



SMART Practice
Understanding and responding to trauma

Grant High School
3rd March 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



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







Image source: © Josh Mills 2022

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	<p>Part 1: 8:45 to 10:05am Introducing the SMART PRACTICE Framework and ACF Model of PRACTICE Neurobiology and the Adolescent Brain Identifying States of Being – Our Nervous System</p> <p><i>Morning Tea: 10:05 to 10:25</i></p>
	<p>Part 2: 10:25 to 11:45am Understanding the Possible Impacts of trauma Safety, Relationships and Meaning Making</p> <p><i>Lunch Break: 11:45 to 12:15pm</i></p>
	<p>Part 3: 12:15 to 1:35pm Healing ways to respond: SMART PRACTICE</p> <p><i>Afternoon tea 1:35 to 1:55pm</i></p> <p>Part 4: 1:55 to 3:15pm Healing ways to respond: SMART PRACTICE</p>



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PART 1:

**Introducing the SMART
Framework and ACF Model
of practice**



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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 adolescents
- 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

The Site Audit Tool INVITES Educators, Leaders and Support Staff to **celebrate and reflect** on their current practices, policies and processes

Invite your participants to consider their main area of influence/work and what processes/policies and strategies support staff and students.

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

SMART PRACTICE – Site Audit Tool

This is an opportunity to reflect on the current application of the SMART PRACTICE framework across your site. The tool can also be used to plan future implementation strategies as a self-peer. It is acknowledged that not all areas will be relevant to all sites, however each site has value in terms of a holistic application of the skills and knowledge underpinning SMART PRACTICE. In the following table, list strategies, policies or other processes that are currently undertaken that support each of the listed groups in each of the elements of the SMART PRACTICE framework.

SMART PRACTICE	Whole site	Staff team	Group / 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 importance of culture

A protective factor

- Sense of safety
- Relationships
- Meaning making



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Personal Reflection

- What cultural backgrounds are represented in Grant High School?
- What opportunities exist to enrich your classroom environment and lessons with cultural connections, perspectives, wisdom, joy etc.?
- How do you integrate the culture of your students?

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PART 1:

Neurobiology and the Adolescent Brain



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Brain development



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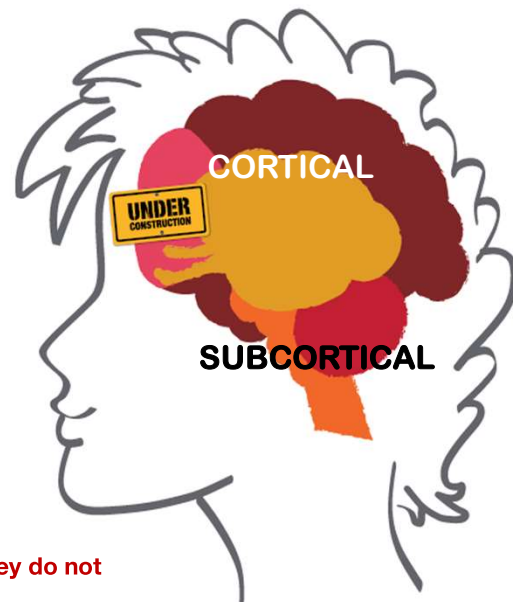
Cortical

- higher executive functions including emotional regulation, planning, reasoning and problem solving, impulse control, processing sensory information such as hearing, recognising language, visual processing, and forming memories

Subcortical

- Survival and living systems such as maintaining homeostasis and reacting to responding to a loud bang

All brain regions use interlinked systems / pathways, they do not work in isolation



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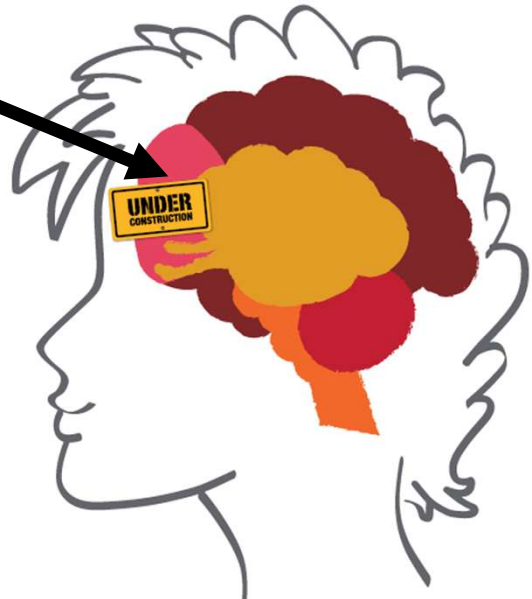


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The Prefrontal Cortex

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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Cortical

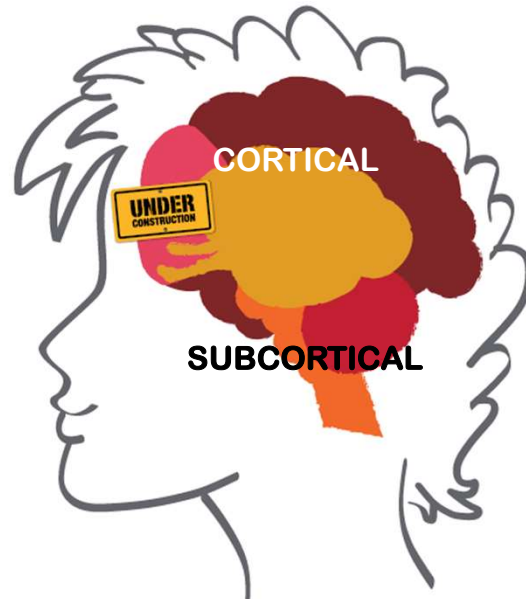
- Consciously activated for reflection

Responsive

Subcortical

- Unconsciously activated for constant survival

Reactive



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Survival

Our brain's 1st priority is to survive. Responding to a perceived threat initiates an immediate whole body experience where we either:

- **Seek relationship (most advanced)**
- **Fight, flight, actively freeze (Mobilise)**
- **Flop (Immobilise)**

Depending on the degree of the response, the cortex and hippocampus can be difficult to access. We become less able to 'consciously think', and in the moment and reactive.

In a full survival response, we are terrified, uncontained and disconnected from our body.



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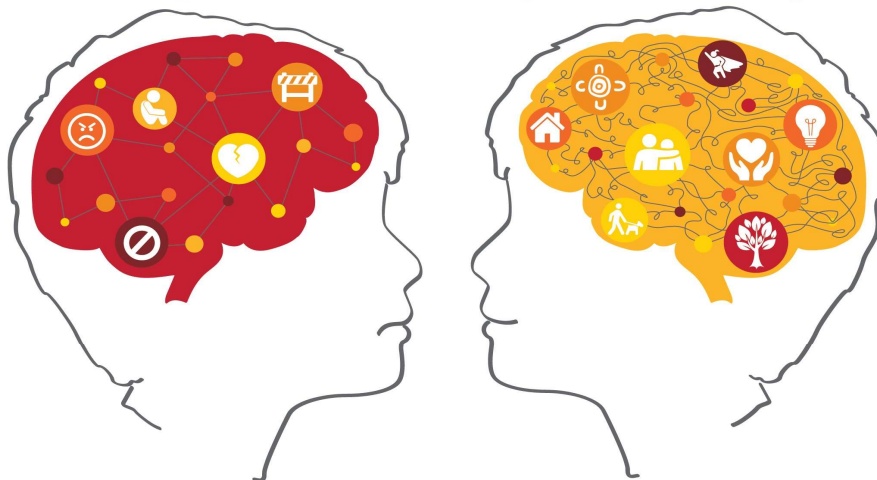


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Early experiences shape the architecture of our brain

Threat and Neglect → Survival

Safety and Connection → Integration

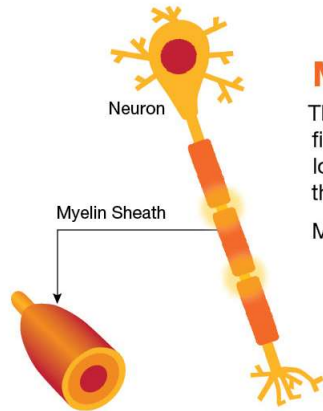


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Pruning & myelination in the adolescent brain



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.

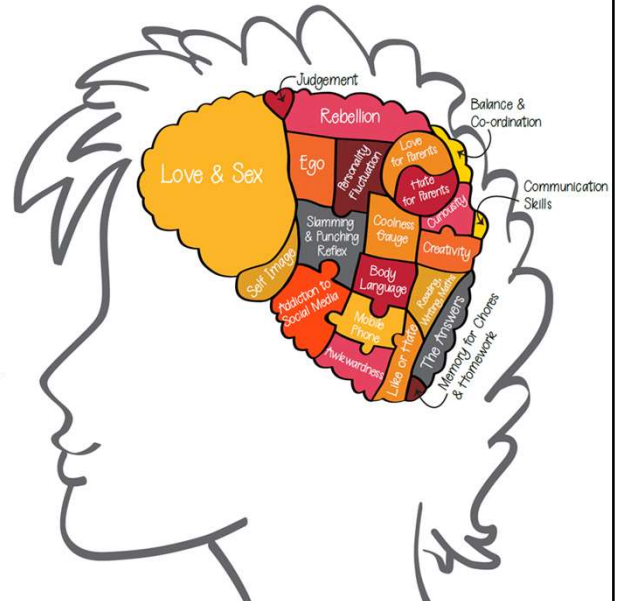
Myelination on a neuron allows it to operate more efficiently.



A challenging time....

Heightened novelty seeking and risk taking during adolescence is biologically driven and normative to an extent.

Pubescent hormones influence young people to look for edgy activities while their underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex doesn't help them to hold the potential negative consequences of these activities in mind and control their impulses.



Harnessing the power of the teenage brain

Testing boundaries and a passion to explore what is unknown and exciting, helps move from dependence to independence

Essential time of emotional intensity, social engagement, and creativity. They are primed to think outside the box, push boundaries, to seek out novel experiences and become more integrated (efficient) at regularly used processes amongst many other changes!

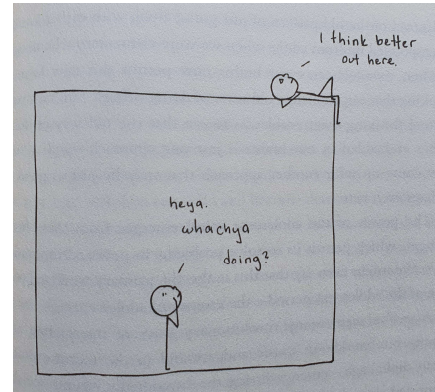


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PART 1:

Identifying States of Being



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Detecting Safety with our Social Engagement System

- Finding comfort in the presence of others
- This is a calm behavioural state
- Often characterized by mirroring and reciprocation.
- Tell tale signs– people are orientated towards one another with engaged faces, relaxed movement, smiling/ laughing
- Open to learning, new experiences, taking on challenges



Neuroception of Safety

Neuroception = the way our neural circuits quickly and implicitly work out if situations or people are safe or dangerous

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	Mobilisation Fight, Flight, Active Freeze	I don't feel safe	I am filled with energy I need to move I need to act now	Red Faced, hot and sweaty Fast beating heart Muscles tensed Moving body, hard to find stillness	
	Social Engagement	I feel safe	I am all set to play and explore I am ready to connect I am open to your ideas	Making Eye contact Orienting towards those around Listening Relaxed, loose, flowing body	
	Immobilisation Flop	I don't feel safe	I am numbed out I am retreating inside I am collapsed, small, and distant	I have cold extremities Glazed eyes, distant stare Slow movement Lethargic & passive body	

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Calming Self-Care Strategies for Staff

- Short meditation or focused activity first thing in the morning
- Use breathing techniques to address tension – see if you can slow your heart rate down
- Set intention for the day on the way to school
- Stretch
- Use an affirmation – have it where you can see it
- Bring mindfulness to everyday tasks
- Listening to calming music

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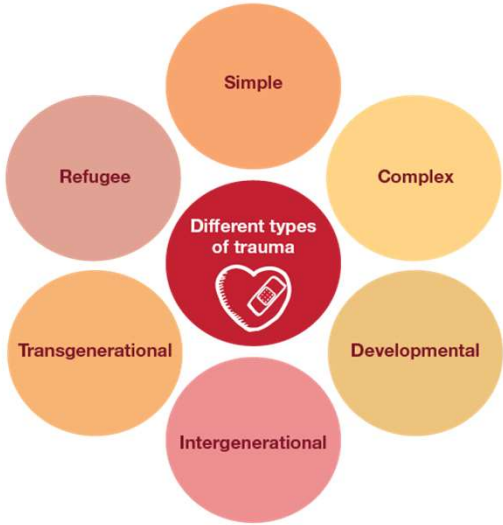
PART 2:

Understanding the Possible Impacts of Trauma




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Experiences of trauma and impacts



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Developmental Trauma

- Refers to the period of time the brain is undergoing significant development; in utero through to late adolescence. Exposure to trauma during this time can alter the brain's architecture.
- Usually relational in nature – the trauma happens in relationship (through abuse, neglect, domestic violence, toxic stress etc) and therefore is healed in relationship.



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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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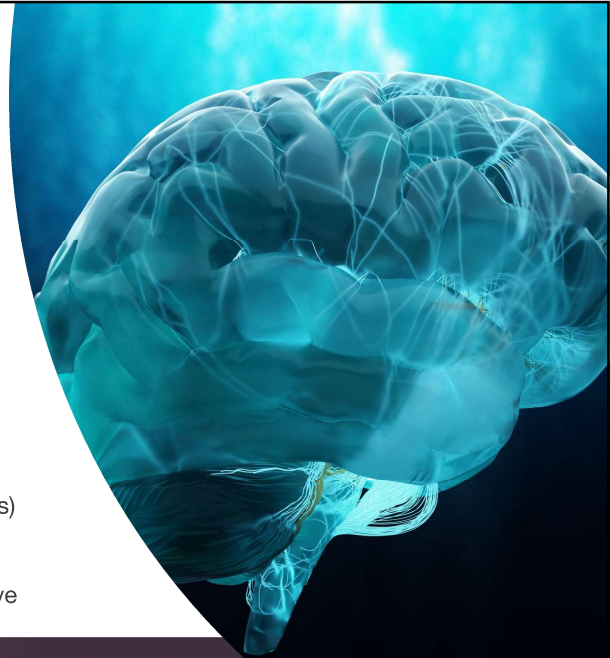


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Vulnerabilities – the impact of trauma on the PFC

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



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Possible impacts

- Difficulties coordinating cognitive processes such as planning & working memory
- Difficulty with voluntary movement tasks – walking or writing
- Becoming overwhelmed and not able to sort incoming sensory information
- Can't place memories in time or place – flooding & flashbacks
- Working memory, retention and recall (retrieval) capacity severely impacted
- Difficulty in emotional regulation
- Difficulty in reading facial expressions
- Constantly perceiving threat where there is none
- Might be unable to use foresight and anticipation, sustain attention and focus, 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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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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Children that have been abused do not have **'behaviour problems'** that need to be addressed. They have extreme survival skills that need to be **understood**.

- Paula Goodwin

Image source: ©2022 Sabrina A Francis

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9 Points of curiosity:

Be curious about the behaviour and the meaning it holds

1. What is the function behind the behaviour = meeting an unmet need?
2. Developmental stage of the child?
3. Current state of the child's nervous system? (hypersensitised, under responsive?)
4. Survival/protective response – fight, flight, freeze, dissociate
5. Coping strategy (that no longer works)
6. Structural changes in the brain
7. The demands of the environment outstripping the capacity of the person
8. How is this problem the child's solution?
9. Trauma induced thinking and conditioning (the world is an unsafe place, adults cannot be trusted, there is no hope of change, it is not safe to show vulnerability...)


Words Matter – how behaviours are perceived/understood in the classroom



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PART 2:

Safety, Relationships and Making Meaning



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The importance of safety



- Arousal**
 - Staying alert
 - Shutdown or hide
- Attention**
 - Trying to take in too much
 - Trying to avoid stimulation
- Memory**
 - Indiscriminative 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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- What do you think provides psychological safety for your students?
- What threatens their safety?
- How can you increase safety for students at your high school?

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The importance of relationship

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

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The importance of making meaning

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

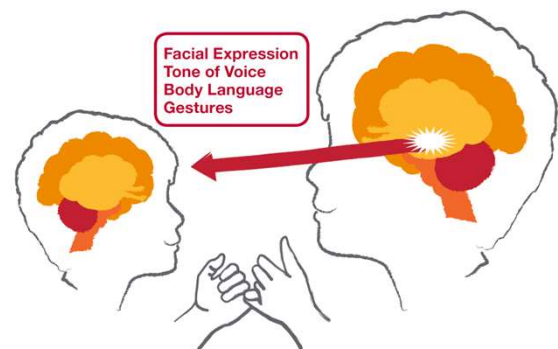
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How do I make meaning of the world?

Relational Templates:

- Our brains grow through connection with another brain.
- Our early attachments provide us with cues on how we interpret and respond to the world around us.
- Mirror neurons help us to mimic social cues and learn new skills from others.
- Effective communication is reliant on sufficient access to relationships who are available, consistent and safe.



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Reflection

- Thinking about your classroom, what activities do you do that relate back to the needs* of the students?

What will you add to your classroom or practice tomorrow?

*needs as a *child* not as a learner. This is a small but important distinction.



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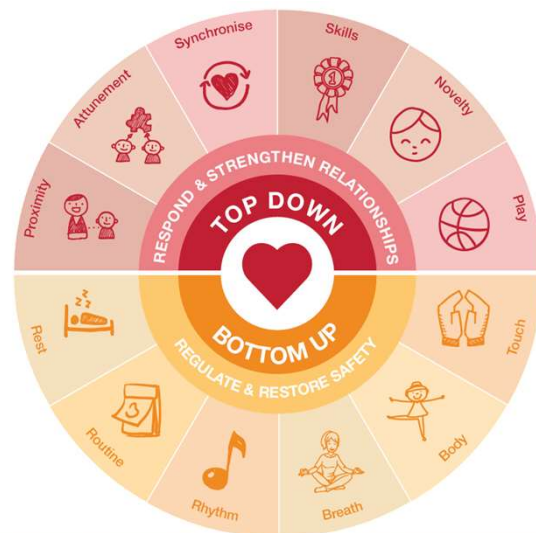


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What is the SMART Circle of PRACTICE?

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.



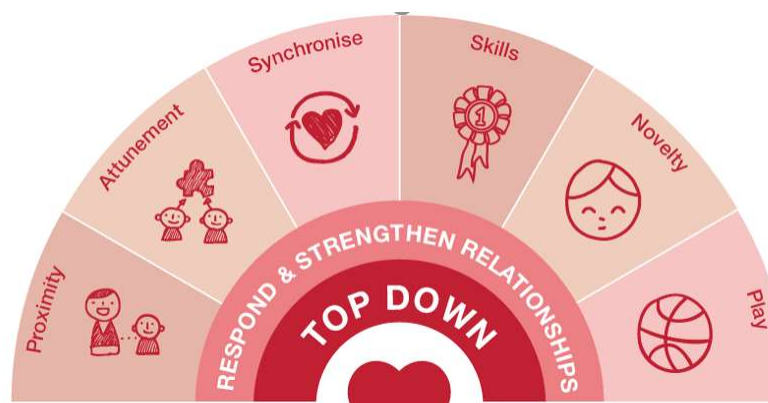
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Top Down

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



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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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PART 3:

**Healing Ways to Respond:
SMART Practice**



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Best Practice Approaches for all children...	And for those with trauma and/ or disability...	
Build felt sense of safety	Build unique profile of needs and work to meet them	Meet the child/ young person where they are at, not where they 'should' be
Honour their voice, strengths, differences, culture, their life journey so far	Coregulate	Implement additional supports where needed such as learning supports
Routine and predictability	Work to translate behaviour into meaning and adapt responses accordingly	Provide opportunities to make meaning of their life story
	Build necessary skill sets	Build emotional literacy
		Implement sensory support where needed
		Bring playfulness




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External Brain

The cognitive impairments in children with disability or trauma can cause them to have poor memory, lack of impulse control, poor judgment, and difficulty with 'cause and effect' reasoning.

Neurodivergent children may have significant strengths in some areas and challenges in others.

This means they need individualised support from others to manage functions they struggle with.

Your children or young people may need you and other trusted adults to act as their External Brain.



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Understanding the needs - PREDICTABLE

To achieve a felt sense of safety:

- I need predictability in relationships
- I need predictability in my environments

PRACTICE Goal:

Create environments that are routine and predictable and prepare students for change



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Transitions – how do we ensure predictability in these transitions/changes?

Micro

- Transitioning between classrooms
- Transitioning between buildings, going past certain buildings
- Transitions within class time – one activity to another, individual work to group work
- Friendships/relationship changes
- Dealing with changing weather issues – hot, cold, wet
- Navigating free time (*free time is not always predictable – it can be a time of dysregulation*)

Macro

- Transitioning from childhood to adolescence
- Transitioning from Year 6 – Year 7
- Transitioning from Middle School
- Changing schools or campuses
- Friends from primary school not transitioning with them to high school
- Children in Care – changing carers/placements or changing schools/friends

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Understanding the needs – RESPONSIVE

- I need those closest to me to respond to me in a way that I need
- I need environments that support and respond to what I need

PRACTICE Goal:

- Respond to students with the understanding that their past trauma will guide present behaviours, cognitions, and emotions.



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Understanding the needs – ATTUNED

- I need those around me to attune into me and my needs
- I need to make positive meaning about my world.

PRACTICE Goal:

- Recognize and act upon trauma related cues displayed by the student



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Understanding the needs – CONNECTING

- 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.

PRACTICE Goal:

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



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Understanding the needs - TRANSLATING

- I need you to help me understand why I respond or behave in the way I do....especially in my body
- I need you to help me remember what I need to do (both in my learning and in my emotional and body regulation)

PRACTICE Goal:

- Aid students to interpret and organize their experiences



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Understanding the needs - INVOLVING



Image: hobbyart.com

- I need you to help me feel and be involved in activities in my class or at school
- I need you to help scaffold my peer relationships for me

PRACTICE Goal:

Promote students' participation in with peers, in class and the wider school community

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Understanding the needs - CALMING

- I need you to respond to me in a way that makes me feel safe and ok
- I need my felt sense of safety restored through co-regulation

PRACTICE Goal:

- Assist students to attain a sense of calm and connection



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Understanding the needs - ENGAGING

- I need you to help me understand who I am, so I can engage with others – help me build the narrative of who I am, my story.
- I need practice to be in relationships with others, through play, building my self-efficiency and for you to model what this can look like.

PRACTICE Goals:

- Support students by building relationships with them that are respectful, compassionate and sustained



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Group Activity

Think about the demands of the school/ classroom environment and the capacities of the students to cope.

Where may there be differences?



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Checkout
Keep in touch
ACF & SMART Resources
References



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Check out

What are you taking back to your school/site tomorrow?

- **Strategy?**
- **Activity?**
- **New perspective?**





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Keep in touch with ACF and DfE

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Karen Perry, Policy Officer, Child Protection and Trauma-informed practice, DfE

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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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