



1



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Key learning outcomes

- To develop an enhanced understanding of complex abuse related trauma, with a particular focus on its effects on brain functioning
- To develop a clear understanding of the manifestations of abuse related trauma on the general functioning of a child or young person
- To be able to assess the impacts of abuse related trauma on the child or young person
- To gain a knowledge of the strategies and activities that we may use in the classroom to assist a child or young person manage the impacts of abuse related trauma



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What is the Making Space for Learning framework?



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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. I.e: 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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When you were growing up...

Pick a card which helps you tell the story of a teacher who taught you when you were young and had a positive influence:

- What do you remember most about them?
- How did that person make you feel?
 - What did they do?



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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**



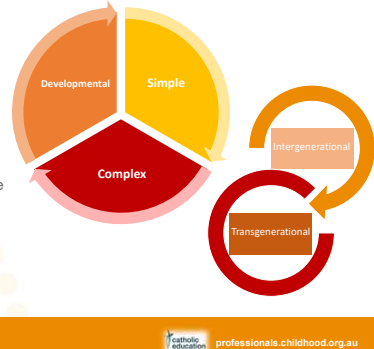
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Defining trauma

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



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Complex relational trauma

- Multiple incidents over an extended period of time
- Is blaming or stigmatising of the victim
- Based in relationship and associated with shame
- Is an isolating experience, often underpinned by intentionality
- Induces a sense of disconnection from others and their support

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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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Understanding the developing brain

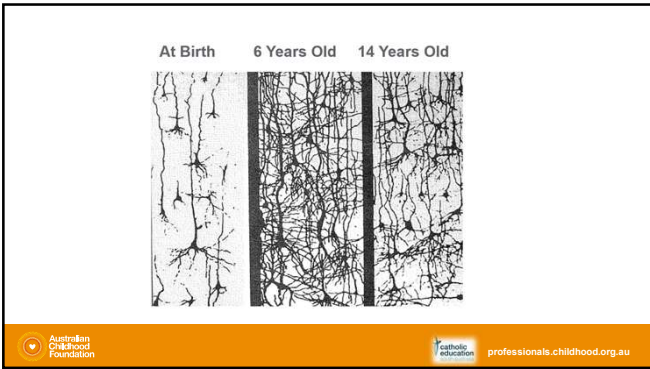
new born 3 year old adult

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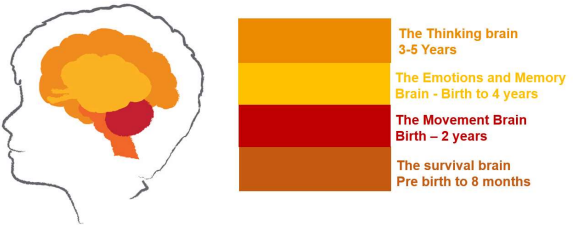


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Sequential brain development – building blocks




- 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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Brainstem - basic life functions

- 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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Cerebellum- movement and balance

- 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
- Has its own connective pathways between the 2 halves- cerebellar vermis



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Strategies for healing...Desktop drumming

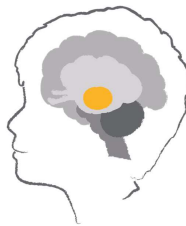


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Diencephalon - sorting & sending centre

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

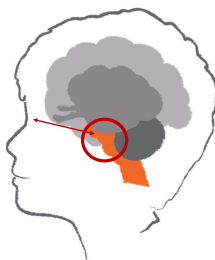


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Superior Colliculus

- Processes visual threats – looming objects identified by cells in the retina of the eye
- Retinal neuronal input received by Superior Colliculus which engages the body in **Avoidance and defensive behaviours**




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Limbic lobe- emotional gateway

- 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
- Also heavily involved in attachment processes
- This area develops mainly after birth



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Understanding the needs

- I need support to connect with how I'm feeling in my brain and body
- I need help to express how I am feeling in my emotions and in my body.

Healing Goal:
Help students to be more in touch with their feelings as they relate to language, bodily sensations, and behaviours

What do my sensations mean for me?

Body Sensations	Emotions
Achy, Dull, knotted,	Happy
Sharp, Stinging, Electric,	Sad
Numbness, Light, Heavy,	Scared
Smooth, Bubbles, Shaggy,	Worried
Soft, Achy, Itchy,	Disgusted
Bruised, Burning, Buzzy,	Surprised
Open, Floundering, Spinning,	Angry
icy, Hot, Cold,	Calm
Clenched, Pulsing, Throbbing,	
Tight, Tingling, Twitchy,	
Itchy, Dry, Jumpy,	
Shaky, Dizzy, Faint,	
Fuzzy, Hollow, Puffy,	
Prickly, Itchy, Itched,	
Numb, Tense, Loose,	




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Hippocampus – Brain's historian

- Explicit memory system
- Develops approximately 2-3 years of age
- Provides context to memory and embeds long term memory

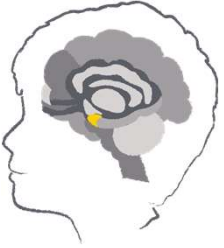


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Amygdala – smoke alarm

- Detects threat
- Develops from birth
- Learns by association
- Involved in implicit memory processes




A diagram of a human head in profile, showing the brain. The amygdala is highlighted in yellow, located in the limbic system.

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Cerebral cortex- complex thinking

- The largest part of the brain
- Associated with higher brain function such as thought and action
- Examples of functions:
 - Reasoning
 - Logic
 - Judgement
 - Voluntary movement



A diagram of a human head in profile, showing the brain. The cerebral cortex is highlighted in orange, covering the outer layer of the brain.


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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



A diagram of a human head in profile, showing the brain. The prefrontal cortex is highlighted in red and yellow. A yellow box with the word 'UNDER' is placed over the prefrontal cortex area.

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Vulnerabilities – the impact of trauma on the PFC

Behaviours associated with an underdeveloped pre-frontal 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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Risk taking and impulse control



Heightened sensation seeking + Under-developed self-regulatory control = Increased RISK TAKING

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HELPING TEENS DEAL WITH PEER PRESURE



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Express and communicate about how you are feeling



Adolescent | Adult

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The Shield of Shame

Blame
"It was his fault!"

Deny
"I never did anything!"

Minimise
"He wasn't really hurt"

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

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Medial prefrontal cortex

- Associated with perceptions of self and similar others
- Known as centre for mindfulness
- Involved in maternal bonding – the parent child dyad and inter-subjectivity

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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

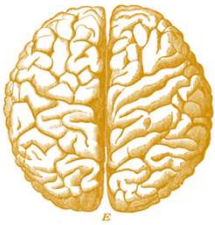
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Lateral brain development



Left Hemisphere

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



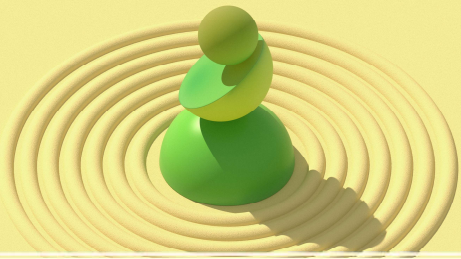
Right Hemisphere

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

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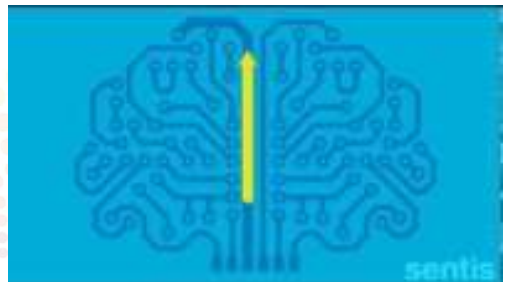
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Activity- Wright Family

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Trauma Impacts

Trauma can impact all elements of children's development: brain, body, memory, learning, behaviour, emotions, relationships.

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Body Systems

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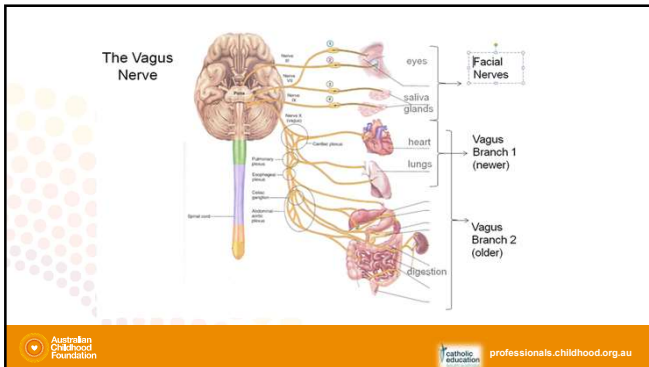
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Sensory information response sequence

Cortex | Thalamus | Amygdala | Survival mode message sent to defend oneself | Sensory data streaming in

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Polyvagal theory and protective responses

by Stephen Porges

Behavioural Functions	Body Functions
Social Engagement 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 eye lids • Slows or speeds heart rate
Mobilisation Fight or Flight Active Freeze Moderate or extreme danger	Hyper-arousal • 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 • Slows heart rate • Constricts bronchi • Stimulates gastrointestinal function

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What trauma or stress response can look like

Cognitions & Behaviours: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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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Strategies to promote neuroception of safety

Physiological safety Relational safety Environmental safety

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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

Mobilising

Offer...

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

Offer...

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

Immobilising

Offer...

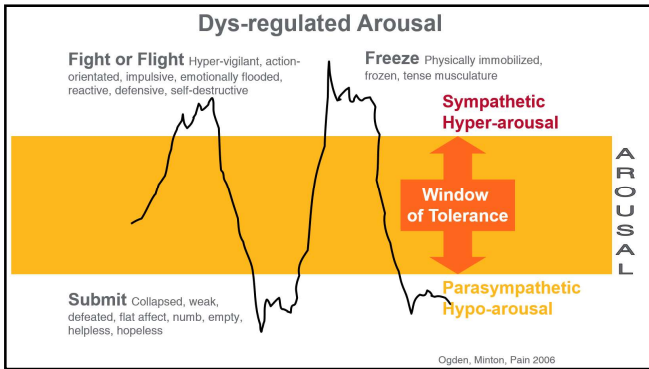
- Heat snap pack
- Gentle sensory/ spine engagement
- Chewing on a sweet or sour lolly, drinking cold or sweet

Offer...

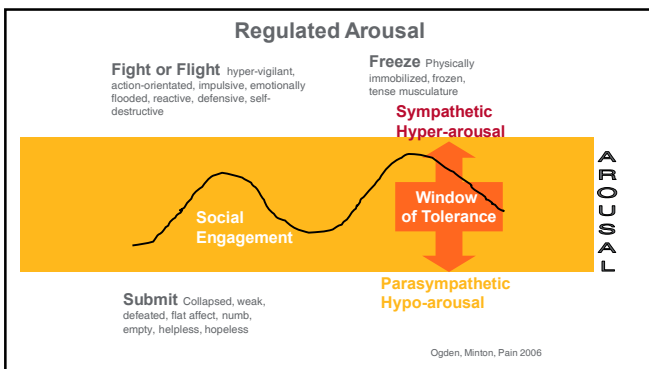
- Drip cold water on the skin i.e. palm initially
- Music, hum
- Voice of safe person
- Seek small movement

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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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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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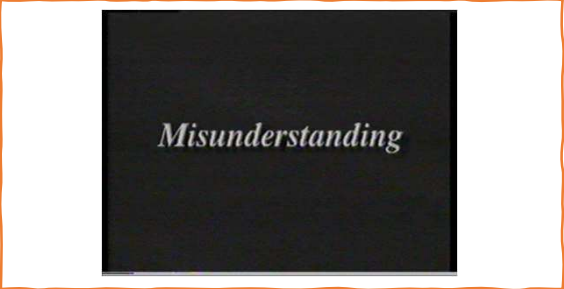
Hand to Hand Attunement

Let's work together to hold an object up between our hands or fingers and *not* let it fall.

We will need to synchronise our movements and attune to one another. What object feels right to hold between us? A big gum ball? A sports ball? A cushion? A balloon? A pencil? Let's try moving the object around. What is that like for you? As you move together, notice if one person is leading or if the movement initiation is sweeping between you. Play around with this. When you become accomplished, add another object so you are using both of your hands to hold up two objects between you. What does it feel like to be in synchrony with another person?



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Misunderstanding

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Finding it difficult to stay (want to be) connected?

Well-Connected Brain
Utilizing the front part of the brain



Open Flexible and Adaptive

Stressed out Brain
Utilizing the more primitive middle region of the brain



Closed and Rigid

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Experience Feeling safe in relationship



Mutual Joy Causes Contentment

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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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Staged- A brain development metaphor - My Brain House

- We build our brain from the bottom to the top- like building a house
- We reinforce parts of our house as we grow, with our roof continuing to develop into our mid 20s.
- A student who is calm and focused at school will likely be functioning with a strong standing brain house, from foundation to roof.
- In times of great stress bits of our brain house can come down and require repair. This is achievable and our brain house can stand strong again.

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Staged/Safe- A brain development metaphor - My Brain House

- Our brain house can experience adversity. This can effect its structural integrity. If we get rattled our thinking cap roof can come off, leaving our feeling walls exposed. This can lead to strong emotions coming out without our thinking cap to help us contain our feelings.
- When this happens we can struggle to find words to communicate as our words flew off with our thinking cap roof.
- If we are deeply shook our roof and walls might come down and leave only our foundation. Our foundation is very strong and reliable. In these times we have our basic life functions to focus on to get us through- eg. our breathing, our heart beat.
- Everyone's rooves blow off from time to time. Given we have all built our own brain houses, we are all equipped to support each other to repair our houses together.

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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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What might adaptive look like in practice?


- See the needs beneath the behaviour
- Utilise strengths
- Psychoeducation in the virtual space
- Relationship, repetition, rhythm
- Use PACE
 - Playfulness
 - Acceptance
 - Curiosity
 - Empathy



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What might Connected look like in practice?




- The student feels safe and connected
- Co-regulation occurs
- A feeling of connectedness is what you get when you feel like you belong in a group, when you are with others of your
- Mirror neurons –eye contact
- Attuned listening.


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What might Enabled look like in practice?

- Creating safety
- Understand triggers
- Map behaviours
- Victoria Dept of Ed's ABC and Scatter Plot Data
- Classroom approaches for individuals
- Flight, Fight, Active Freeze or Submit responses are assisted to enable learning.




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Making SPACE for Learning – Site Audit Tool

This audit tool can be used to evaluate the policies and initiatives of a school that resource and equip different levels of the school structure to create trauma-informed practice. In the following table, list strategies, policies or other processes currently undertaken that support traumatised students at your school.

	Whole Site	Staff	Classroom / Group	Small Group	Individual Student / OHS
S Safe					
P Predictable					
A Adapted					
C Controlled					
E Enabled					

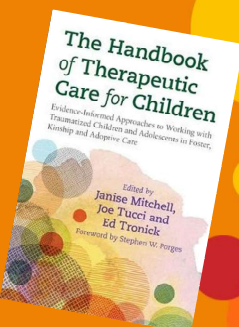
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A valuable resource

Includes chapters from:

- Martin Teicher
- Ed Tronick
- Allan Shore
- Bruce Perry
- Dan Hughes & Jon Baylin
- Kim Golding
- Cathy Malchiodi
- Joe Tucci
- Janise Mitchell
- Glenda Kickett
- Noel Macnamara



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Thank you for your participation!

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