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# Trauma Responsive Practice with Adolescents

## Blue Cove Group May 2023



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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians and owners of this land and waters. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and to the children who are their leaders of tomorrow. We acknowledge their history and living culture and the many thousands of years in which they have raised their children to be safe and strong.



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## 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/](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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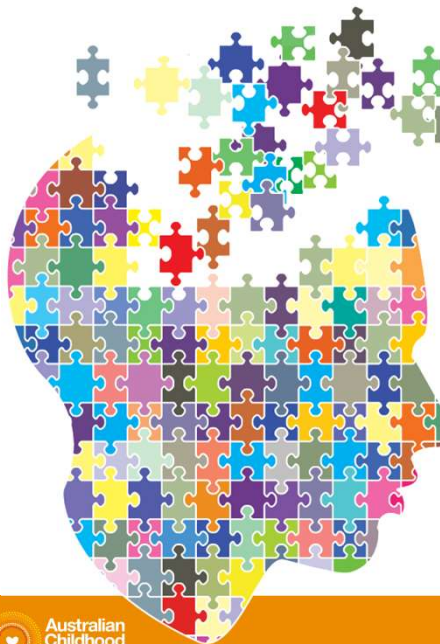
## Our Safeguarding Services

- 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/>

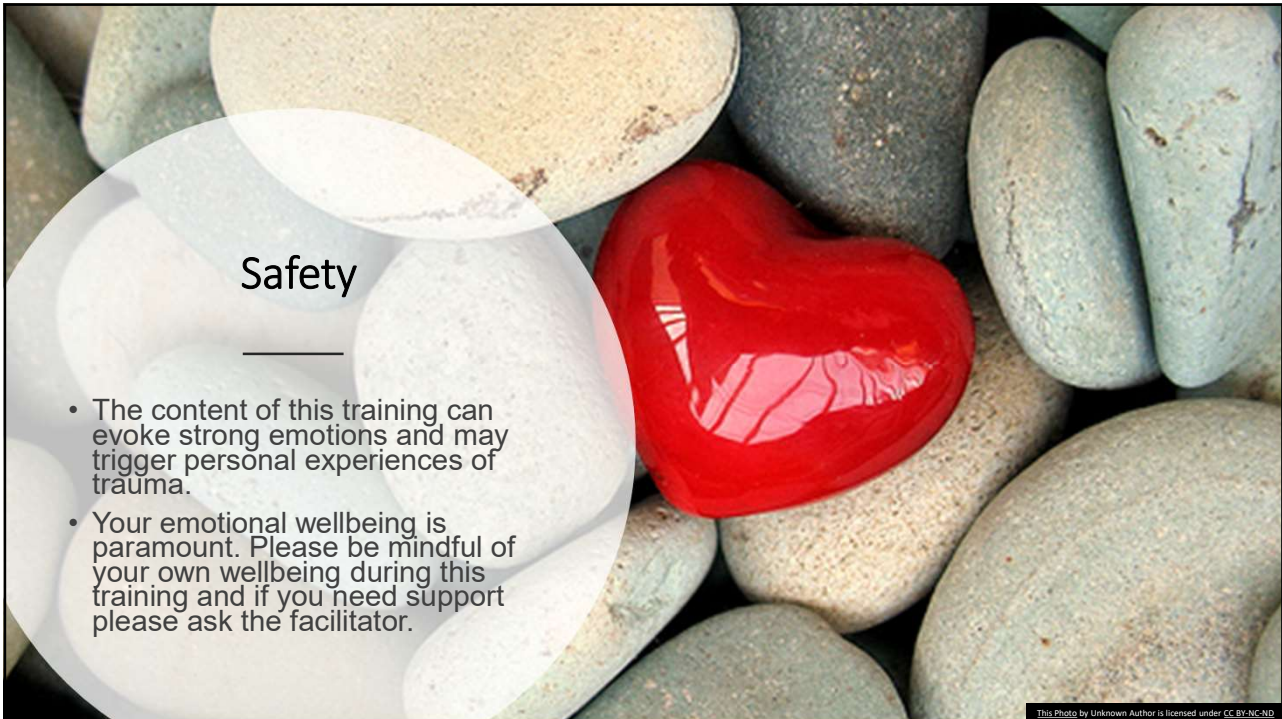


## Learning together online



- Participation welcome
- Cameras on
- Mute yourself when not talking
- Hands up or use the chat button if you have questions
- Please use headphones if children are in your training space
- Confidentiality





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## Learning outcomes

- Review your understanding of neurobiology and the impacts of trauma on development and explore a conceptual model of trauma-informed work with young people who have experienced developmental (relational) trauma.
- Be supported to translate theory to practice. Participants will be aided to identify and contextualise strategies for working with young people who have experienced complex trauma to their work setting.
- Ensure a staff wellbeing approach is included in a trauma informed practice model.

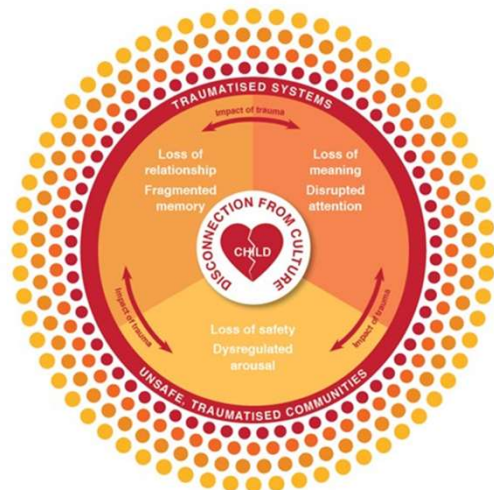
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## Introductions

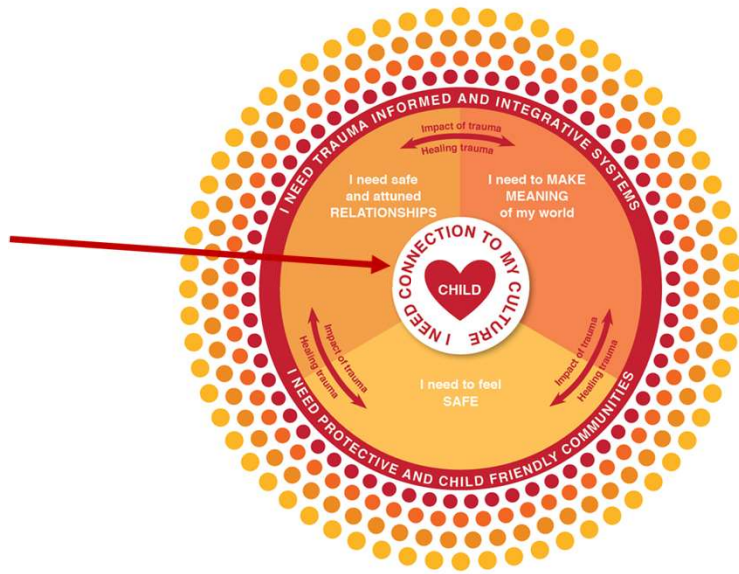


Consider a teacher or another adult who had a positive influence on you....what do you remember about them? How did they make you feel?

## ACF Trauma Responsive Model



I need connection to my CULTURE



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## The importance of culture

### A protective factor

- Sense of safety
- Relationships
- Meaning making



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**I need to feel SAFE**

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**The importance of a felt sense 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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**I need safe and attuned RELATIONSHIPS**

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**Influences**

What messages are they given about relationships and who they?

What messages do they take?

What impact does technology have?

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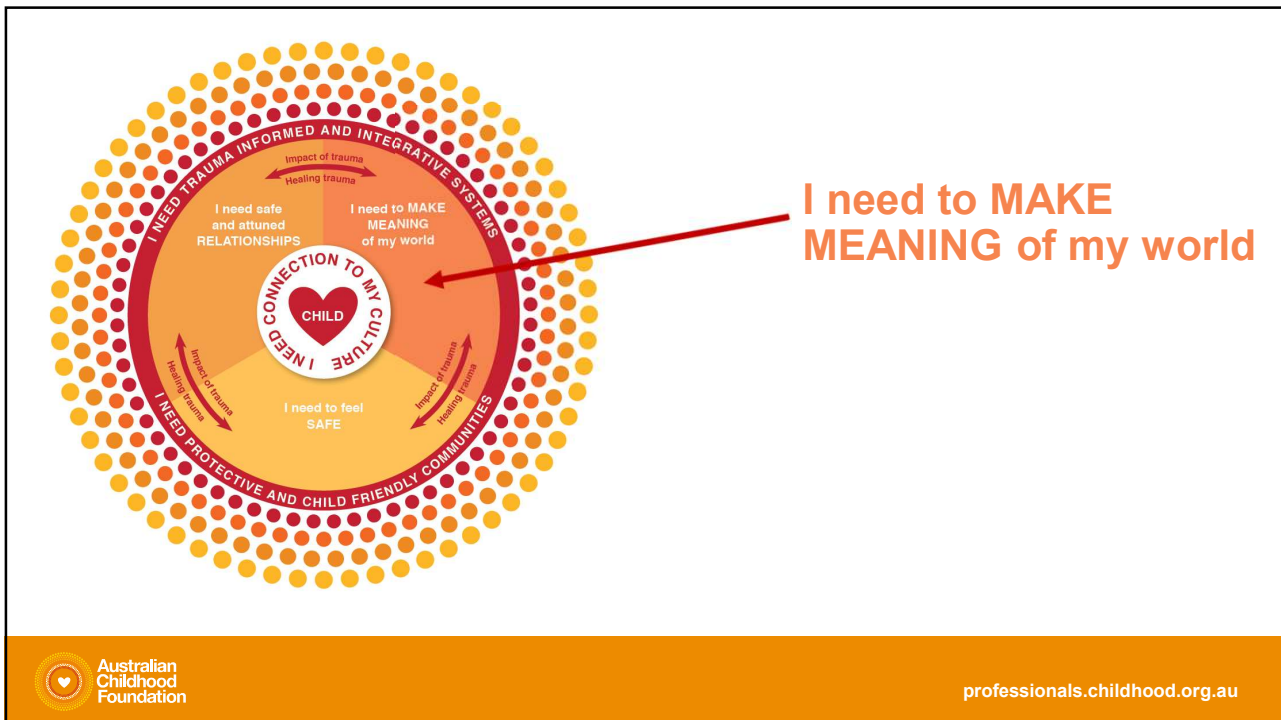
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## Relationships shape our sense of self and safety

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

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## How do I make meaning of the world?

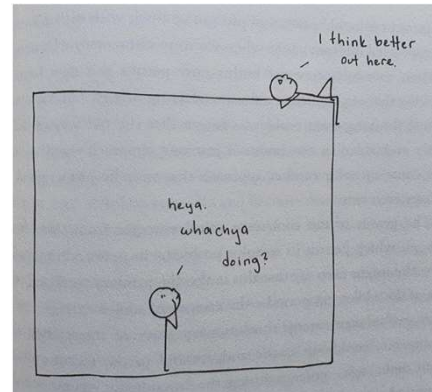
We are deeply impacted by both our surrounding relationships and the environment in how we perceive and make sense of:

- The world – safe vs unsafe
- Relationships – trustworthy vs unreliable
- Self- lovable vs unlovable
- Protected vs unprotected

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## 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.



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## Brain development



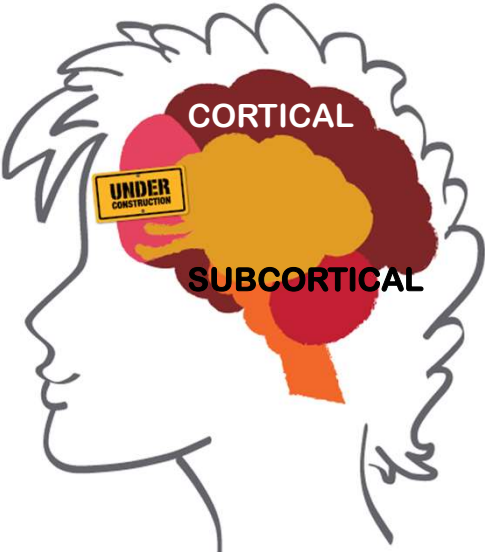
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## Cortical

- Cortex
- Prefrontal Cortex
- Medial Prefrontal Cortex

## Subcortical

- Brainstem
- Cerebellum
- Limbic System – Amygdala & Hippocampus




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## Cortical

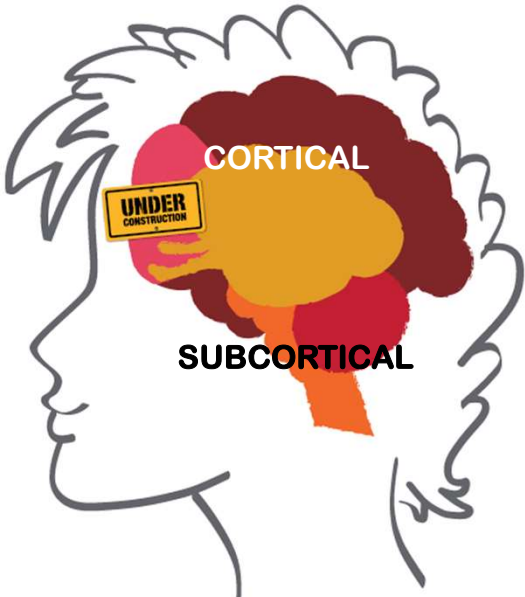
- Consciously activated for reflection


Responsive

## Subcortical

- Unconsciously activated for constant survival

Reactive





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### Early experiences shape the architecture of our brain

Threat and Neglect → Survival      Safety and Connection → Integration

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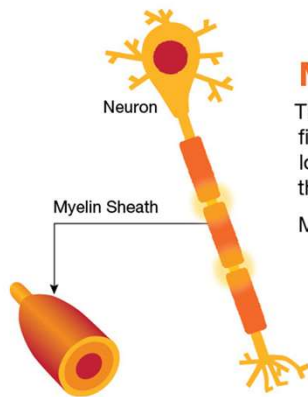
### Life span development

Birth      2 Years      6 Years      12 Years      Adult

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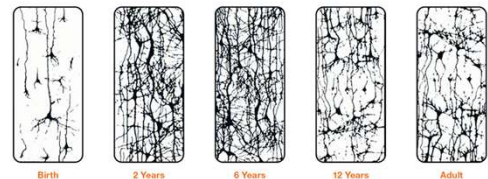
## Pruning & myelination in the adolescent brain



### 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.



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## What does this mean for our young people - the importance of rest and sleep...

- Pruning and myelination occur during sleep
- Sleep strengthens learning and memories

### What impacts our adolescents' sleep?

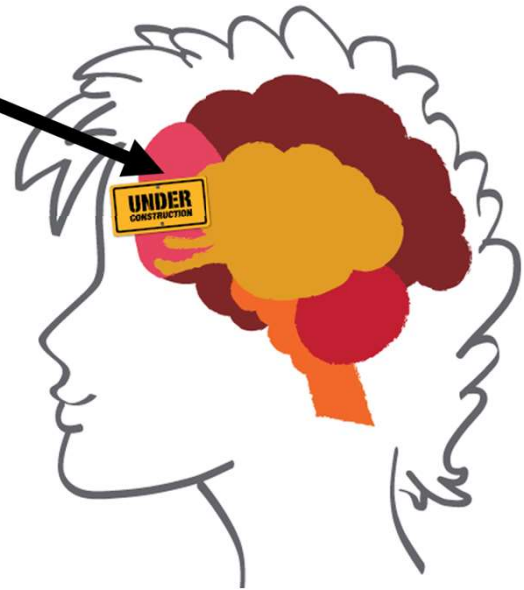
- Later release of melatonin during adolescence
- Lack of safety to sleep well, if at all
- Poor sleep hygiene
- Use of devices

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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



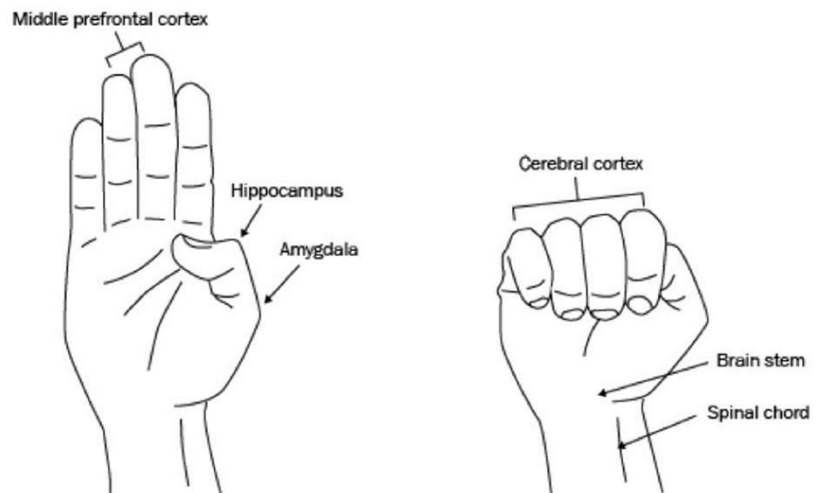
## Vulnerabilities – the impact of trauma on the Pfc

**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



## Flipping your lid!



*Hand model courtesy of Dan Siegel*

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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.
- Young people may struggle to remain in the present 'here and now'
- Ensure there is a de-escalation plan for young people to help them recover from their distress within relationship.

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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>



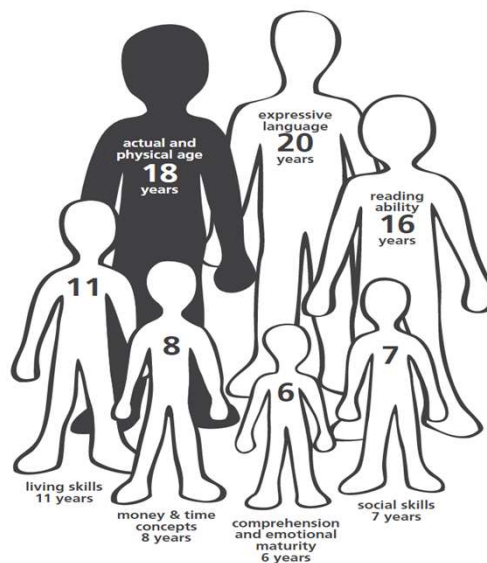
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**Be alert to disparities between chronological age and abilities for all children you work with.**

**Figure 6: The developmental age and ability of an 18-year-old with FASD**

This diagram shows how a child's chronological age and developmental age can vary dramatically at any one time.



Source: Jodee Kulp  
<http://www.betterendings.org>

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## Impacts on behaviour

When a young person is feeling 'unsafe' and feeling a sense of powerlessness, we may see:

- Aggression
- Overactive stress responses
- Withdrawal
- Agitation
- Tiredness due to lack of sleep
- Loss of fine motor skills

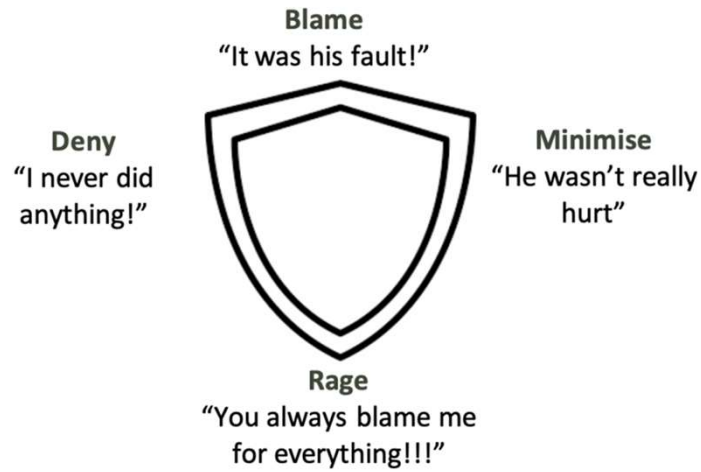


## Making meaning of the behaviour

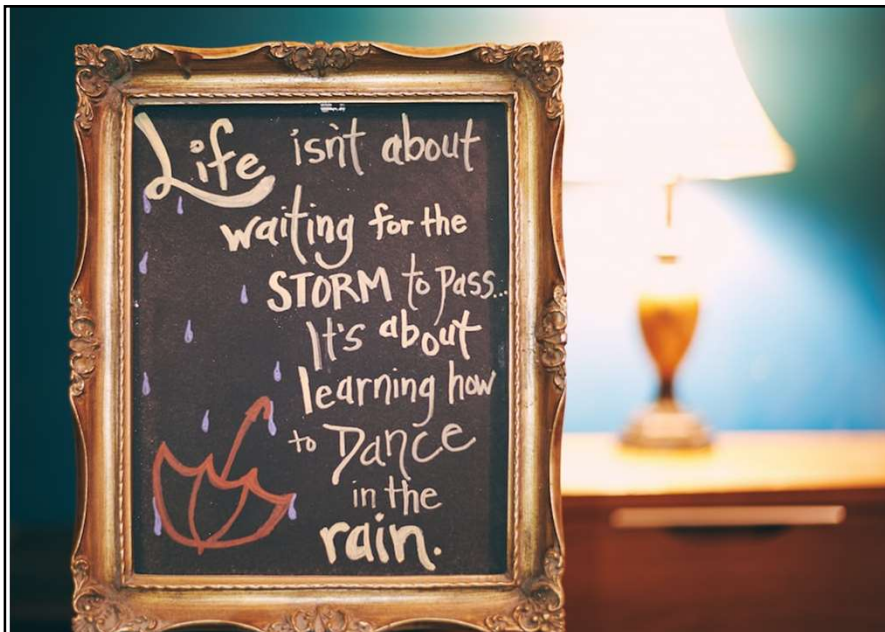
- Behaviour is often a young person's way of **communicating** with us when they can't articulate their state
- Learning how to **understand** a young person's behaviour is a more effective tool than only responding to the surface behaviour
- We need to learn to ask "**What is this behaviour telling me?**" and be curious about what it might mean so that we can best respond



## The Shield of Shame



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## Reframing our view

"what's wrong with you"

versus

"what has happened to you?"

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# The Autonomic nervous system...



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## Polyvagal Theory



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

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## Building Trust



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## COREGULATING ... Creating safety

### Can I pick....

- Where both me and the child/ young person is in our nervous systems using indicators such as body movements, muscle tension, voice etc?
- How to use this knowledge to modify my attunement/ communication /activities to be self-regulating and co-regulating?

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## P.A.C.E video – Dan Hughes



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## Bottom up and top down responding...building relationship



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## Empathy – Brene Brown



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>

## Reframing our thoughts and language



## Trauma Responsive

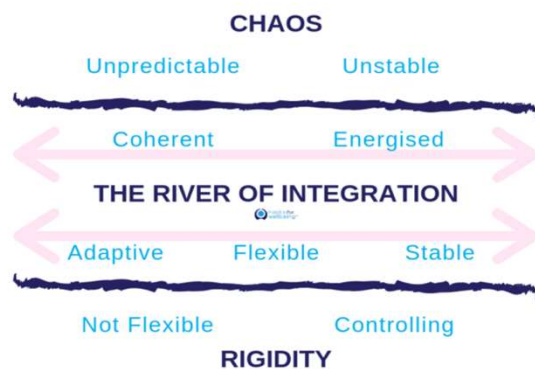


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## Wellbeing – The River of Integration

(Dan Siegel)



Adapted from - Siegel, D. (2009). Mindsight - The New Science of Personal Transformation. NSW, Australia: Scribe Publications.



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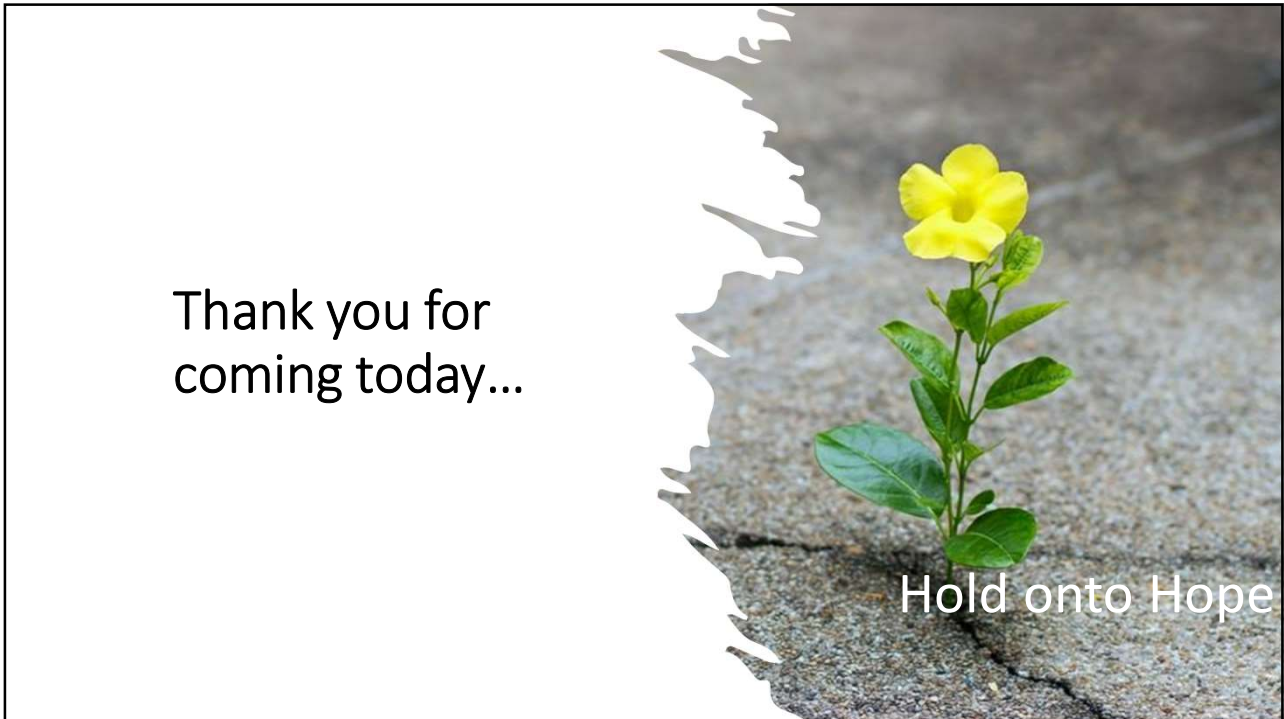
## Key takeaway messages

- Develop connection and belonging – RELATIONSHIPS are key – acknowledge strengths
- Reintegrate experiences of shame (eye contact)
- Experience trust and respect
- Develop a sense of personal competence
- Be predictable
- Regulate to engage - be present, be connected, be authentic
- Be PACEful



### The Four Ms:





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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION**

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