



The intersectionality of Disability, Neurodiversity and Trauma

16 March 2023

Australian Inclusive Schooling Conference



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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of this land. 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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Presentation overview

- Terminology – what are we talking about when we use the terms disability, neurodiversity and developmental trauma
- Intersectionality – how do these considerations interconnect
- Helpful Approaches in practice
- Where to go for more information
- Australian Childhood Foundation



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TERMINOLOGY



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Neurodiversity



- Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.
- The word neurodiversity refers to the diversity of all people, but it is often used in the context of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as ADHD or learning disabilities.

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-neurodiversity-202111232645>



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The neurodiversity perspective - Aiyana Bailin

- Autism and other neurological variations (learning disabilities, ADHD, etc.) may be disabilities, but they are not flaws. People with neurological differences are not broken or incomplete versions of normal people.
- Disability, no matter how profound, does not diminish personhood. People with atypical brains are fully human, with inalienable human rights, just like everyone else.
- People with disabilities can live rich, meaningful lives.
- Neurological variations are a vital part of humanity, as much as variations in size, shape, skin color and personality. None of us has the right (or the wisdom) to try and improve upon our species by deciding which characteristics to keep and which to discard. Every person is valuable.
- Disability is a complicated thing. Often, it's defined more by society's expectations than by individual conditions. Not always, but often.
- Aiyana Bailin on June 6, 2019 <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/clearing-up-some-misconceptions-about-neurodiversity/>



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Disability

- The old way of thinking about disability focused on an individual's impairment as a medical condition to be treated, fixed, or cured.
- Fortunately, in recent times there has been a shift in the way disability is viewed and understood. The focus is now on removing barriers and implementing adjustments that provide an equitable experience to participate in society for people with disability.

<https://www.and.org.au/resources/disability-statistics/what-is-disability>

The definition of 'Disability' under the Federal *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) is very broad to encompass physical, sensory, mental and intellectual disability.




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Pathological Demand Avoidance

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I have **pathological demand avoidance**, an autism spectrum condition affecting social interaction and communication. It can also mean I get lost in my imagination. My main challenge is that demands (you must/you need to/you have to) make me very anxious. It can look like aggression or being naughty, but actually I'm panicking.

Please be patient, allow me to make my own decisions where possible, give me time to process change, and help me calm down if needed.



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Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

- FASD is a lifelong disability.
- Individuals with FASD will experience some degree of challenges in their daily living, and need support with motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, attention, communication, emotional regulation, and social skills to reach their full potential.
- FASD is a serious public health issue.
- There are more children born each year with FASD than with ASD, Spina Bifida, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome and SIDS combined (Mather Wiles & O'Brien, 2015)



Photo credit: iStock



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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 brains architecture.
- Usually relational in nature – the trauma happens in relationship (through abuse, neglect, domestic violence, toxic stress etc) and therefore is healed in relationship.



Photo credit: unsplash.com

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INTERSECTIONALITY



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How do I know what is trauma related and what is disability or neurodivergence related?

- Sometimes you just won't know for sure!
- Chicken and egg conundrum: Various research indicates children and young people with disabilities and neurodivergence are more vulnerable to experiencing trauma and those identified as experiencing trauma often have diagnosed learning difficulties, sensitivities, and disabilities.
- Due to research into epigenetics, we also know that what life experiences mum has had can influence the development of her unborn child.
- Misdiagnosis can occur if not all factors are taken into consideration.

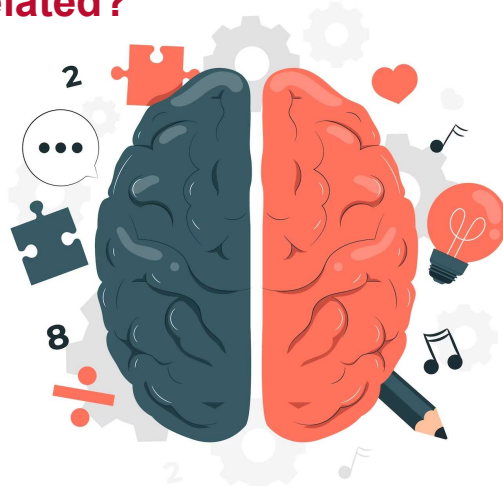
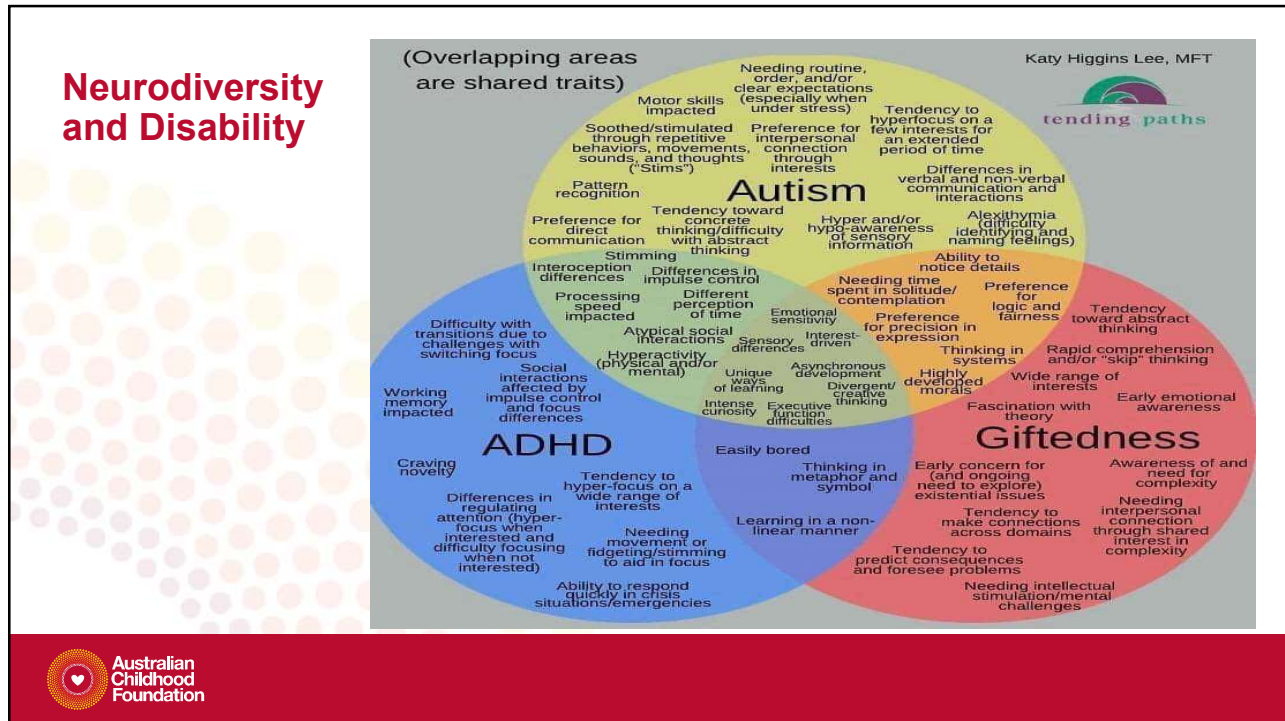


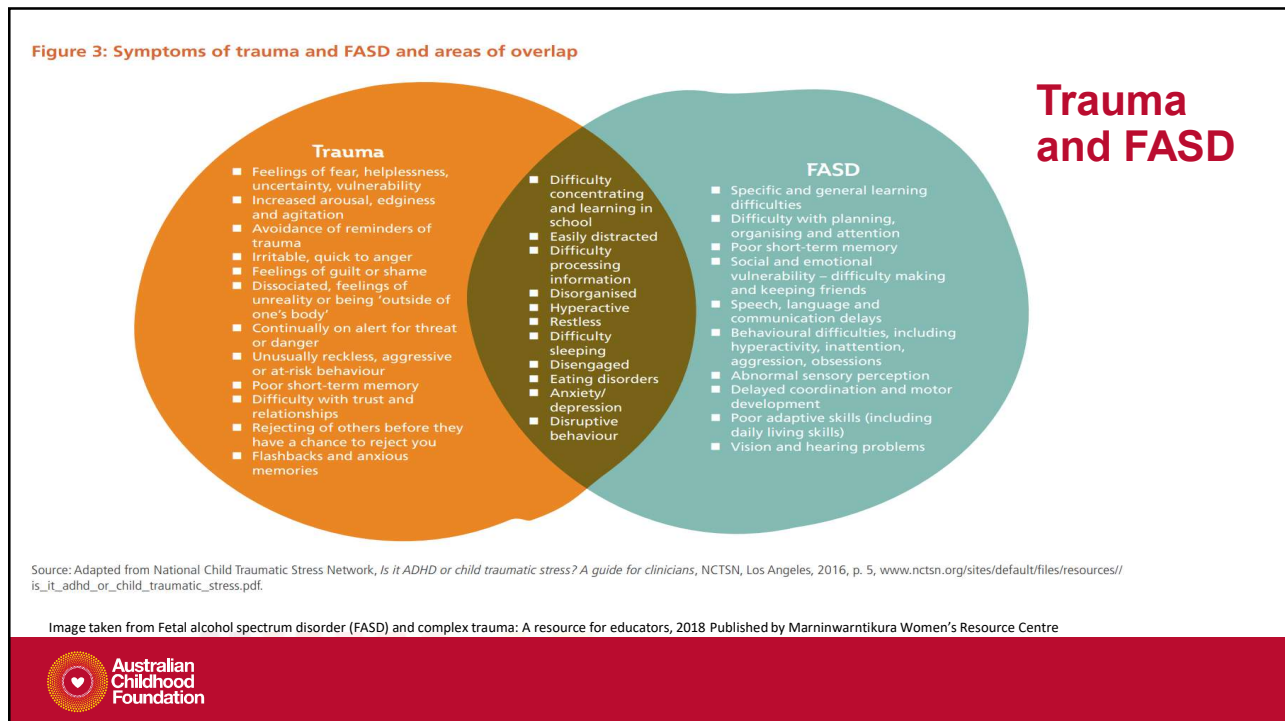
Photo credit: freepik.com



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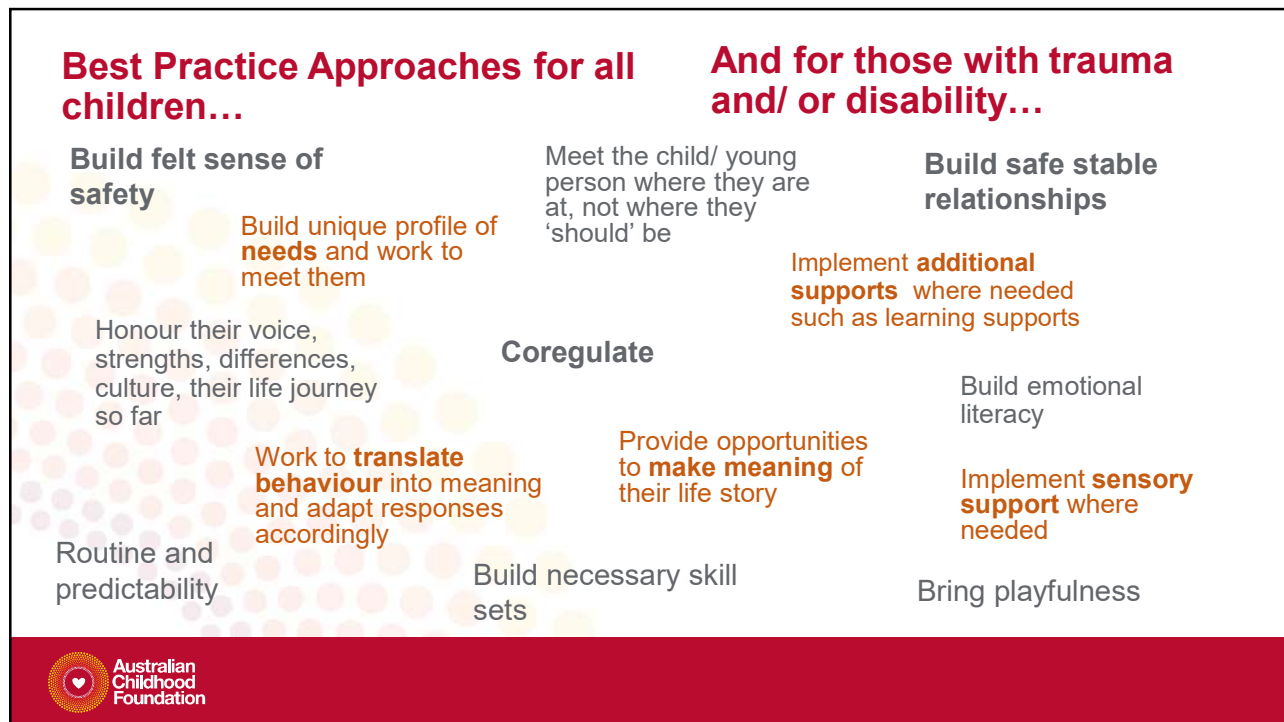


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HELPFUL APPROACHES IN PRACTICE

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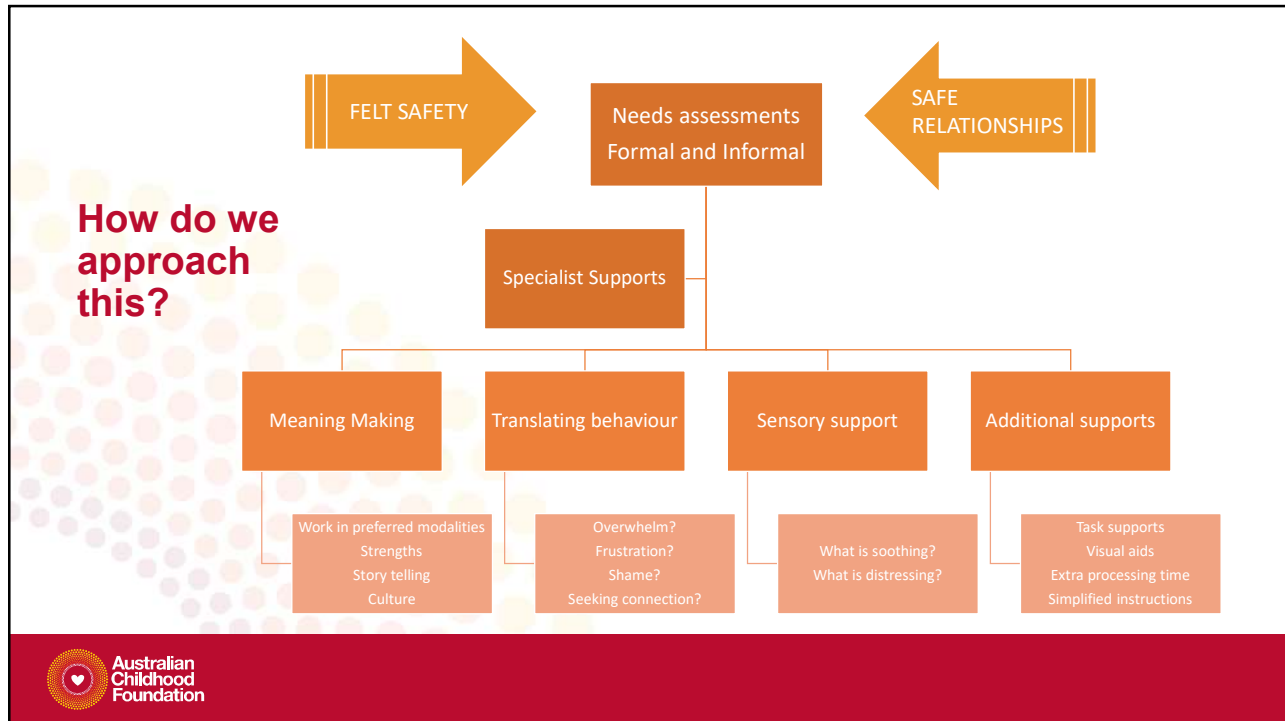
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Specialised supports

- Occupational
- Medical
- Assistive Technology
- Neurological
- Speech Therapy
- Various modalities of therapy such as art, play, equine, music, EMDR

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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.

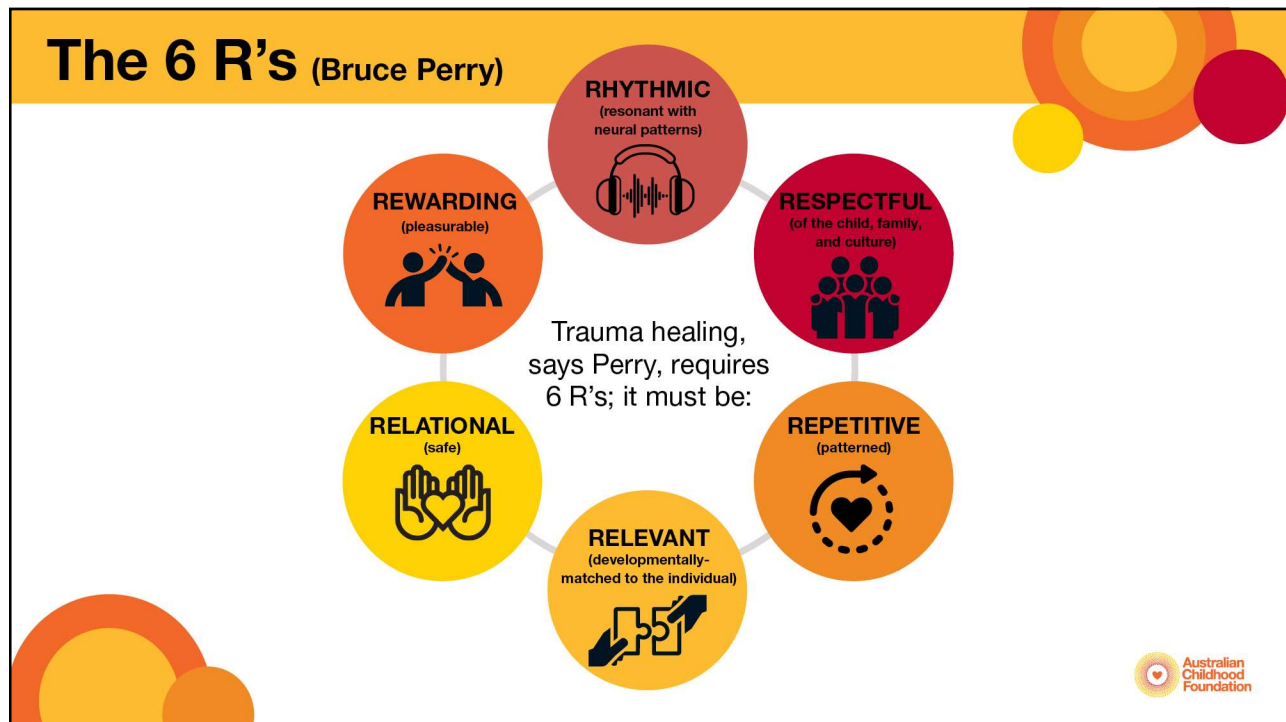
Neurodivergent children may have significant strengths in some areas and challenges in others.

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

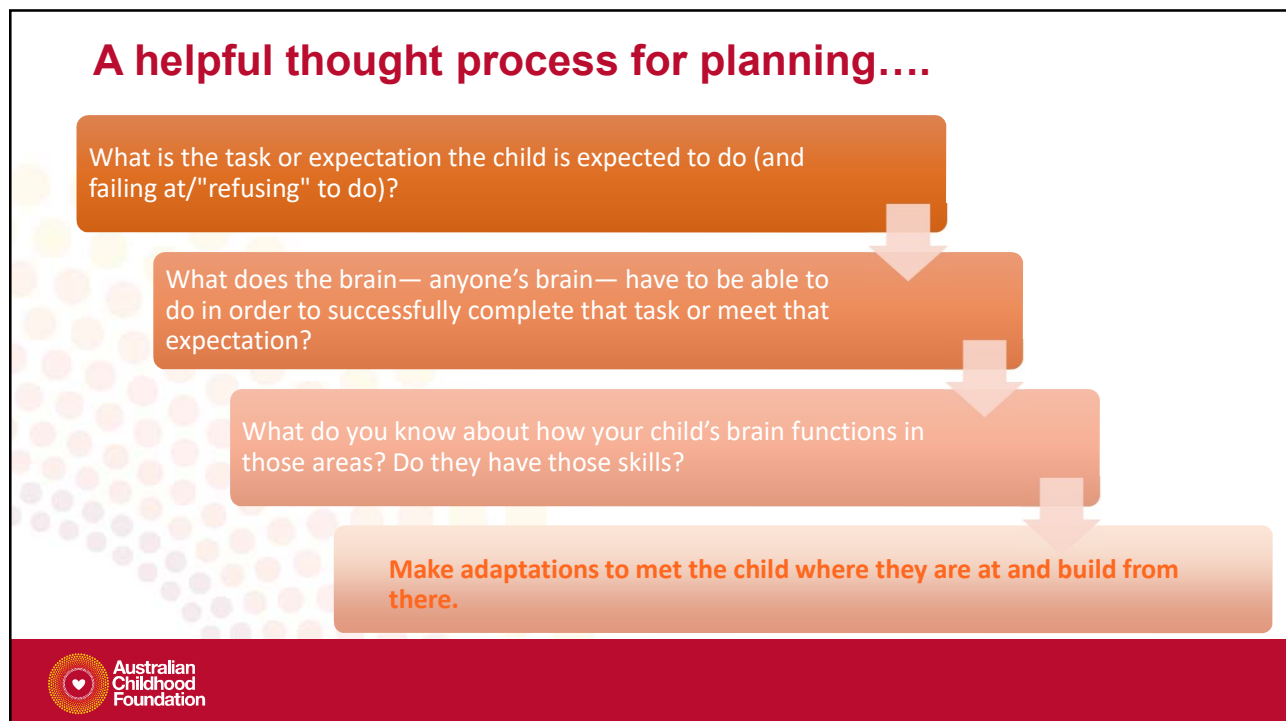
Your children or young people may need you and other trusted adults to act as their External Brain.

Photo credit: unsplash.com

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WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION



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Resources

- Robert Jason Grant

<https://www.robertjasongrant.com/store/>

Interoception: The New Topic in Autism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=A0zbCiakjaA&feature=emb_imp_woyt

Kelly Mahler: Interoception & Trauma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7cGrH9g3ps>

Innovative Resources

<https://innovativeresources.org/what-are-the-differences-between-trauma-and-learning-difficulties-in-young-children-and-why-is-it-important-to-be-able-to-recognise-them/>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/justice-and-safety/child-abuse-and-neglect?_ga=2.188211310.79661319.1677039499-1090934101.1677039499



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Resources continued

- Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People [ACYP]. 2020. Voices of Children and Young People with Disability Report.
<https://f.hubspotusercontent20.net/hubfs/522228/docs/ACYP-the-voices-of-children-and-young-people-with-disability-2020.pdf>
- Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care
<https://cetc.org.au/just-ask-us-insights-into-working-with-young-people-with-disability/>
- More than one neurotype (provides reflections, links, resources etc from a lived experience perspective)
<https://www.facebook.com/morethanoneurotype/photos>
- The Neuroscience of the ADHD Brain
https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=Jjf-yHLaXtU&feature=emb_imp_woyt
- <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/practice-guides/effect-trauma-brain-development-children>



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Resources continued

- <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/schools-and-educators/curriculum-and-teaching/curriculum-programs/applying-interoception-skills-classroom>
- <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-child-with-slow-processing-speed>
- <https://autismfriendlycharter.org.au/app/>
- <https://www.spectrumnews.org/features/legacy-special-reports/autism-brain-region-by-region/>
- <https://mytherapyhouse.com.au/pathological-demand-avoidance-disorder-pda/#:~:text=PDA%20is%20an%20extremely%20debilitating,environment%20with%20the%20right%20supports.>
- <https://theactgroup.com.au/pathological-demand-avoidance/>



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Resources - FASD

- <https://www.fasdhub.org.au/fasd-information/assessment-and-diagnosis/guide-to-diagnosis/>
- <https://www.fasdhub.org.au/>
- <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorders>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgoZy7c-96k>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTwHuclGJ9A>
- <https://www.nofasd.org.au/>
- <https://cetc.org.au/im-a-fasd-specialist-here-are-5-things-you-should-know-about-it/>



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An overview of the Australian Childhood Foundation

We are a Force for Childhood, making an impact in Australia & New Zealand for nearly 40 years



We Help Children Heal

On their own, children do not recover from the devastating impact of abuse, neglect and family violence. They need specialised support to heal. We provide therapeutic services to children.



We Keep Children Safe

We build the ability and confidence of individuals and organisations to protect children. We provide parents with education and support to help them raise happy, safe and loved children.



We Stand Up for Children

We advocate for changes to laws and policies that help to make all children safer. We work to strengthen community attitudes that prioritise the rights of children to love and safe relationships.



We Create Understanding for Children

We educate and support adults who look after and work with children to be better able to understand and respond to their needs.



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Our Education Services

Access our latest offerings:
<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/training-development/>

- Our Education Services co-create and amplify knowledge that changes children's lives for the better, by creating networks of learning in partnership with professionals and organisations working with children and young people.
- Our efforts include:
 - Accessible learning opportunities for professionals: a range of self-paced modules and virtual classrooms covering trauma prevention, relational healing and evidence-based approaches to best practice.
 - Customised organisational education: tailored training packages designed to support ongoing staff development, including Train The Trainer options for long-term success.
 - Accredited training: our unique Graduate Certificate in Developmental Trauma



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Our Safeguarding Services

- Over a decade, Safeguarding Services have partnered with over 300 organisations nationally and internationally to strengthen the capacity of institutions to keep children and young people safe.
- We offer a suite of standard and customised solutions that meet national and state Child Safe Standards, aimed at creating organisational culture change.
- We draw on best practice from the Foundation's experience and our network of partners, and evidence, including our recent Safeguarding Evaluation by the Centre for Social Impact.

Access our latest offerings:
<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/safeguarding-children-services/>



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QUESTIONS



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Education & Safeguarding Services
training@childhood.org.au
safeguarding@childhood.org.au

Karyn Robinson

Senior Consultant

krobinson@childhood.org.au

