- **Relationships** (safe)
- **Relevant** (developmentally-matched to the individual)
- **Repetitive** (patterned)
- **Rewarding** (pleasurable)
- **Rhythmic**
- **Respectful** (of the child, family, and culture)

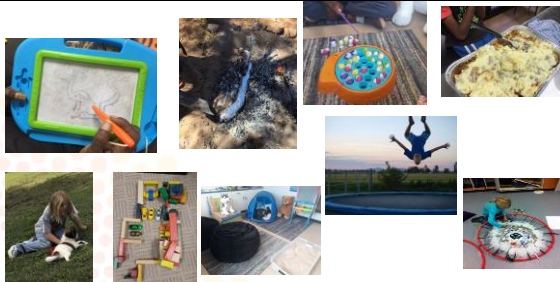
Bruce Perry, as cited by <https://attachmentisorderhealing.com/developmental-trauma-3>



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Overhooting your Window of Tolerance:

- Upset and hyped up
- Angry and agitated
- Flustered
- 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
- Focused and content
- Mindful and able to regulate your emotions



Undershooting your Window of Tolerance:

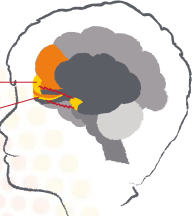
- Sad and tired
- Demotivated with no energy
- Feel empty and withdrawn
- Don't want to listen, talk or play
- Can't think about learning



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

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Mindfulness and co-regulation



Pre-Frontal Cortex
(the centre of Mindfulness/ Self awareness)

- Mindful awareness/ meditation de-activates the amygdala


Right Orbitofrontal Cortex
(Regulation of Arousal)

- Quality co-regulation de-activates the amygdala

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Mindfulness and co-regulation- Dadirri





Dadirri
the deep inner
spring inside us


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Understanding what's behind the behaviour



Trauma and behaviour- helpful and unhelpful


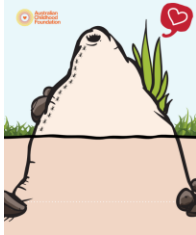


Trauma based behaviour is functional at the time in which it develops as a response to threat.



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Building our understanding of behaviour




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What's behind the behaviour?

- What is the behaviour telling me?
- What might have triggered this behaviour?
- How does this behaviour serve to protect the young person or child or help them survive?
- How can I support meeting the young person's need?
- What is its impact on me?
- How can I get support?


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Looking after ourselves



"You cannot wipe the tears off another's face
without getting your hands wet"

(Zulu proverb, as quoted in Hagwood et al 2014)



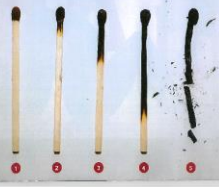
Reflect on yourself for a moment...

- How do you know when you are travelling well?
- How do you know when you are not travelling so well?
- What do others notice in you and what do you notice in others



5 TELL TALE SIGNS OF BURNOUT

Burnout is a state of extreme physical and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. It can be a result of too much work, excessive responsibilities, or a lack of control over your work. It can lead to a range of physical and mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and insomnia. It can also lead to a loss of motivation and a sense of hopelessness. If you are experiencing any of these signs, it is important to seek help from a professional.



Key Message

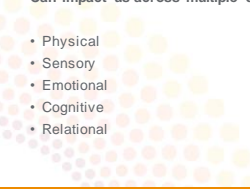
Vicarious Trauma is not done to workers nor does it reflect the level of competence of the worker, it can be an inevitable effect of working with survivors of trauma (Pearlman and Saakvira, 1996, p. 31)




Vicarious Trauma - Possible indicators

Can impact us across multiple domains:

- Physical
- Sensory
- Emotional
- Cognitive
- Relational



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Keep Yourself Healed- Self Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers

(VACCHO and Beyond Blue)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJUO7iAYN_0




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Why don't we want to admit it?

- Self-blame - It's just me!
- Shame - I'm embarrassed to admit it
- Denial - It'll pass if I ignore it!
- Self-sacrifice – Others' needs are greater than mine
- Job security - I can't expose my weaknesses
- Pressure - I don't have time to deal with it
- Cost - I can't afford to take time off and spend money for help



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