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An overview of the Australian Childhood Foundation

We are a Force for Childhood, making an impact in Australia 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/](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/>

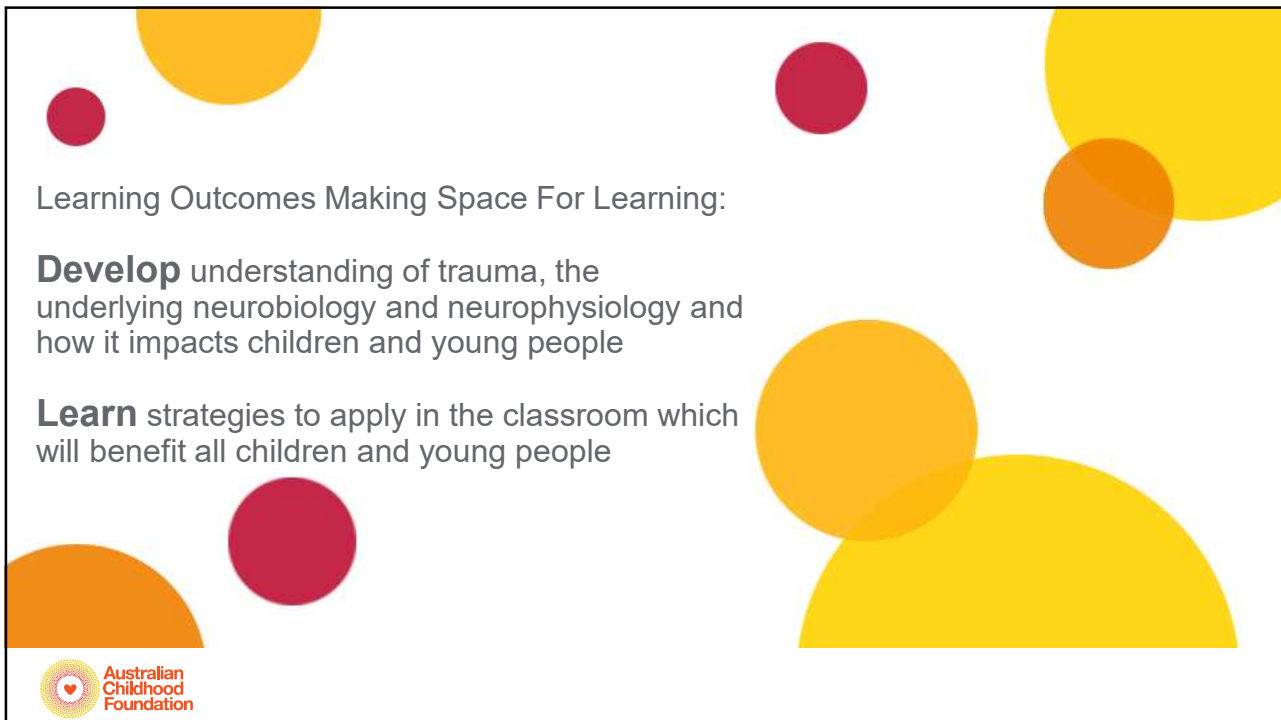


Our Learning Community



Stay in touch!
<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/childhood-professionals-newsletter/>






Learning Outcomes Making Space For Learning:

Develop understanding of trauma, the underlying neurobiology and neurophysiology and how it impacts children and young people

Learn strategies to apply in the classroom which will benefit all children and young people





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Safety

The content of this training can evoke strong emotions and may stir up personal experiences of trauma.

Please be mindful of your own wellbeing during this training and if you need support please ask the facilitator.





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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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STAGED **ADAPTIVE** **ENABLED**

S **P** **A** **C** **E**

PREDICTABLE **CONNECTED**

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Domains	Domain Explanation	Translated into needs statements
Staged	The brain develops sequentially. Sophisticated functions only emerge after basic functions are consolidated. We should resource children in line with what their developing brain's need.	Children's brains need support to grow and learn My brain grows upwards step by step
Predictable	Uncertainty and unpredictability can disrupt emotional wellbeing and threaten social competence. Strategies which promote stability and familiarity enhance social and emotional wellbeing.	Children need to know what they can count on I feel better when I know what is coming next.
Adaptive	Familiar behavioural routines are more likely to be enacted in response to life challenges than new ones. Familiar routines may not always be constructive. Strategies which promote adaptability in children's behavioural routines are ones that meet children creatively with multiple options for intervention.	Children need support to grow up healthy and strong There are things I need to grow up healthy and strong.
Connected	Children's internal maps for forming, maintaining and being in relationships are affected by their experiences of relationships throughout their lives. Negotiating relationships at school can be a source of stress when children have found them hard or unsafe in the past. Relationship with safe and consistent adults and peers form the foundation for change.	Children need to feel like they are connected. I need to feel like I am connected.
		Children need to feel safe and know about what makes a safe connection. I need to feel safe. I need safe connections in my life.
Enabled	All children can benefit from engaging in the process of understanding themselves more deeply. The capacity to identify feelings and learn how they relate to the body, thoughts, and behaviours is a worthwhile life skill. Learning to communicate feelings with each other enriches social cohesion. Making sense of our stories helps us to build coherent identities over time.	Children need to know more about what makes them who they are. I grow stronger as I learn more about what makes me, me.

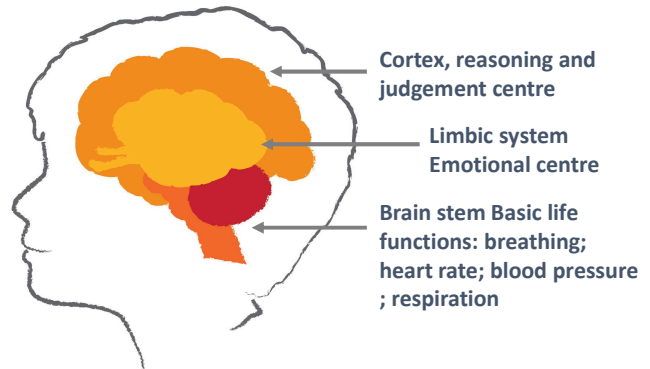
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Understanding Neuro sequential Brain Development

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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.



Children's brains need support to grow and learn step.

My brain grows upwards, step by



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The Importance of Culture

How did you become who you are?

- Safety:** Belonging
- Relationships:** Connection
- Meaning making:** Identity

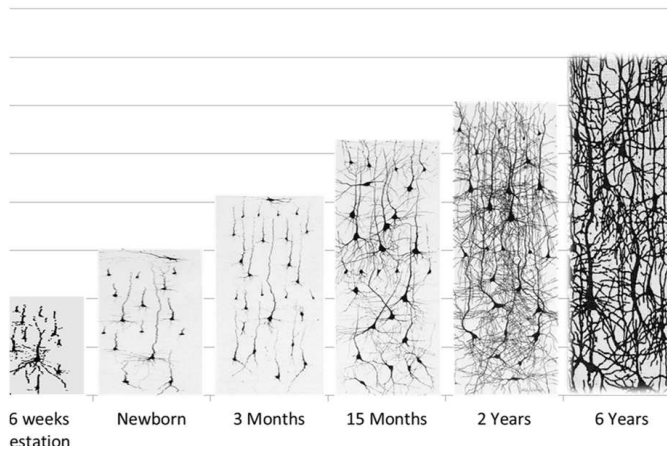


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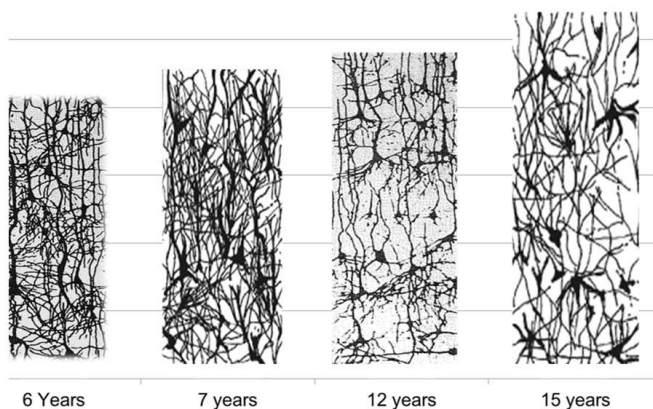
Neuronal development



- Rapid growth occurs from birth to 6 years
- **Critical period** of development
- Healthy neuronal development occurs through **relationships, regulation, repetition**

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Neuronal development



- Early years – period of **rapid growth**
- Followed by onset of puberty in which **synaptic pruning and formation of new neurons** occurs.

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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



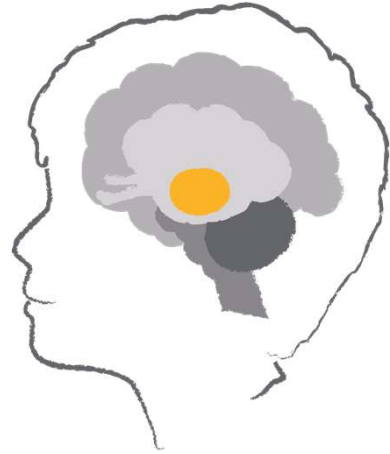
Cerebellum- movement and balance

- 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



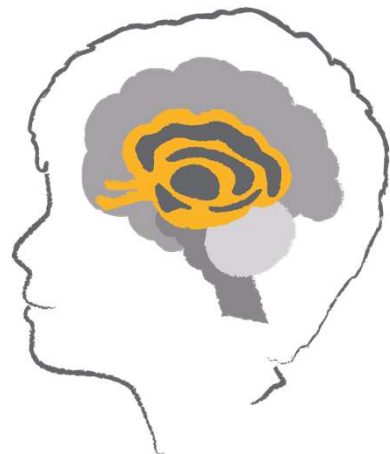
Diencephalon - sorting & sending centre

- 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



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



Amygdala & Hippocampus

Amygdala

- the 'smoke detector' of the brain
- is mature at birth
- processes & stores implicit memories

Hippocampus

- matures between 2-3yrs of age
- provides context to memories & embeds into long-term memory



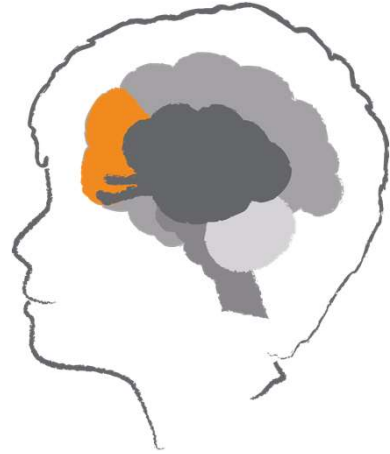
Cerebral cortex- complex thinking

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



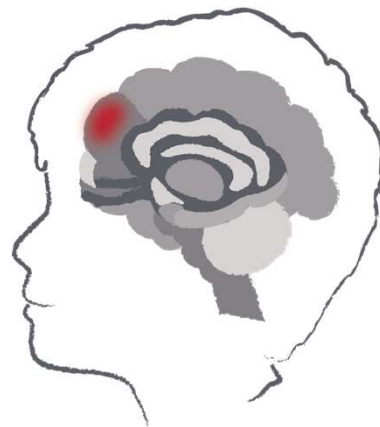
The prefrontal cortex- executive function

- Responsible for executive functions, such as judgement, reasoning, and self awareness. Final part of the brain to reach maturity in late twenties to early 30s



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



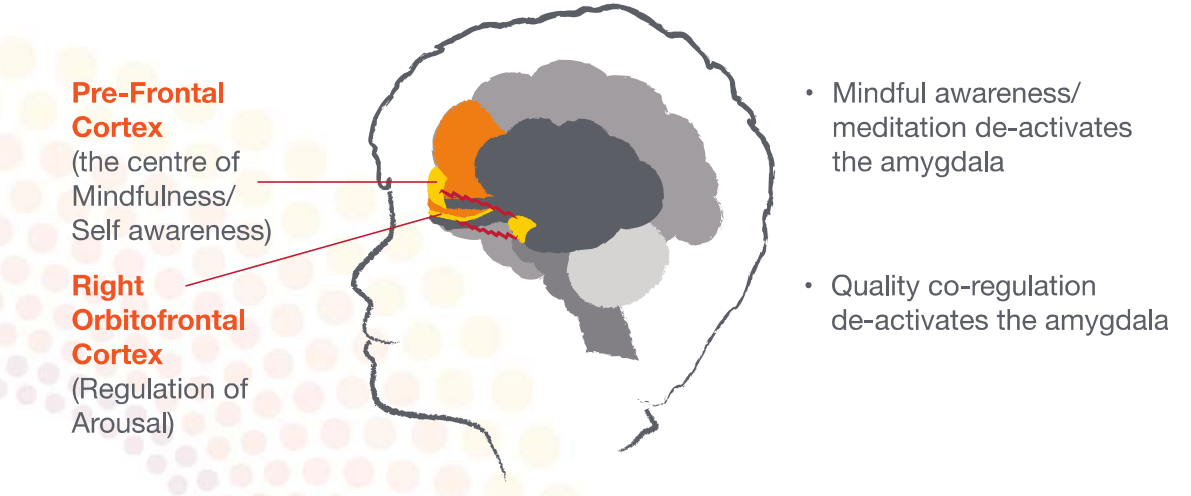


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Mindfulness and co-regulation



- Mindful awareness/ meditation de-activates the amygdala
- Quality co-regulation de-activates the amygdala

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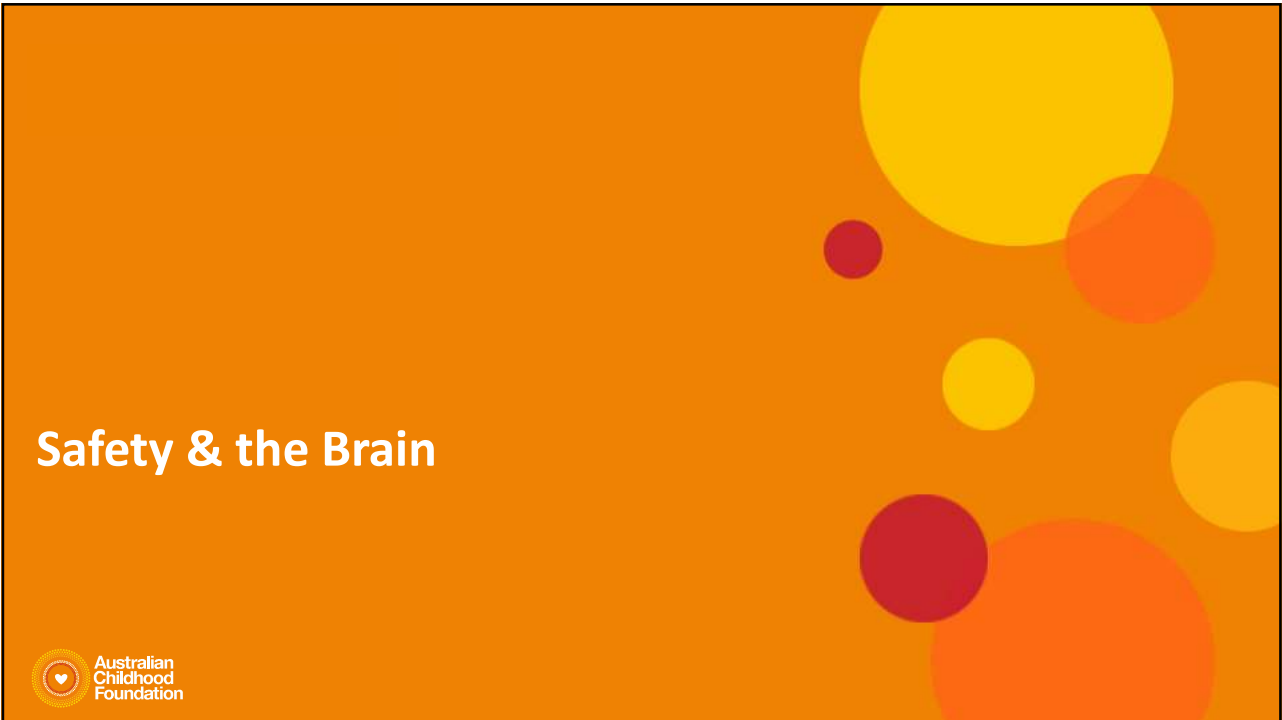
The whiteboard features a hand-drawn diagram with the title "Safety & the Brain" at the top. On the left, a child figure is surrounded by several icons: a car, a house, a person, a heart, and a person with a speech bubble. In the center, a table contains several icons, including a person, a heart, and a person with a speech bubble. On the right, an adult figure stands next to a vertical stack of five icons: a person, a heart, a person with a speech bubble, a person, and a person with a speech bubble. A hand is visible on the right side of the whiteboard, pointing at the stack of icons. The background of the whiteboard is decorated with a red heart and the text "Safety & the Brain".

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Safety & the Brain



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An introduction to the Polyvagal theory and neuroception

Cues of risk and safety are continually monitored by our nervous system.

“Before we can engage in social behaviour and learning we must first feel safe.”

(Porges, 2015, p.115).

<http://lewisinstitute.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/img-strategies2.jpg>



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Polyvagal theory and Protective Responses

Behavioural Functions

Social Engagement

Soothing and calming
Indicates safety

Mobilisation

Fight or Flight
Active Freeze
Moderate or extreme danger

Immobilisation

Collapse or submission
Death feigning
Increased pain threshold
Conserves metabolic resources
Life threatening situations

Body Functions

- Lowers or raises vocalisation pitch
- Regulates middle ear muscles to perceive human voice
- Changes facial expressivity
- Head turning
- Tears and eyelids
- Slows or speeds heart rate

Hyper arousal

- Increases heart rate
- Sweat increases
- Inhibits gastrointestinal function
- Narrowing blood vessels - to slow blood flow to extremities
- Release of adrenaline

Hypo - arousal

- Slows heart rate
- Constricts bronchi
- Stimulates gastrointestinal function

by Stephen Porges



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What trauma or stress response can look like

Cognitions & Behaviours:

- 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:

- 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:


- 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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Polyvagal Theory

I am showing you....

On the inside.....

I need you to....

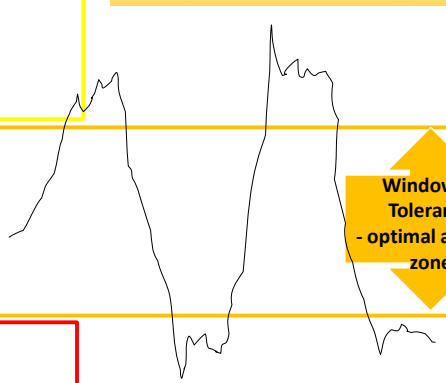
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT	<p>Feeling safe, staying in relationship, connection oriented</p> <p>You might say I am:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making eye contact • Listening • Engaging in play and exploration 	<p>I am feeling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe, Calm, Happy, Sad, Annoyed,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

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

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Changes in Arousal States

Affect:	Shame, anger
Thought:	“I’m a screw up, this is unfair”
Behaviour:	Hitting, running away
Sense of self:	“I am bad, I am broken”
Consciousness:	Hyper-focused, narrow, rigid
Affect:	Joy, pleasure
Thought:	“This is fun, “I’m good at this”
Behaviour:	Increased, sustained effort
Sense of self:	“I’m competent, I can do this”
Consciousness:	Focused and flexible
Affect:	Shame
Thought:	“I don’t care, I can’t do it”
Behaviour:	Collapsing, spacing out
Sense of self:	“I am bad, I am broken”
Consciousness:	Diffuse, spacey




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frozen, emotionally reactive, racing thoughts, hyper-arousal, impulsive, aggressive

Window of Tolerance - optimal arousal zone

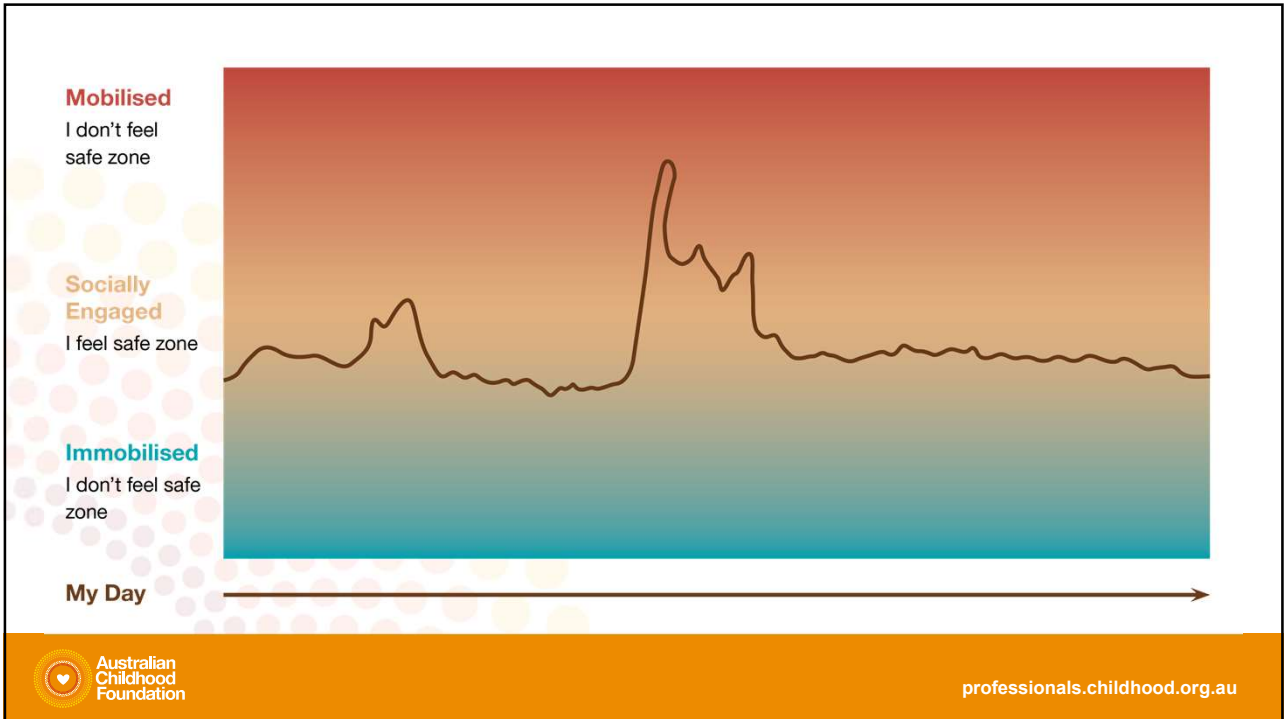
Numb, lethargic, collapsed, cognitively slowed, withdrawn, distant

(Adapted from Ogden & Fisher, 2015)

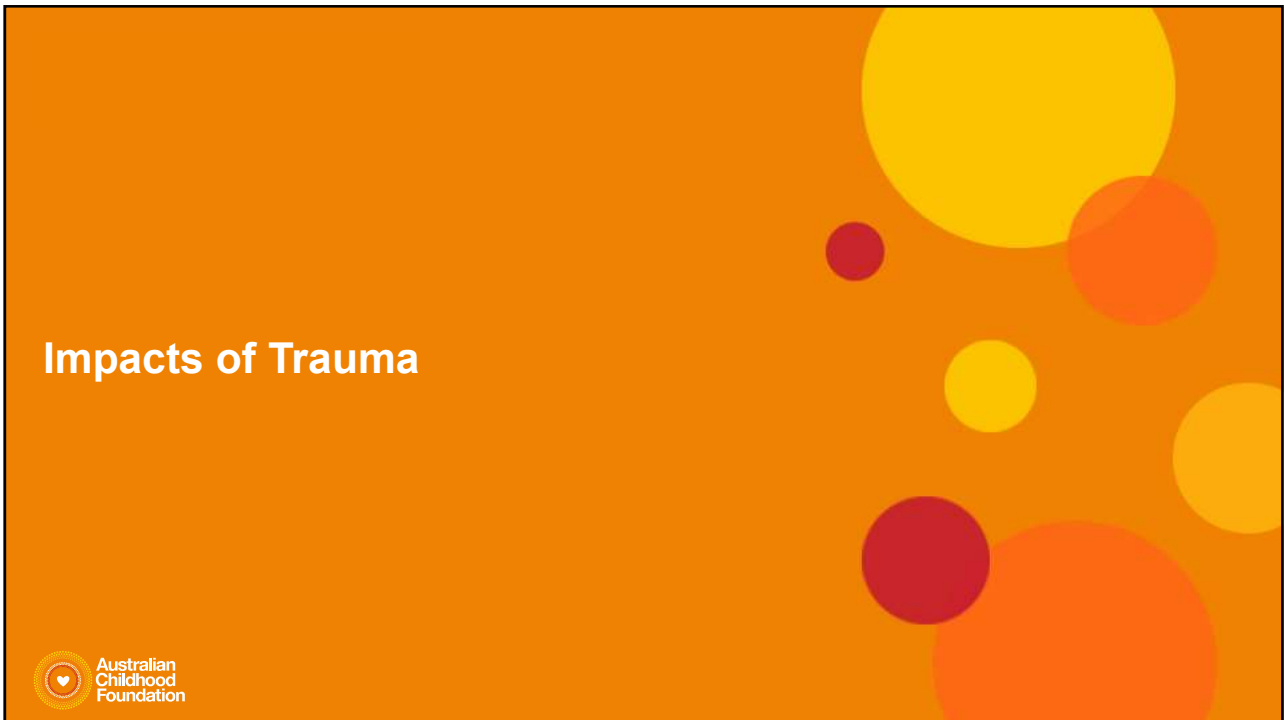


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Defining trauma

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

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Trauma and exposure to chronic stress experienced during childhood and adolescence shake the foundations of healthy brain and body development.



They alter their trajectory over time. They trap their development and prevent them from maturing emotionally, psychologically and cognitively. Children may not progress much beyond the developmental milestones that they had achieved prior to the start of their experiences of abuse and violence.


Children and young people who have suffered this degree of trauma find it difficult to adapt to their environment. In order to best support them, the environment should adapt to the needs of the child or young person. This occurs when relationships surrounding children are safe, predictable and nurturing.

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Exposure to chronic toxic stress or complex trauma affects the effectiveness of key brain structures to integrate the different dimensions of memory. The emotional and physiological resonances of traumatic experiences come to be stored as memory fragments in the limbic system, cerebellum and brain stem without reference points. They do not connect to detailed explicit memories (i.e. the facts) of the events in which these reactions occurred.



Traumatised children and young people are lost in time. They are not connected to their own reactions. Their present and their past are mixed up and confused. They find it difficult to make sense of what has happened to them and what continues to drive their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

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Traumatised children and young people stop practising integrating their feeling states (a function of their right hemisphere) with words and constructs (a function of their left hemisphere) they can use to know and communicate about their internal sensations. They have limited emotional literacy. They do not easily understand their own feelings. They find it hard to attribute language to them and describe them meaningfully for others to understand.



Consistent, congruent and validating responses give them effective blueprints for organising their internal world.



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Children need positive experiences of connection as the basis for them to learn how to:

- problem solve;
- feel safe to explore new situations;
- manage their feelings;
- remember the positive feelings associated with forming relationships; and,
- have a working model for initiating and maintaining relationships.

Traumatised children have poor connective experiences. Their working models are built on fear and mistrust. Supporting children to re-experience relationships differently is the key to trauma recovery and change.



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Trauma-based behaviour, in general, serves important adaptive functions. It often makes sense in the context in which it first emerged. However, it can become counterproductive if it continues after the need for it has changed.

- Comfort Seeking
- Seeking connection
- Self-Protection
- What feelings are under the behaviour?
- What needs are under the behaviour?



SPACE

Predictable

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



Student need to know what they can count on

I feel better when I know what is coming next.



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What might predictability look like in practice?

- For students
- For families
- For all staff
- Systemically

relationships

physical
activities

routines

instructions

learning
tasks

behavioural
expectations



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Predictable You

“I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.”

Hiam Ginott



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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?
- You had a 'win'/great day at work. Who did you share this with? What did you do to acknowledge it?



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Adaptive

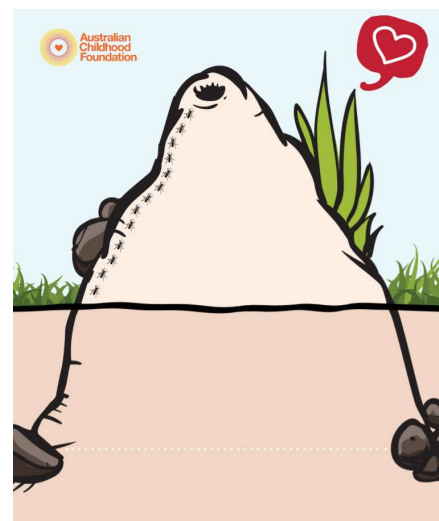


- Traumatized students and young people rely on a limited set of behavioural routines to respond to the challenges of their context.
- These routines are sourced in the history of their physiological reaction to trauma and the experiences of relationships through which these reactions were interpreted and responded to.
- Strategies which promote adaptability in students and young people are those which are able to maintain multiple meanings for behaviour and remain open to multiple options for interventions.

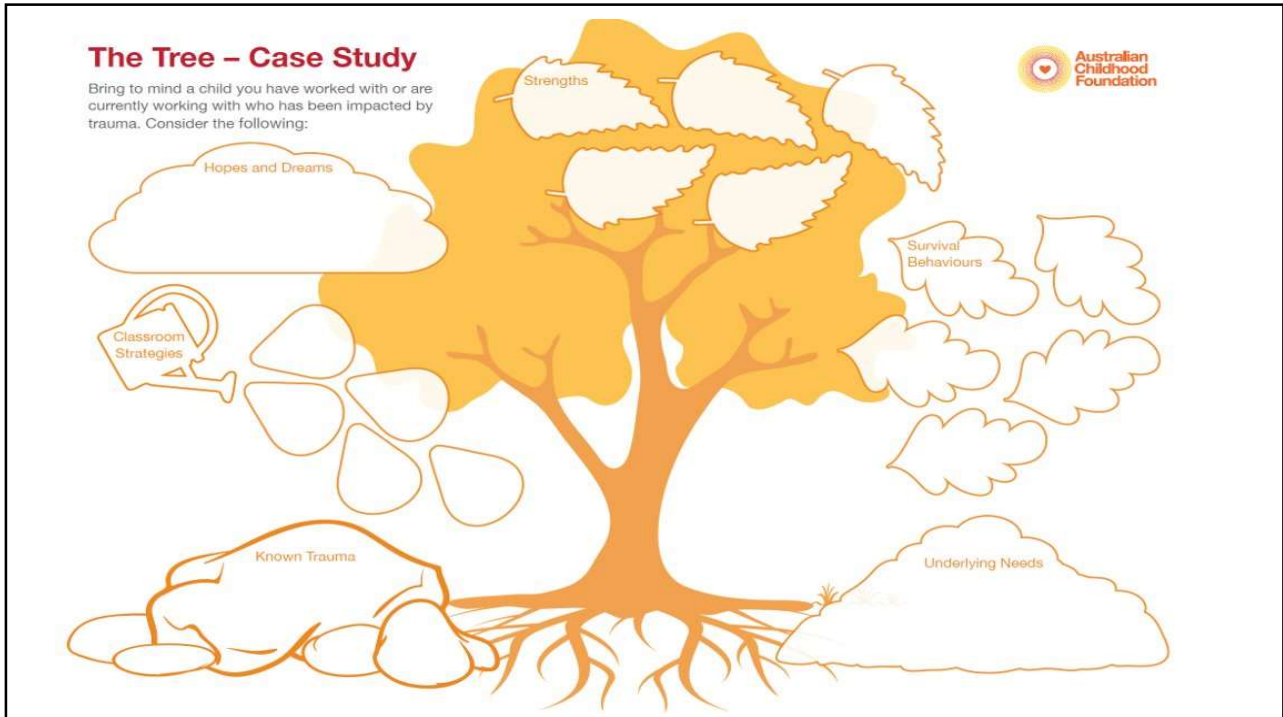
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Building understanding of behaviour

- Behaviour is communication
- 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.
- Openness and curiosity about behaviour is an important response



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Connected

- Student's relational templates for forming and being in relationships take shape as they grow. They learn what to expect and how to navigate relationships through their experiences of connection with those around them.
- We tend to expect things from relationships based on what we have known from past connections.
- 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.

**Students need to feel like they are connected.
Students need to feel safe and know about what makes a safe connection.**

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

The photograph shows a close-up of a tree trunk with several hands of various skin tones (white, brown, black) stacked on top of each other, resting on the bark. This visual metaphor represents connection, support, and community.

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Enabled

- Engaging students in the process of understanding themselves can build social and emotional well being.
- Learning about and identifying feelings, understanding them and practice communicating them with others in socially cohesive ways bolsters emotional regulation.
- 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

Students need to know more about what makes them who they are.
I grow stronger as I learn more about what makes me, me.



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SPACE : Strategy Wheel & Activities



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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 undertake 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 / Child
<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">S Staged</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">P Predictable</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">A Adaptive</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">C Connected</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">E Enabled</div> </div>					

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Staged

TOP DOWN STAGED

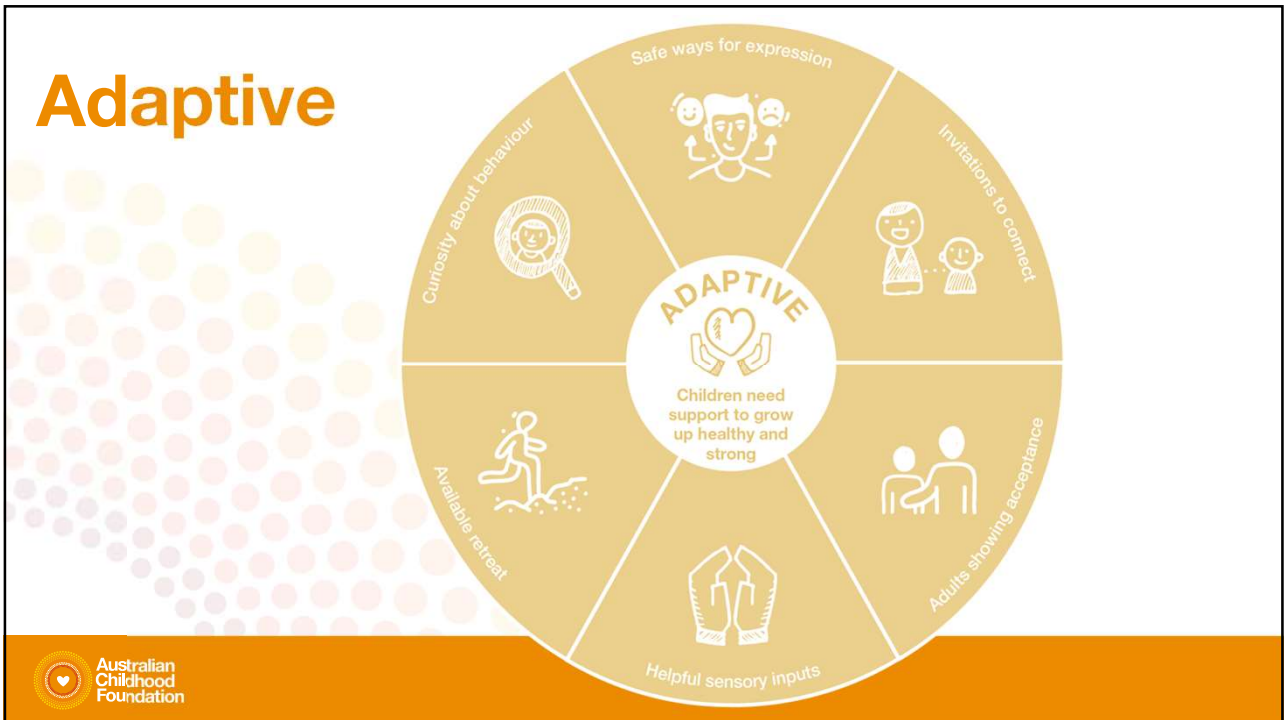
Children's brains need support to grow and learn

BOTTOM UP

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Further Resources:

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/making-space-learning-resources/>

Any questions?

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