

**Making SPACE For Learning in Schools: Introduction to a Trauma Responsive Framework for Teachers**

Customised Half day workshop  
Nazareth Catholic College  
Melissa Powney




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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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**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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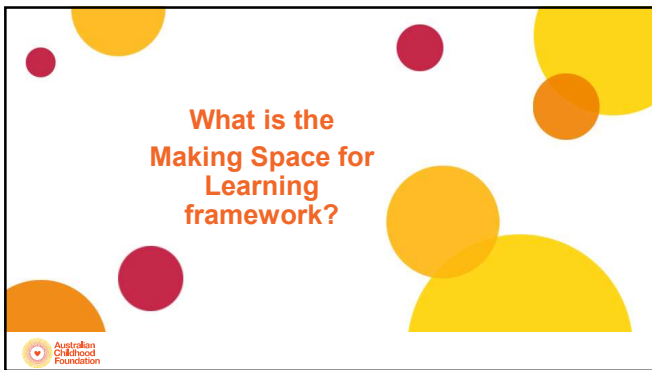
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**What is the Making Space for Learning framework?**



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**SPACE**

STAGED ADAPTIVE ENABLED  
PREDICTABLE CONNECTED



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### SPACE in Action

1. Draw a symbol that represents something novel about yourself that you are willing to share.
2. Walk around the room and stop when you have met someone who is far away from where you were sitting and share your symbol. Do not return to your spot until completing two further actions....
3. Tell your partner how you know which seat you were sitting in previously. Ie: Did you leave any reference points for yourself? Like your coat/bag...did you mentally count how many rows before you moved?
4. Imagine now that you couldn't go back to your original seat. Where would you move to and why? What do you consider or what rules do you have around where your most comfortable to sit in a space like this?



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### Predictable

- Changes to routines and uncertainty can be a source of stress to student
- Predictability in Student's relationships and activities deactivates their stress systems
- This then promotes flexibility and adaptability



I feel better when I know what is coming next.



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### What might predictability look like in practice?



- Build routines and predictability wherever possible
  - Prepare children and young people for what is coming next eg: giving countdowns to transitions
    - Visual timetables are useful
- Think about how to do transitions throughout the day
  - Play and fun
  - Planned brain breaks
- Give plenty of information and time building up to changes



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### Staged

- Brain development is sequential
- One of the ways our brain develops is vertically, from the bottom to the top
- Some neurodevelopmental delays such as those effected by trauma can cause brain changes. However with the right support the brain can be repaired through neuroplasticity.



**My brain grows upwards, step by step.**

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### Sequential brain development – building blocks



The Thinking brain	3-5 Years
The Emotions and Memory Brain	Birth to 4 years
The Movement Brain	Birth – 2 years
The survival brain	Pre birth to 8 months

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Key Brain Area	Potential impact of trauma	
Brainstem & Diencephalon	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 Becomes overwhelmed and cannot sort through information	
Cerebellum	Difficulty in maintain posture & balance Lack of awareness of their body in space Poor fine or cross motor skills	
Limbic Lobe	Receptive communication- struggle to read/ understand others Expressive communication- may themselves struggle to express emotions. Oversensitivity or under-sensitivity to threat Struggle to recall information Difficulty in placing time and dates to memories	
Cortex	Unable to or limited ability to: Use foresight and anticipation Organise and plan decisions well Use impulse control Be enthusiastic, motivated or persistent with activities	

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### The Prefrontal Cortex

Final part of the brain to reach maturity in one's mid to late twenties

- self awareness
- reasoning and judgement
- foresight and anticipation
- focusing and sustaining attention
- planning organising and prioritising
- decision making
- reflecting
- enthusiasm, motivation and persistence
- impulse control
- working memory



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### Vulnerabilities – the impact of trauma on the PFC

Behaviours associated with an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex

- Short attention span
- Impulsivity and increased risk taking
- Procrastination (lack of motivation or internal reward systems)
- Disorganisation (trouble working through long term goals)
- Poor judgement and problem solving
- Reduction in ability to see things from other's perspective




Image source: © iStock 2022

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### Strategies for building healthy brain development

Brainstem & Diencephalon	Basic survival & sensory processing	Pacification or stimulation. Activities in the child's preferred sensory modality
Cerebellum	Coordination of movement	Using music, rhyme and movement activities
Limbic	Emotional processing	Building relational connection through plays, animals, games
Cortex	Thinking processes	Linking experiences and sensations to words and descriptions
Prefrontal cortex	Analytical and abstract thinking	Challenges and safe risk taking activities

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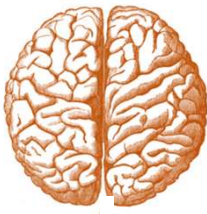
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### Hemispheric integration

**Left Hemisphere**

- Evaluates language content
- Optimistic hemisphere
- Understands beginning, middle and end
- Learns from the past and expects the future
- Looks for patterns



**Right Hemisphere**

- In the present moment
- Eye contact
- Facial expression
- Tone of voice
- Posture
- Gesture
- Intensity
- Is mute
- Grasps the whole

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## BODY SYSTEMS



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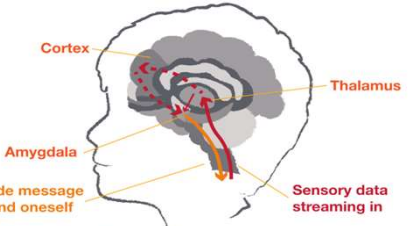
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### Sensory information response sequence



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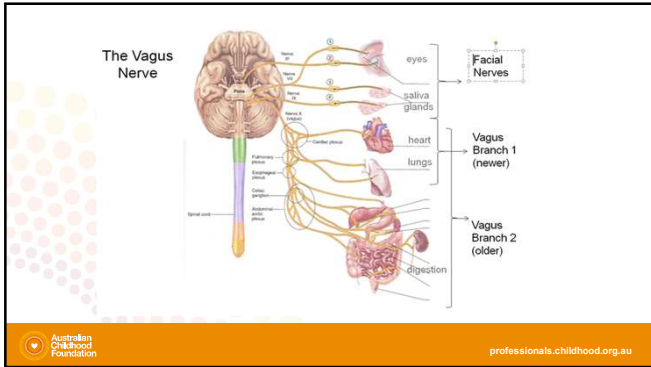
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### Polyvagal theory and protective responses

by Stephen Porges

Behavioural Functions	Body Functions
<b>Social Engagement</b> 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 eyeblinks • Slows or speeds heart rate
<b>Mobilisation</b> Fight or Flight Active Freeze Moderate or extreme danger	<b>Hyper-arousal</b> • Increases heart rate • Sweat increases • Inhibits gastrointestinal function • Narrowing blood vessels - to slowblood flow to extremities • Release of adrenaline
<b>Immobilisation</b> Collapse or submission Death feigning Increased pain threshold Conserves metabolic resources Life threatening situations	<b>Hypo-arousal</b> • Slows heart rate • Constricts bronchi • Stimulates gastrointestinal function

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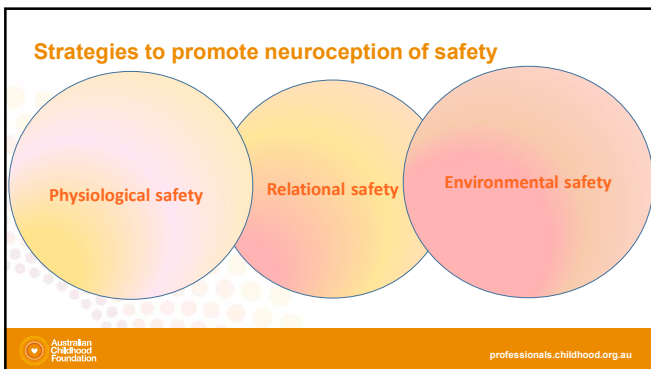
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### When I am terrified

- Containment- help me feel back in my body
- Grounded- Help me feel present in the Here and Now.
- Present- Stay with me, help me know I am not alone in my distress

**Notice and name**

5 things you can see  
 4 things you can hear  
 3 things you touch/sense  
 2 things you can smell  
 1 thing you can taste




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### Working with nervous systems

Increase Resources – Regulatory Capabilities

**Social Engagement**



**Offer...**

- Heat snap pack
- Something weighted
- Something rhythmic
- Reduction in stimulus
- Physical task

**Mobilising** →

**Offer...**

- Heat snap pack
- Gentle sensory/spine engagement
- Chewing on a sweet or sour lolly, drinking cold or sweet

**Offer...**

- Punching bag
- Screwed up paper to kick / throw
- Change environment
- Pool noodle

**Immobilising** →

**Offer...**

- Drip cold water on the skin i.e. palm initially
- Music, hum
- Voice of safe person
- Seek small movement

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### Polyvagal Theory

I am showing you....	On the inside.....	I need you to....
<p><b>SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p>Feeling safe, staying in relationship, connection oriented</p> <p>You might say I am:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making eye contact</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Engaging in play and exploration</li> </ul>	<p>I am feeling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe, Calm, Happy, Glad, Annoyed, Reflective, Playful, Curious</li> </ul> <p>My body says:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach others</li> <li>• Sit still</li> <li>• Breathe deeply</li> </ul>	<p>Help me to stay engaged!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play and have fun with me</li> <li>• Reinforce positive relationships</li> <li>• Set boundaries and natural consequences</li> <li>• Use reflection and problem solving skills so I can learn from too</li> <li>• Notice and acknowledge my strengths and my skills</li> </ul>
<p><b>MOBILISATION</b></p> <p>Fight, flight, active freeze, action oriented</p> <p>You might say I am:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressive</li> <li>• Fighting</li> <li>• Running away</li> <li>• Hyperactive</li> </ul>	<p>I am feeling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxious, Frightened, Lonely, Hurt, Confused, Overwhelmed</li> </ul> <p>My body says:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run away</li> <li>• I'm hot</li> <li>• I can't sit still</li> <li>• I need to move</li> </ul>	<p>Help me to down regulate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep me safe</li> <li>• Co-regulate – be safe, attuned and responsive to me</li> <li>• Use movement – big then smaller, jumping, hanging, swinging, climbing, star jumps</li> <li>• Create a safe space near you where I can retreat to until I calm down</li> <li>• Model deep breathing</li> <li>• Repair our relationship – “we are ok and our relationship is strong”</li> </ul>
<p><b>IMMOBILISATION</b></p> <p>Withdrawal, collapse, submission, dissociation, accident oriented</p> <p>You might say I am:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawn</li> <li>• Avoiding contact</li> <li>• Distort</li> <li>• Compliant</li> <li>• Hiding</li> </ul>	<p>I am feeling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disconnected, Unfocused, Flat, Withdrawn, I'm disappearing</li> </ul> <p>My body says:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid others</li> <li>• I'm not in my body</li> <li>• I want to hide</li> <li>• Curl up in a ball</li> </ul>	<p>Help me to up regulate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-regulate – be safe, attuned and responsive with me</li> <li>• Tell me I am safe and demonstrate it with your actions, gestures and tone of voice</li> <li>• Help me to orient to the room we are in by looking for specific things like something green, something on the roof or something on the floor</li> <li>• Help me to feel my body by nodding different parts, such as my feet on the floor and my bottom on the chair</li> <li>• Repair our relationship – “we are ok and our relationship is strong”</li> </ul>

Grounded in the work of Dr Dan Siegel, Dr Stephen Porges and Dr Bruce Perry

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### Physiological Safety

- Provide opportunities for children to reconnect with their bodies such as Interoception activities
- Understand that the body may need time to regulate to a calm state.
- Ensure there is a de-escalation plan for students to help them recover from their distress that includes connection to a supportive adult.

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### Adaptive

- 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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### Dys-regulated Arousal

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

**Freeze** Physically immobilized, frozen, tense musculature

**Submit** Collapsed, weak, defeated, flat affect, numb, empty, helpless, hopeless

**Sympathetic Hyper-arousal**

**Parasympathetic Hypo-arousal**

**Window of Tolerance**

**AROUSAL**

Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006

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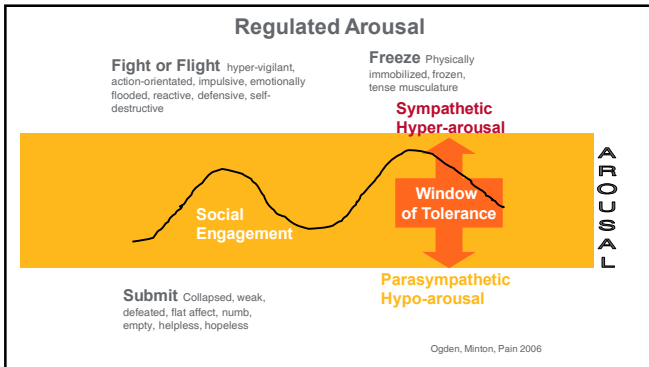
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**Overshooting your Window of Tolerance:**

- Upset and hyped 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

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

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### Reflection Time

- During your teaching day are you more likely to become hyper or hypo aroused?
- When you felt dysregulated and someone co-regulated you. What did they do that helped?
- During a difficult day at work you self-regulated. What skills did you draw on to be able to do this?

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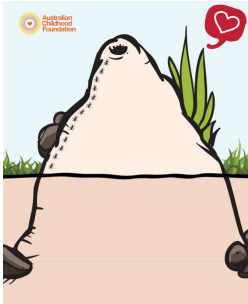
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**Behaviour is Communication**

- Develop openness and curiosity about behaviour
- If we can understand what drives a behaviour, we can work out how to respond to it
- If we can meet the need that is driving a behaviour, the behaviour can start to reduce
- **Behaviours are** functional and almost always makes sense given their specific experiences of trauma



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**Connected**

Strategies to support students as their relational templates continue to develop emphasise relationships with safe and consistent adults and peers as the foundation for healthy, strong social and emotional functioning.



I need to feel like I am connected.  
I need to feel safe.  
I need safe connections in my life.

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Plan together, share together

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**Enabled**

- Engaging students in the process of understanding themselves can build social and emotional learning.
- When students know about their qualities, their attributes and their talents they can feel good about themselves.
- Knowing about their own special story helps students to build a coherent self narrative

**I grow stronger as I learn more about what makes me, me.**



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**Safety in the classroom**

- Create connection and sense of belonging
- Consider sensory environment
- Consider where each student is at in their nervous system as they enter – do they need to up regulate or down regulate to focus
- Include brain breaks and meaning-making or reflection opportunities
- Facilitate early opportunities for success
- Make things predictable and consistent
- Identify an 'emotional anchor' or key person for the student



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**How do I access MSFL? & other Questions**



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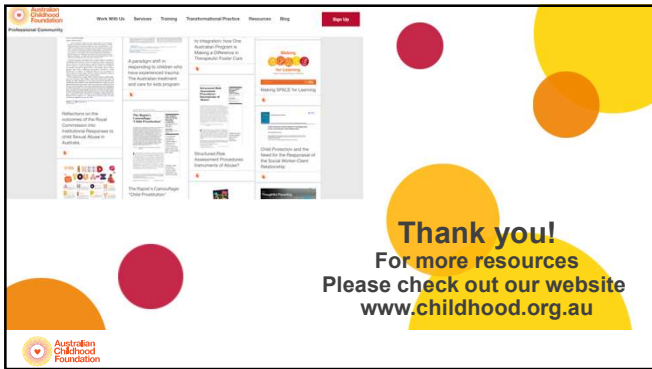
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The image shows a screenshot of the Australian Childhood Foundation website. The page features a navigation menu at the top with links for Home, About Us, Services, Training, Transformational Practice, Research, and Blog. The main content area displays several articles with titles such as 'A partnership with an international organisation to support the Australian Childhood Foundation's work in the Pacific region', 'The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of children and young people', and 'The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of children and young people'. Below the screenshot, there is a thank you message: 'Thank you! For more resources Please check out our website www.childhood.org.au'. The Australian Childhood Foundation logo is located in the bottom left corner of the screenshot area.

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