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# Trauma Responsive Practice

## Territory Families

Care and Protection  
Induction 2023



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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of this land and we pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future.



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### Take care of you today....

The content of this training can evoke strong emotions and may trigger **personal experiences of trauma**. Please be mindful of your own wellbeing during this training and if you need support please do what you need to do to feel safe. We are happy for you to talk to the facilitator if you need to.

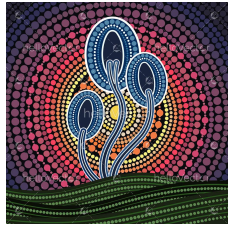


Image: Hellovector.com

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**Our journey today....**

- Importance of relationships and culture
- Brain development
- Understanding the impacts of trauma
- Creating Safety
- 5 Parenting Systems
- Repairing the impacts of trauma
- Self Care



Image: Aboriginal Art Store

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**Children, youth and adults at risk of experiencing trauma**

A current context



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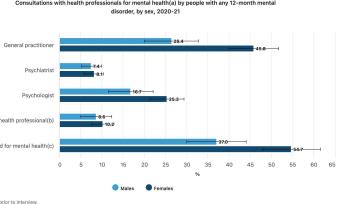
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Consultations with health professionals for mental health(a) by people with any 12-month mental disorder, by sex, 2020-21



Health Professional	Male (%)	Female (%)
General practitioners	24.4	48.8
Psychiatrist	4.1	5.9
Psychologist	16.8	25.0
Other mental health professionals	18.1	20.3
Any service used for mental health(b)	37.0	54.7

(a) In the 12 months prior to diagnosis.  
 (b) Includes mental health care and other mental health professional.  
 (c) Also includes specialist doctor or nurse, other health professional and hospital admission for mental health.  
 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2020-21

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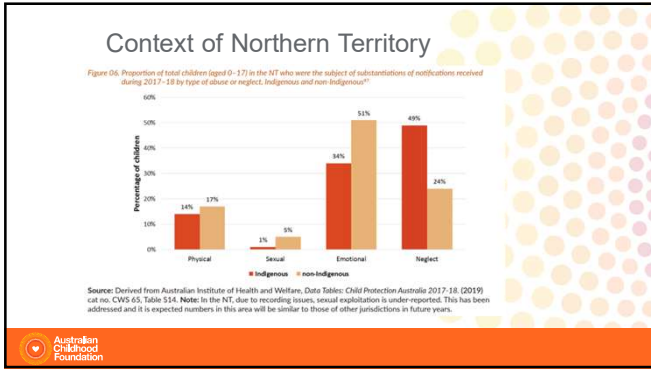
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- ### Context of Northern Territory
- Over 50% of Aboriginal children in the NT have been the subject of a notification to child protection by the age of ten
  - In 2016, 75.2% of Aboriginal children who were found guilty of an offence in the NT had previously been reported to child protection
  - Aboriginal Territorians make up 88% of the NT's homeless population
  - Suicide rates in the NT for children aged 5-17 years are over three times higher than in any other jurisdiction.
  - 81% of all homelessness in the NT is caused by overcrowding
  - Research indicates that the majority of incarcerated Aboriginal women are mothers.
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### Importance of relationship and culture

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### A collective view of relationships

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### I need connection to my CULTURE

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### The Importance of Culture

A protective factor

Safety: Belonging  
 Relationships: Connection  
 Meaning making: identity

Our culture influences our brain development.  
 How has it influenced yours? Think about:

- Sense of safety
- Relationships
- Meaning making

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## Brain Development



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### Brain development

- The brain develops through a mix of genetics and environmental factors.
- Key to this development are relationships
- The brain develops sequentially from the bottom up



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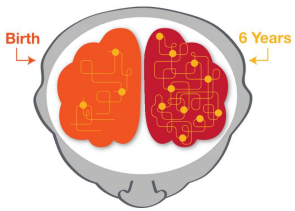
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### Neuronal connections

- The neural system has the ability for one neuron to communicate with up to 10,000 other neurons
- The newborn brain has approximately 100 billion neurons



Birth 6 Years

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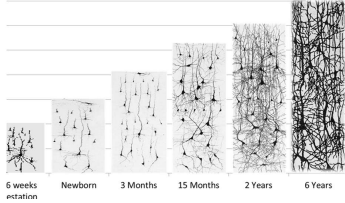
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### Neuronal development



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

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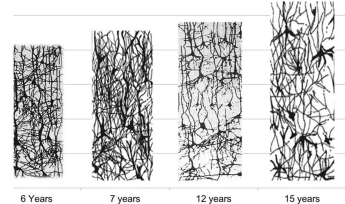
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### Neuronal development



- 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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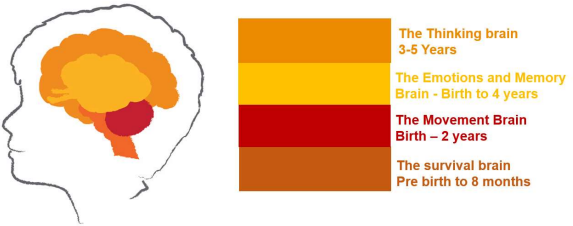
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### Sequential brain development – building blocks



- 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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### Infancy -0-12 months

- Critical functions being organised
- Regulation of
  - - arousal,
  - - sleep,
  - - fear states



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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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**Infancy-0-12 months**

Primary developmental goal:

- State regulation
- Primary attachment
- Flexible stress response
- Resilience



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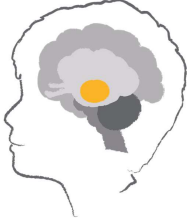
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**Diencephalon - sorting & sending centre**

- 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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**Early Childhood- 1-3 Years**

- Critical functions being organised:
  - Integration of multiple sensory inputs
  - Fine motor control
  - Emotional states
  - Social language; interpretation of nonverbal information



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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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### Amygdala – smoke alarm

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



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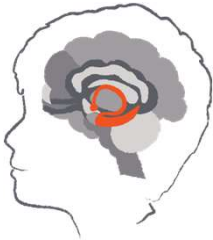
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### Hippocampus – Brain’s historian

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



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**Neuroplasticity is hope**

- The brain is at its most plastic in early childhood
- In early childhood, the brain is most vulnerable to harm, but also has the greatest potential for healing
- Neuroplasticity gives us hope

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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



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**Pre-school**

- Critical functions being organised:
  - Abstract cognitive functions
  - Socio emotional integration

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### 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 one's mid 20s
- Under reconstruction in adolescents from the age of approximately 12 years



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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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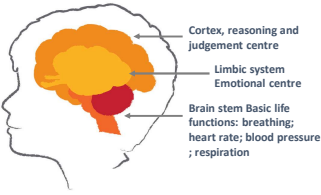
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### Brain development

- 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.



Cortex, reasoning and judgement centre  
Limbic system Emotional centre  
Brain stem Basic life functions: breathing; heart rate; blood pressure ; respiration

Children's brains need support to grow and learn My brain grows upwards, step by step.

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### 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 heartbeat.
- 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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## Understanding the impacts of trauma




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### Experiences of trauma.....Discuss in pairs...

What does trauma:

- Look like
- Sound like
- Feel like

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### Defining trauma



ANY SINGLE, ONGOING OR CUMULATIVE EXPERIENCE WHICH:

FEELS/IS OUTSIDE OUR CONTROL

OVERWHELMS OUR CAPACITY TO COPE

EVOKES A PHYSIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SET OF RESPONSES BASED ON FEAR OR AVOIDANCE

A RESPONSE TO A PERCEIVED THREAT; RESPONSE IS USUALLY BASED IN SURVIVAL

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### Developmental trauma

Occurs when the foetus in utero, baby, child or adolescent experiences trauma, from abuse and neglect during these stages of development



Image source: GACF2021

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
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### Intergenerational Trauma

- The prefix 'inter' is from the Latin meaning between, or among, together or mutually together

- Inter-generational trauma is passed down directly from one generation to the next



- Inter-generational trauma occurs directly through experiencing the trauma or from seeing or hearing about it

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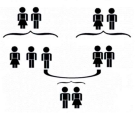
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### Transgenerational trauma

- The prefix 'trans' is from the Latin word meaning across or crossing, through, beyond or on the other side

- Trans-generational trauma is transmitted across a number of generations



"This type of trauma occurs without direct stimulus but is instead transmitted from a parent who has experienced a traumatic event"  
(Davidson & Mellor 2001 as cited in Goodman, West & Cicciocioppo, 2008)

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**Transgenerational transmission and cultural impacts**

Duran and Duran (1995) suggest that:  
 "...historical trauma becomes embedded in the cultural memory of a people and is passed on by the same mechanisms by which culture is generally transmitted, and therefore becomes 'normalised' within that culture."

Atkinson, J., *Trauma Trails: Recreating Song Lines*, 2002



**Culture and development**

- Our culture influences our brain development
- Our relationships influence our culture and our culture influences our relationships
- Sensory data is interpreted according to our culture long before our ability to think about and understand our culture

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**Trauma impacts**



Trauma can impact all elements of adolescent's development: brain, body, memory, learning, behaviour, emotions, relationships and their view of themselves

Image source: GACF 2021

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Three Core Concepts in Early Development

**3 Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development**

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 Center on the Developing Child | HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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### Medial Pre-frontal Cortex and the Right Orbito-frontal Cortex

**Medial**

**Pre-Frontal Cortex**  
(the centre of Mindfulness/ Self awareness)

**Right Orbitofrontal Cortex**  
(Regulation of Arousal)

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

Image source: IACF 2021

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## Creating Safety

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by Stephen Porges

Behavioural Functions	Body Functions
<b>Social Engagement</b> Soothing and calming Indicates safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lowers or raises vocalisation pitch</li> <li>• Regulates middle ear muscles to perceive human voice</li> <li>• Changes facial expressivity</li> <li>• Head turning</li> <li>• Tears and eyelids</li> <li>• Slows or speeds heart rate</li> </ul>
<b>Mobilisation</b> Fight or Flight Active Freeze Moderate or extreme danger	<b>Hyper arousal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases heart rate</li> <li>• Sweat increases</li> </ul> <b>Hypo - arousal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inhibits gastrointestinal function</li> <li>• Narrowing blood vessels - to slow blood flow to extremities</li> <li>• Release of adrenaline</li> </ul>
<b>Immobilisation</b> Collapse or submission Death feigning Increased pain threshold Conserves metabolic resources Life threatening situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slows heart rate</li> <li>• Constricts bronchi</li> <li>• Stimulates gastrointestinal function</li> </ul>

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### Creating Safety

A young person's cortical capacity is impaired by trauma-as a result subcortical functioning becomes dysregulated

In order to regain cortical capacity, essential for learning, we must restore emotional regulation.

How do we create:

- Regulation (calm)
- Engagement
- Connection
- Control

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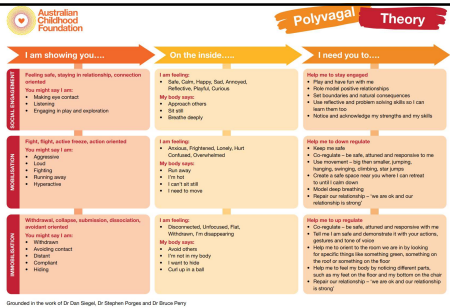
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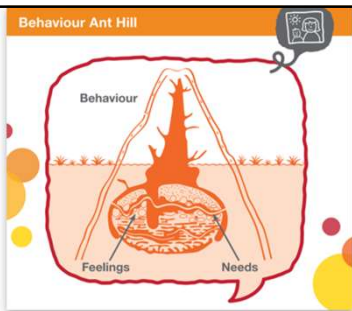
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**Activity**

**How can we create safety for the children, young people and families we are working with?**



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**The 5 Parenting Systems**



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**Relationship is the key! .....Brain systems that support parenting**

**Parental Approach System**

- Get close to the child without becoming defensive.

**Parental Reward System**

- Enjoy interacting with the child.

**Parental Child Reading System**

- Understand the mind of the child.

**Parental Meaning Making System**

- Make sense of our experiences with the child and our social life.

**Parental Executive System**

- Regulate interpersonal conflicts between approach and avoidance, pro-social and defensive reactions.




Image source: Dreamtime

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### Approach System

estrogen  
prolactin  
oxytocin

hypothalamus

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### Early Adversity impacts our Parenting ability

The environment we grow up in can shape how we use our right and left brain systems of avoidance and approach. If we begin life exposed to insensitive caregiving our right brained harm avoidance system is likely to be used a lot. Instead of feeling protected and connected with our caregiver, we are more likely to need to shift into a defensive state of protest or collapse in order to try to protect ourselves.

Left side of brain | Right side of brain

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### Reward System

1. We become a parent which generates hormones that talk to our hypothalamus.

2. Our hypothalamus releases oxytocin (the love hormone) which activates the reward system.

3. The reward system works by this area sending dopamine to the orbitofrontal cortex and the nucleus accumbens.

Orbitofrontal cortex plays a key role in processing rewarding experiences and helps us create positive parenting memories.

When the Nucleus accumbens is activated we become highly motivated to approach things that have led to reward in the past. It can become activated responding to expectations of positive interactions with our child.

hypothalamus | orbitofrontal cortex | nucleus accumbens

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### Child Reading System

Facial Expression  
Tone of Voice  
Body Language  
Gestures

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### Meaning Making System

Well-Connected Brain  
Utilizing the front part of the brain

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

Open Flexible and Adaptive | Closed and Rigid

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### Blocked Executive System

Unprocessed trauma history

Experiencing chronic stress

Exposure to high levels of adversity in early life

Poor attachment with caregiver in early childhood

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## Repairing the impacts of trauma


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### Repairing the impacts of trauma

- Relational** (safe)
- Relevant** (developmentally-matched to the individual)
- Repetitive** (patterned)
- Rewarding** (pleasurable)
- Rhythmic** (resonant with neural patterns)
- Respectful** (of the child, family, and culture)



Bruce Perry, as cited by <https://attachmentdisorderhealing.com/developmental-trauma-3>

Image: hellovector.com

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### Safety and listening the child

- Model attunement
- Ensure that the child is seen and kept in focus throughout the assessment and that account is always taken of the child's perspective
- Are they ready-how long can you sit and wait
- Validate what the child is feeling
- Check meaning
- Make sense of what is happening for the child
- What will have meaning

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**PACE**

- Playfulness
- Accepting
- Curious
- Empathetic






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**PACE Helps**

- The social engagement system come online
- Connect the prefrontal cortex (thinking brain) to the lower regions of the brain (emotional and survival brain)
- Calm the threat sensing amygdala by sending a message of safety.
- Connect children and their caregivers
- Aid the growth of regulation skills.
- Build the ability to reflect
- Develops the child make meaning of themselves, their stories and their behaviour.

**PACE uses all 5 parent brain systems (approach, reward, child reading, meaning making and executive)**




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**Key considerations**

- There is no magic wand!
- It takes time and patience: persistence and repetition is a must
- You matter in this work!
- Your relationship with the child is key
- Each child is individual which adds to the complexity
- Trial and error is common
- A titrated approach is important






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### Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount

Respecting diversity should be taken to mean 'having the same aims for people's wellbeing and safety but finding different ways to achieve them' that are more appropriate to the person's different perspective.

Being child-safe respects cultural difference:

- thinks about safety and wellbeing concepts from a cultural perspective
- takes steps to develop cultural competence to respond in a culturally appropriate manner
- takes guidance from experienced others (for example, seek advice from recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisations in regards to the needs of children from these backgrounds), and
- approach family cultural contexts with sensitivity.



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### Looking after ourselves.... Self-care



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**Impact of working with trauma**

**Signs and symptoms**

How this might look at work:

- Decreased communication- staff putting notes up to advise of things
- Decreased ability to accept change or adapt- holding information
- Decreased ability to try new things/explore
- Increased sick days, late to work
- Decreased focus on tasks
- Memory issues
- Avoidance working with traumatic material

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**Wellbeing – The River of Integration**  
(Dan Siegel)

CHAOS  
Unpredictable Unstable

Coherent Energised

THE RIVER OF INTEGRATION

Adaptive Flexible Stable

Not Flexible Controlling

RIGIDITY

Adapted from - Siegel, D. (2008). *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*. NSW, Australia: Scribner Publications.

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**Importance of supervision**

- Compared to case conferences, one-on-one supervision better supports the critical reasoning required for child safety (Munro 1999)
- Reflective regular supervision promotes staff well-being
- Reduces staff turnover
- Identify specific and ongoing training
- Formal and informal supervision provide space and permission for workers for workers to reflect on emotional responses to the work
- Peer supervision and support enable the reduction of isolation, promotes safety and develops greater transparency to identify risk and opportunity
- Models of supervision

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### Prevention: Personal level

- Maintaining self care and prioritising healthy lifestyle/personal wellbeing
- Life outside of work incorporates: social, relaxing, spiritual, fun aspects
- Supportive and healthy relationships
- Work-life balance : maintaining healthy boundaries
- Personal & professional values align with the work
- Personal wellbeing plans are well-integrated & effective



The Self-Care Wheel was inspired by and adapted from "Self-Care Assessment Workbook" from The National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (2008). Created by Olga Pivovarska, PhD, University of Queensland, Australia. Available at: [www.qlgpa.com.au](http://www.qlgpa.com.au)

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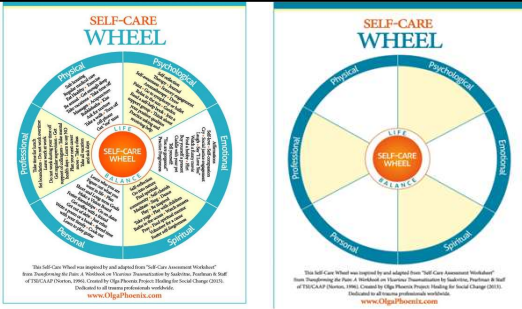
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The Self-Care Wheel was inspired by and adapted from "Self-Care Assessment Workbook" from The National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (2008). Created by Olga Pivovarska, PhD, University of Queensland, Australia. Available at: [www.qlgpa.com.au](http://www.qlgpa.com.au)

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### A Handful of M&Ms

- m** Share one thing you do for yourself emotionally
- m** Share one thing you do for yourself physically
- m** Share one thing you do for yourself spiritually
- m** Share one thing you do for yourself mentally
- m** Share one thing you do for yourself professionally
- m** Share one thing you do for yourself relationally

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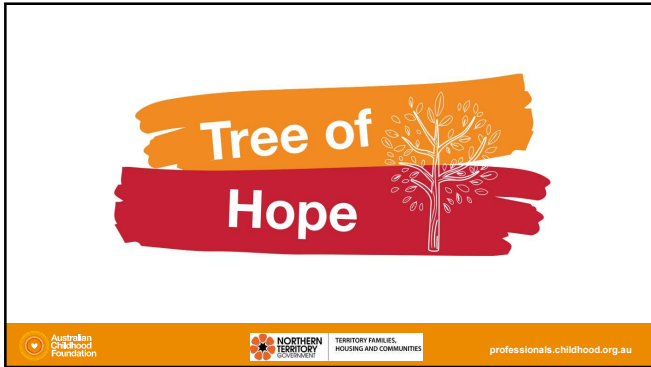
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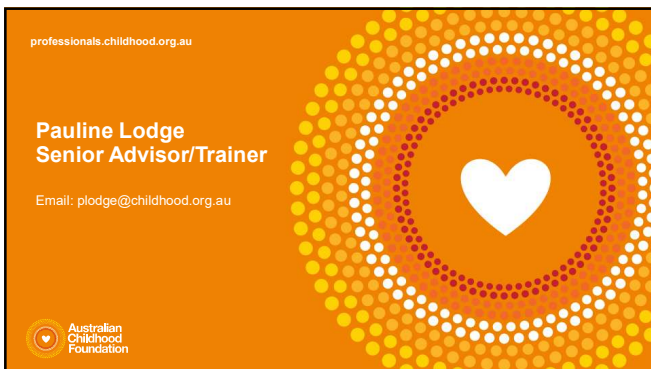
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