


Understanding and responding to trauma

Refugees




Australian Childhood Foundation **SMART** PRACTICE 2023

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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians and owners of the land and waters across Australia.

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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We acknowledge you and what you bring...

- Knowledge
- Practice skills
- Experience
- Passion
- Compassion
- A desire to bring about change



bettyimages

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MORNING → **Part 1: 9.00am - 11.00am**
 Introducing the SMART PRACTICE Framework & ACF Model of PRACTICE
Morning Tea: 11.00am - 11.15am

MIDDLE → **Part 2: 11.15am - 12.45pm**
 The Brain, types of refugee trauma and the impacts
Lunch Break: 12.45pm - 1.15pm

AFTERNOON → **Part 3: 1.15pm - 3.15pm**
 Healing ways to respond: SMART Circle of PRACTICE
Wrap Up & Evaluations 3.15pm
 Finish: 3.30pm

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Introductions




Consider a teacher who taught you, and had a positive influence on you... What do you remember about them? How did they make you feel?

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Learning together



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

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Success Criteria

- **develop** an enhanced understanding of complex abuse related trauma, with a particular focus on refugee and asylum seeker trauma
- **apply** frameworks for assessing and responding to the impact of trauma on students.
- **build** a toolkit of practice skills to respond, which promote recovery and healing for students.

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PART 1:

Introducing the SMART Framework and ACF Model of practice



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Resources to assist you...

The collage features three main resource items:

- TOGETHER:** A graphic with the word 'TOGETHER' in large, colorful letters, surrounded by illustrations of diverse people.
- SMART PRACTICE - Site Audit Tool:** A table with columns for 'SMART', 'PRACTICE', 'EFFECTIVE', 'EFFICIENT', and 'EVIDENCE'. It contains a grid of checkboxes for various audit points.
- SMART PRACTICE Introduction:** A document cover with the SMART PRACTICE logo and a list of key points.

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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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Using the Site Audit Tool – celebration and reflection....

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

SMART PRACTICE - Site Audit Tool

This tool is designed to support the implementation of the SMART PRACTICE framework across your site. This tool can also be used to guide future implementation through an evaluation of the impact of the framework on your site. This tool is a guide to the implementation of the SMART PRACTICE framework.

SMART PRACTICE	Whole site	Staff team	Class/Room	Small group	Individual child
P PREDICTABLE					
R RESPONSIVE					
A ATTUNED					
C CONNECTING					
T TRANSLATING					
I INVOLVING					
C CALMING					
E ENGAGING					



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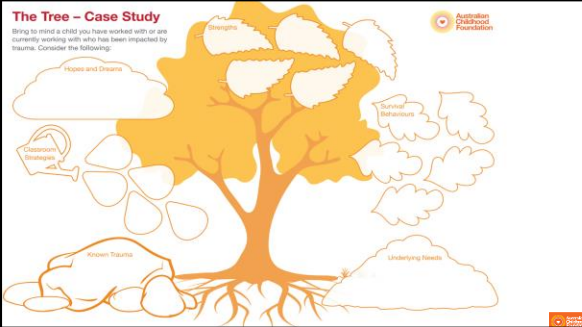
Introducing the ACF Model of practice



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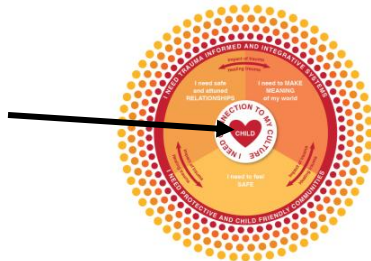
The Tree – Case Study

Bring to mind a child you have worked with or are currently working with who has been impacted by trauma. Consider the following:



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Holding the student at the centre....



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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

The Clouds by Unknown
 Author is licensed under CC BY-ND

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I need to FEEL SAFE

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The importance of safety

If I don't feel SAFE then I will struggle to learn because...

- Awareness**
 - Staying alert
 - Shutdown or hide
- Attention**
 - Trying to take in too much
 - Trying to avoid stimulation
- Memory**
 - Indiscriminate on what to store and what to let go
- Exploration**
 - It's not safe to explore
 - I need to prioritise finding a safe base, so I can't focus on new learning

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Distinction between migrants, refugees & asylum seekers

<p>Migrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose their new home Take all their belongings with them Say goodbye to friends and family and leave a forwarding address Enter country of choice with visa Can return to country of origin if they wish. 	<p>Refugees and Asylum Seekers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leave country of origin in traumatic circumstances with little or no possessions May know little about the country they are going to Leave family and friends behind in danger or difficulty May never be able to return to their home country May be forced to enter country of asylum without authorisation May spend months or years in camps or detention centres with an uncertain future.
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ACTIVITY: The felt sense of safety

- Take 9 pieces of sticky notes
- Write 3 individual people who are the most important to you and place them together
- Write 3 individual personal possessions that are most dear to you, things you would never voluntarily part with, then place them in separately, together
- Write 3 individual things you know to be true about yourself, place them together also

PLEASE HOLD ON TO THESE PIECES OF PAPER

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ACTIVITY: The felt sense of safety

Now choose one sticky note from each of the groups below:

- individual people who are the most important to you
- individual personal possessions that are most dear to you, things you would never voluntarily part with
- individual things you know to be true about yourself

PLEASE TEAR UP THESE PIECES OF PAPER AND PUT ON THE FLOOR



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ACTIVITY: The felt sense of safety

Now, turn to the person to the right of you, and take one of each of their remaining sticky notes left.

- individual people who are the most important to them
- individual personal possessions that are most dear to them, things they would never voluntarily part with
- individual things they know to be true about themselves

PLEASE TEAR UP THESE PIECES OF PAPER AND THROW ON THE FLOOR



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Reflection and check-in....restoring our safety

Please hold on to your remaining pieces of paper.
Check in with yourself....what do you need for you...

Take a few moments to:

- breath, move or to sit quietly.
- check in with the person next to you, the one you took the sticky notes from
- find your pieces of paper and hold on to them
- write down a message of hope for yourself



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**I need safe and attuned
RELATIONSHIPS**

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**Relationships shape
our sense of self and
safety**

- Relationships are the most important factor in our development and in healing from experiences of trauma
- Secure relationships are central to how a student experiences themselves and others

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**I need to MAKE
MEANING of my world**

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How do I make meaning of the world?

We are deeply impacted by both our surrounding relationships and the environment on how we perceive and make sense of:

- The world – safe vs unsafe
- Relationships – trustworthy vs unreliable
- Self- lovable vs unlovable
- Protected vs unprotected

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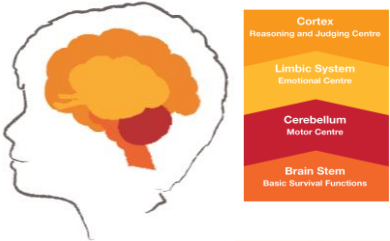
PART 2:

The brain, types of refugee trauma and the impacts

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Brain development - vertically



- Cortex**
Reasoning and Judging Centre
- Limbic System**
Emotional Centre
- Cerebellum**
Motor Centres
- Brain Stem**
Basic Survival Functions

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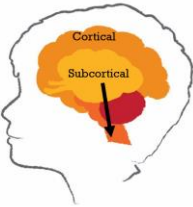
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Cortical

- Cortex
- Prefrontal Cortex
- Medial Prefrontal Cortex

Subcortical

- Brainstem
- Cerebellum
- Limbic System – Amygdala & Hippocampus



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Cortical

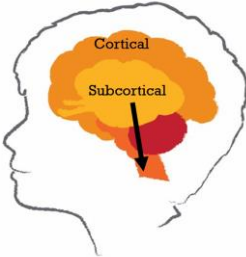
- Consciously activated for reflection

Responsive

Subcortical

- Unconsciously activated for constant survival

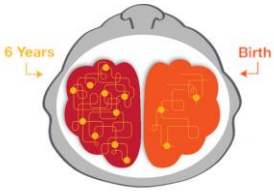
Reactive



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Brain development – horizontally



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Life span /child development

Newborn 2 Years Adult

6 Years Birth

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Adolescents - The remodelling brain: pruning & myelination in the teenage brain

Neuron

Myelin Sheath

Myelination

The second change is in myelination: in adolescence, it is not finished. The last part of the brain to myelinate is the frontal lobes. And myelination is not complete in the frontal lobes of the brain until around 18 to 20 or later.

Myelination on a neuron allows it to operate more efficiently.

Birth 2 Years 5 Years 10 Years 18 Years

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ACTIVITY:

Predictability & Repetition the foundation of neuronal pathways...

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Survival




Our brain's first priority is to survive. Responding to a perceived threat initiates an immediate whole-body experience where we either:

- Seek relationship (Social Engagement)
- Fight, flight, actively freeze (Mobilise)
 - Flop (Immobilise)


▪ During this time, the cortex and hippocampus are offline. We are not able to 'consciously think'; we are in the moment and reactive.

▪ During this time, we can become terrified, uncontained and disconnected from our body.





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Experiences of trauma and the impacts at school



The diagram features a central red circle with a white bandage icon and the text "Different types of trauma". Surrounding this central circle are six other circles of various colors, each containing a type of trauma: "Simple" (orange), "Complex" (yellow), "Developmental" (light green), "Intergenerational" (pink), "Transgenerational" (light orange), and "Refugee" (light purple).



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Types of trauma – experienced by refugees and asylum seekers

- Simple Trauma
- Historical Trauma
- Trauma – Pre-Migration, Migration & Exile, Resettlement
- Trauma – War & Torture
- Complex Trauma
- Complex Relational & Developmental Trauma





Image source ©2021 ACF




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Civilian Trauma vs. Refugee Trauma

"Classic" civilian trauma	Persecution & human rights violations
1. Single-incident e.g. vehicle accident	1. Prolonged, multiple events e.g. war, civil conflict
2. Unlikely to be repeated	2. Likely to be repeated
3. Opportunities for disconfirming evidence	3. Limited opportunities for disconfirming evidence
4. Non-interpersonal or instigated by one or small group of individual/s	4. Human-instigated, sometimes targeting & devastating entire communities
5. Recovery environment intact	5. Dislocated from important sources of support
6. Future may be predictable	6. Uncertainty of the future
7. Institutional assistance available	7. Institutions may be unfamiliar, ineffectual or implicated in persecution

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War Trauma



"Refugee children and young people have had to cope with a wide range of traumatic incidents and human rights violations in the process of their cognitive, emotional, social and physical development. They are often dependent on adults who are themselves traumatised and unable to meet the developmental needs of their children. This makes them particularly vulnerable to mental health problems" (Baker, 1994)

**"The journey is dangerous and violent"
"The end of the journey is unknown"**

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War Traumas

- eviction from home – separation from family and friends
- being a soldier - killing people - child soldiers; snatched by rebel forces - forced to participate in or witness killing and atrocities.
- being tortured
- violent/physical /sexual assault
- mock execution
- witness execution of family /friends
- forced to torture others
- forced to watch others/family tortured



image:unifugees.com

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The unique challenges for Unaccompanied Minors

When unaccompanied minor children and young people arrive in Australia, they bring with them a developmental context impacted by their traumatic experiences, as well as layers of grief and loss.



<http://www.aiaabers.com/news/2017/05/unof-number-unaccompanied-refugee-children-6ans-17051806320980.html>

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Stresses & trauma - pre-migration

Pre-migration experiences and stressors:

- relocation to a new country may involves stressors such as financial outlay, loss of family and social networks, multiple refugee claim appeals, overcrowding and a loss of control.
- separation from family members
- high exposure to torture and trauma
- living in the midst of & exposure to war and bombings
- exposure to the murder and rape of family members
- violence within the family unit

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Stresses & trauma – pre-migration

- living long term in refugee camps, or detention centres
- lack of basic needs – food, water, shelter and safety
- treacherous and unsafe journeys – witnesses to death and trauma along the way– forced, unforced, boats
- child slaves; many children on regional border areas taken into slavery.
- household and labour slaves; sex slaves; forced into prostitution, rape and assaults
- physical injuries, loss of organs/limbs



A drawing by a six-year-old child detained at the Christmas Island detention centre. AAPA/HRIC

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unicef.org

<https://sarefugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Childrens-art-3.jpg>

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Stresses & trauma - exile and migrating

- perilous flight or escape
- fear/loss/sadness of never returning home
- sadness/loss of relatives and close friends left behind
- escape by boats and smugglers
- extreme fear of death
- extreme fear of capture
- concerns about basic survival on the journey - about food/money
- protracted period of uncertainty
- conflicting feelings of excitement, happiness, sadness and guilt

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theconversation.com

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Stresses & trauma - resettlement

- culture shock, radical change in external environment
- discrimination, hostility, marginalisation and a lack of acceptance from the host population
- loss of identity and belonging
- a decline in living situation and social/economic status - were highly educated and/or had higher incomes prior to migration - now no/low income, unemployment
- foreign language - language acquisition new learning environments - school/Uni/TAFE
- isolation/separation from family (biological) and community & concern about family in country of origin
- uncertainty of permanence & concern about country of origin
- unrealistic expectations from themselves, family and others
- change in family power dynamics - differences between parental and child acculturation levels may lead to values and expectation clashes
- lack of adult/parental support for young people
- managing cultural/social differences and peer vs family relationships
- living in uncertain environments (detention centres, temporary accommodation, unsafe housing)

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humanrights.gov.au

https://twitter.com/kidsoffnauru

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Source: Building Bridges, breaking barriers, a training manual for volunteers working with Refugees: ASATTS (Association of Services for Torture and Trauma Survivors) Induction

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Protective factors

- refugee and migrant people may also have access to a range of protective factors against risk for mental illness:
- social support and/or perceived social support
- feeling welcomed and an absence of discrimination from the host society
- good English language skills
- integration (close ties with home and host culture)
- family reunification

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Residual Messages of Trauma

We learn through our relationships with others and the environment around us. Developing beliefs about how we connect with others, influence the way we see our self, and how we interact with the world.



Below are some residual messages of trauma that may influence one's developing relational templates:

- Alpha: *"You're either the attacker or the attacked"*
- Submission: Follower, submit at all costs
- Perfectionist: Outside of perfect is unsafe
- Police officer: I need to have everyone follow the rules my world needs to be predictable and consistent

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Embodied Trauma




- It is important that we understand the deep connection between the body, the brain and trauma.
- Our implicit memory can make us feel the sensations of trauma long after the trauma has occurred.
- Students may struggle to remain in the present 'here and now'
- Ensure there is a de-escalation plan for students to help them recover from their distress within relationship.

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“Uppgivenessyndrom”



“It’s like going into hibernation. The world is too hard.”
-LOUISE NEWMAN
TED TALK

Source: Two refugee children who show the symptoms of uppgivenessyndrom, or resignation syndrome.
Magnum Wireman for The New Yorker

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Three Core Concepts in Early Development


3 Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development

NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD
Center on the Developing Child HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Effects of trauma on behaviour



To cope with trauma children use initial adaptive responses to survive

This is reasonable as a once off occurrence, but, if they continue they can become maladaptive patterns of behaviour

These responses will be different for an individual child at different developmental stages

Often a combination of appropriate developmental behaviours and maladaptive patterns of behaviour emerge

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Activity

Think about the students you have interacted with this week.
In the classroom, on yard duty, before school, students leaving early, or within a formal meeting.


What behaviour have you seen that could be the impact of trauma?

What did it


- **Look like**
- **Sound like**
- **Feel like**

Trauma can impact on all elements of children's development.

Body
Brain
Memory






Emotions
Relationships
Learning
Behaviour

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Brain and Body Break

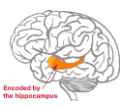



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Implicit and Explicit Memory Systems

Implicit Memory Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subconscious retrieval 	Explicit Memory Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscious encoding and retrieval • Explicit memory develops after brain systems are in place and has three component 	
Is non-verbal memory Active before birth	Develops around 18 months	Develops around 2-3 years
Implicit memory lacks conscious awareness & is fundamental to how the brain stores traumatic representations	Semantic/factual memory Knowledge of the world, memories about the way things work Episodic memory Discrete events that occur at different points in time	Narrative/Autobiographical To do with sense of self and time



Encoded by the hippocampus

Image source: ©2018 ACF

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Activity



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How might we exacerbate refugee trauma?

- Shaming
- Guilting
- Bribing
- Manipulating

REMEMBER all these methods may have been used as forms of abuse and torture for families

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The Shield of Shame



Deny "I never did anything"

Blame "It was his fault"

Minimise "He wasn't really hurt"

Rage "You always blame me for everything!!!"

I did something bad I am bad

Image source: <https://genesctc.co.uk/psychological-therapeutic-approaches/> Image source: <https://hand-thwartmind.wordpress.com/2013/06/03/shame-venus-gift/>


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PART 3:

Ways to respond: SMART Circle of PRACTICE



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Reframing our view

“what’s wrong with you”

versus


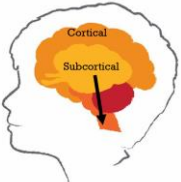

“what has happened to you?”

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SMART Circle of PRACTICE – responsive ways to co-regulate

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What is the SMART Circle of PRACTICE?

The SMART Circle of PRACTICE is a tool designed by the Australian Childhood Foundation to conceptualise ways to support and co-regulate students using what is called "Bottom Up and Top Down" responding and strategies.

When under stress or having been impacted from trauma, a student's ability to stay engaged in their learning and social interactions is significantly impacted...



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Bottom Up

"Bottom Up" responding refers to engaging the subcortical (lower) parts of the brain to regulate the higher parts of the brain.



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Top Down

"Top Down" responding refers to engaging the cortical (higher) parts of the brain to regulate the lower parts of the brain.



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Intention

Bottom up

to regulate and restore safety

Top Down

to respond and strengthen relationships

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When to use each of the approaches

“Top Down” approach
when students are in, or able to still engage, a regulated state to help them stay there

“Bottom Up” approach
to help students access a regulated state when feeling distressed, unsafe or disconnected.

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The 12 elements of the CIRCLE of PRACTICE

The 12 elements in the circle are ways that have been identified through research to provide what human brains and bodies need for regulation.

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SMART PRACTICE
Responses and Strategies

Activities and Discussions




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Building our toolkit
Responsive Activities and Strategies

BOTTOM UP

- Breath
- Body
- Touch
- Rhythm
- Routine
- Rest

TOP DOWN

- Proximity
- Attunement
- Synchronizing
- Skills
- Novelty
- Play




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Introducing the first element of the SMART PRACTICE Framework –

Predictable




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Understanding SMART PRACTICE

For each of the elements of PRACTICE we invite you to:

- consider the main **PRINCIPLE** and **OUTCOMES**
- reflect on what the **NEEDS** are of students (as children/young people)
- understand the **PRACTICE GOAL**
- Identify helpful and supportive **RESPONSES, ACTIVITIES** and **STRATEGIES**

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SMART PRACTICE - PREDICTABLE

Principle:


- Students who have experienced trauma may experience any change as a potential threat. Even if the familiar is difficult and destructive, the familiar is safer for them than the unfamiliar.

Outcomes:

- Students will come to trust, and rely on their reference point(s) as an interpreter of their environment. They will respond in a less volatile way to changes in the classroom and build a platform for responding to change overall.
- Students will learn to use others as a resource to support them at school.

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Understanding the needs - PREDICTABLE

- I need safe and attuned relationships
- I need a felt sense of safety

Healing Goal:
Create environments that are routine and predictable and prepare students for change

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PREDICTABLE responding – whole class and students

SMART PRACTICE – Site Audit Tool

SMART PRACTICE	Whole site	Staff	Classrooms	Yard	Other
S					
M					
A					
R					
T					
P					
R					
A					
C					

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PREDICTABLE responding – whole class and students

Being predictable... would your students be able to answer these questions?

- How you greet them each lesson?
- Do they know what's coming up in the lesson?
- Do they know the general routine of the lesson?
- Do they know where they will sit?
- Do they know how you will give them their instructions, tasks, work, feedback?
- Do they know where to find what they need?
- Do they know what to do if they are struggling with a task? Do they know how you will react?

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PREDICTABLE responding – whole site and staff

- Policies & procedures
- Routines
- Classrooms
- Yard
- Bells and sirens/alarms
- Transitions and changes
- Expectations
- Excursions and incursions
- Evacuations and invacuations

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Neuroplasticity – hope for healing

Neuroplasticity refers to the brain’s capacity to:

- Grow new nerve cells
- Strengthen connections between nerve cells
- Sprout new connections between different cells



Image source: GACF2022

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Images from:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/19/refugee-childrens-story-turned-into-a-heartwarming-claymation-video>

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Referrals and further information

STARS – Survivors of Torture Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Services, Adelaide
www.stars.org.au
<https://www.stars.org.au/uploads/Responding-to-People-in-Distress-Afghanistan-articles.pdf>

Foundation House – Schools Support Program
<https://foundationhouse.org.au/specialised-programs/schools/>

Migrant Women’s Support Program (for women and children escaping DV)
<https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/housing/emergency-shelter-and-homelessness/homelessness-service-providers/migrant-womens-support-program>
Backpacks for Refugees
<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/schools-and-educators/programs-students/backpacks-refugee-children-how-get-involved>

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www.childhood.org.au



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Checkout
Feedback
Keep in touch
SMART Learning Pathway
ACF & SMART Resources
References




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Check out

What are you taking back to your classroom tomorrow?

- Strategy?
- Activity?
- New perspective?



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Feedback



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Keep in touch with ACF and DfE

- Carolyn Grace, Senior Consultant, ACF
- cgrace@childhood.org.au
- Melissa Powney, Senior Consultant ACF
- mpowney@childhood.org.au
- Karen Perry, Policy Officer, Child Protection and Trauma-informed practice, DfE
- Education.SMART@sa.gov.au

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SMART Learning Pathway

- SMART Online Training – register through Plink – self-paced
- SMART – 2-hour training – facilitated by a local SMART Trainer
- SMART PRACTICE – Day 1 – *(includes specialist packages ie Early Years, Refugees, Adolescents, Working with Aboriginal communities)*
- SMART PRACTICE – Day 2
- SMART Train the Trainer program – 2 days

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ACF & SMART Resources

- SMART training – register through PLINK
- Discussion papers – available on TLC Teams page
- Prosody Blog
<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/professional-community-network/>
- Other ACF Training
<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/training-development/course-list/>

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References

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