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# Making SPACE for Learning




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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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## Safety

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.



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## Learning Outcomes:

Develop an increased understanding of the impact of trauma on children and how it may present in the classroom.


Develop confidence in building strong and healing relationships with all students

Awareness of how to target strategies and approaches for working with students impacted by trauma that are accessible and applicable.




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## Overview




**Revisiting the Foundation**

What is trauma and how does it affect children who experience it. Trauma violates safety and can leave children with a range of unmet needs.



**SPACE Acronym - 5 Domains**

Introducing concepts which will support all school staff to understand more about the effects of trauma on children.




**Children's Needs**

The 5 domains are translated into key children's needs statements.



**Evolving Practice**


School staff develop more ways to respond to children's needs that support children to feel safe and engaged in the classroom.



**Desired Outcomes**

Children who have experienced trauma feel safe at school as they engage in reparative relational connection with staff. Trauma informed practice will positively influence the culture of the whole school community.

What happened for the child
A Response Framework for Understanding and Relating with Children affected by Trauma in Educational Contexts
Desired Outcomes


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## Four 1 hour session's flow

**A child experiences trauma**


Child feels unsafe

Unfulfilled needs emerge that were not met at the time the trauma happened

**SPACE Acronym =**  
Framework for learning more about the needs of children who have experienced trauma and ways to support them in educational contexts.

Learn some practical strategies for supporting children in the classroom to feel safe and consider ways we can be available to help meet unfulfilled relational needs left over from children's trauma.

What happened for the Child
A Response Framework for Understanding and Relating with the Child in educational contexts


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## 1st Session: Neurodevelopment and the Impacts of Trauma



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## Key Principles of Neurodevelopment

- The brain is organized, and develops, in a hierarchical sequence that is connected to the body.
- Neurons and neural systems are designed to develop and change in a use-dependent function. The more we use a connection the stronger it becomes.
- The brain develops most rapidly early in life. Childhood is a critical period of brain development.
- Neural systems (or neuronal connections) can be changed, but some systems are easier to change than others. This is the concept of **neuroplasticity**.
- The human brain develops best in connection with other human brains. Relationships and connections are critical to development for all of us.

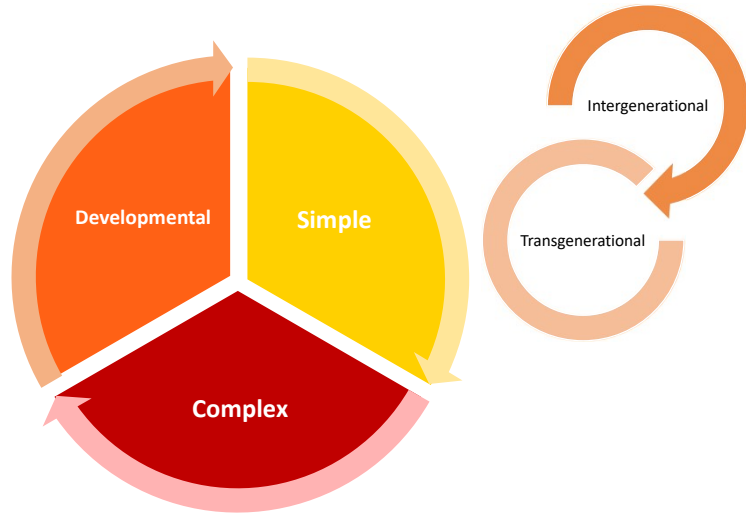


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## Defining trauma

Any single, ongoing or cumulative experience which:

- is a response to a **real or 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



**Trauma can impact all elements of children's development: brain, physiology such as sleep cycles and hormone regulation, body, memory, learning, behaviour, focus, emotions, relationships.**

The slide contains seven circular icons: a ballerina in an orange circle, a thought bubble in an orange circle, a stack of books in an orange circle, a magnifying glass in a yellow circle, a brain in a yellow circle, a heart with circuitry in a yellow circle, and a family of four in a red circle.



## Blocked Trust

Blocked trust is a child's way to adapt to very poor care – **it's a survival state**. Blocked trust is blocking the pain of rejection by:

- Negative bias
- Dissociating
- Suppressing social emotions
- Provisioning – self reliance
- Manipulating
- Resisting authority – aggression, 'defiance'
- Story telling – fantasy
- Lying behaviours

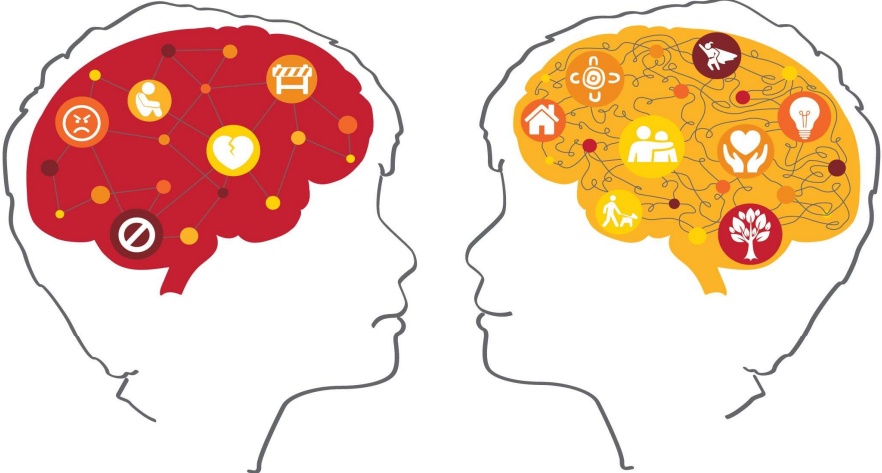
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## Early experiences shape the architecture of our brain

Threat and Neglect → Survival

Safety and Connection → Integration



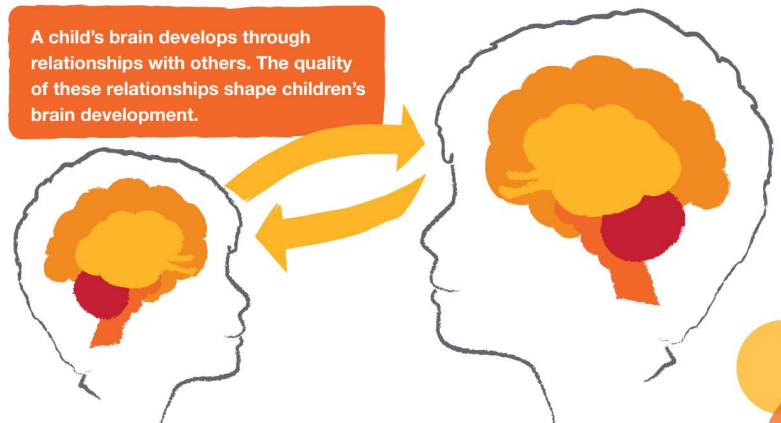
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## Final thoughts on Brain Development

- The brain develops through a mix of genetics and environmental factors.
- Relationships are central to development
- Relationships= survival; Isolation=death
- The quality of relational interactions in childhood influence our development in all areas of life
- There are critical periods of development, trauma experiences during critical periods can result in significant impacts later in childhood and into adulthood
- Culture influences brain development – disconnection from it can create toxic stress and trauma



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## What might it look like?

- 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

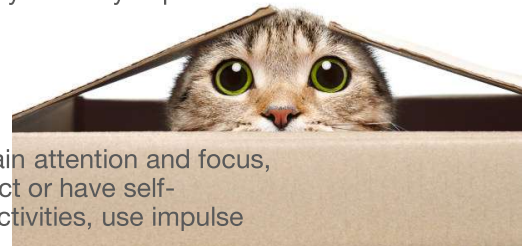
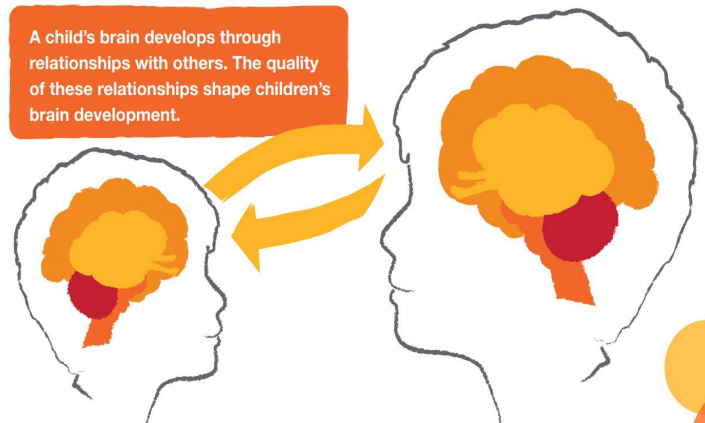


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## Final thoughts on Brain Development

- The brain develops through a mix of genetics and environmental factors.
- Relationships are central to development
- The brain needs felt safety, safe relationships and abundant positive meaning making opportunities
- The quality of relational interactions in childhood influence our development in all areas of life
- There are critical periods of development, trauma experiences during critical periods can result in significant impacts later in childhood and into adulthood
- Culture influences brain development – disconnection from it can create toxic stress and trauma



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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?



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## Trauma and needs

The residue of trauma becomes an experience of unmet needs for children.

Children are left with needs that in the moment of hurt, pain and fear are unfulfilled. These needs stay activated ready for available relationships to respond to them, see them and gradually help them to be met.

These needs are physiological, developmental, and interpersonal, requiring relational investment and presence in order to be resolved

***“ It is like they are on a loop hoping that their needs for safety, attention and validation that were not fulfilled will eventually find at least one relationship in the present that meets these needs consistently over time “ Joe Tucci***



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## Trauma and needs

Connected relationships can restore safety by understanding and addressing the needs that were not met.

For example:

An experience of being alone, can be met with accompaniment

An experience of fear met with protection, and

An experience of shame met with acceptance.

Needs can be identified within the domains of trauma and can be responded to by reparative experiences described in the Making SPACE for learning framework.





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**1<sup>st</sup> Session Reflective Question:**



**How does this knowledge potentially influence your practice?**



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**2<sup>nd</sup> Session:**

**Staged and Predictable**



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## Making SPACE for Learning

SPACE is the central acronym of the program. It includes 5 domains to help educators better understand the needs of children who have experienced trauma and ways to support them in the educational setting.



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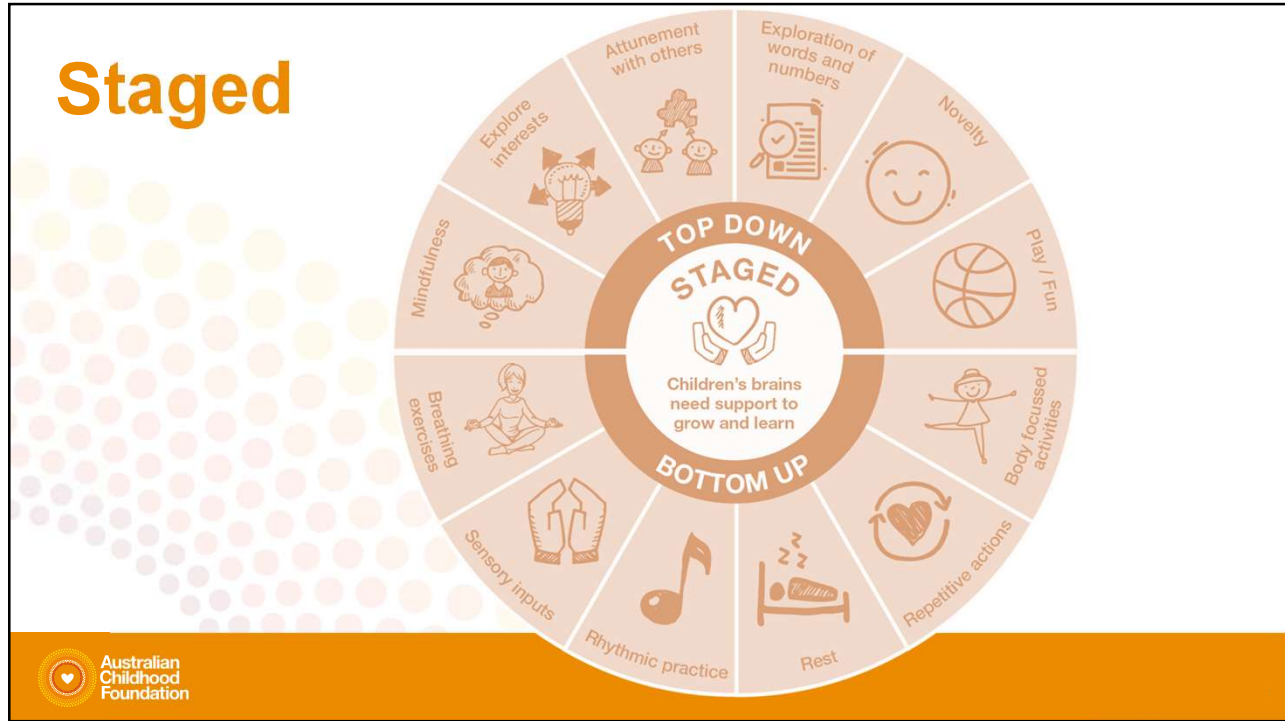
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Domains	Domain Explanation	Translated into needs statements
<b>Staged</b>	The brain develops sequentially. Sophisticated functions only emerge after basic functions are consolidated. We should resource children in line with what their developing brain's need.	Children's brains need support to grow and learn <b>My brain grows upwards step by step</b>
<b>Predictable</b>	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 <b>I feel better when I know what is coming next.</b>
<b>Adaptive</b>	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 <b>There are things I need to grow up healthy and strong.</b>
<b>Connected</b>	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. <b>I need to feel like I am connected.</b>
		Children need to feel safe and know about what makes a safe connection. <b>I need to feel safe.</b> <b>I need safe connections in my life.</b>
<b>Enabled</b>	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. <b>I grow stronger as I learn more about what makes me, me.</b>



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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.

**Cortex, reasoning and judgement centre**

**Limbic system  
Emotional centre**

**Brain stem Basic life functions: breathing; heart rate; blood pressure; respiration**

**My brain grows upwards, step by step.**

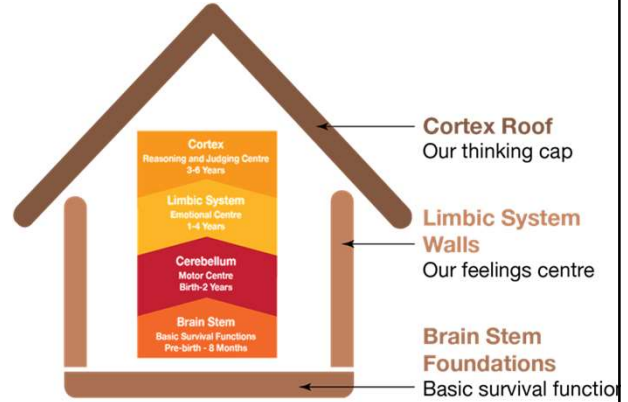
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## Staged- A brain development metaphor - My Brain House

- 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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## The Importance of Culture

How did you become who you are?

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



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## Predictable

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



**I feel better when I know what is coming next.**

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# Predictable

“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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# Predictable

**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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**2<sup>nd</sup> Session Reflective Question:**

**Look at the Demands and Capacities Tool. Think of one lesson and all the capacities needed within the students to successfully engage. How many required capacities would outstrip some of your students?**



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**3rd Session:  
Adaptive**



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## Adaptive

- Most of us have a set of behavioural routines that we draw from to respond to challenges when they emerge. These routines are likely based in what has helped us get by in the past and the experiences of relationships through which these routines were interpreted and responded to.
- To broaden children's behavioural repertoires and promote increased adaptability we need to maintain multiple meanings for the behaviour and remain open to multiple options for interventions.

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## Adaptive

### 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.



## 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...)

# What does safety look like at school?

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


Dr Steven Porges




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## Safe & Unsafe States of Being

MOBILISATION	<p>In this state we feel unsafe</p>	<p><b>We are active and mobilised without a sense of safety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We fight, or flee, or our bodies actively freeze with tensed muscles.</li> </ul>
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT	<p>We feel Safe in these states</p>	<p><b>We are active and mobilised with a sense of safety</b></p> <p><b>We are socially engaged</b></p> <p><b>We come to be still with a sense of safety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sometimes known as the 'Play Zone' in this state our bodies are active as we socially engage with others.</li> <li>Our bodies feel calm and relaxed.</li> <li>We feel in synch and connected with others.</li> <li>We are orientated towards each other with welcoming voices &amp; open faces.</li> <li>We find pleasure in stillness.</li> </ul>
IMMOBILISATION	<p>In this state we feel unsafe</p>	<p><b>Our body slows into an immobilised state without a sense of safety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are withdrawn, submissive, collapsed, numb.</li> </ul>



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**Social Engagement**

**Tell Tale Signs**

We feel **safe** in this state.

- Our bodies are calm and relaxed.
- We engage in mirroring and reciprocity with each other.
- We are orientated towards one another with engaged, open faces.

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**Mobilisation**

**Tell Tale Signs** \* Our bodies are filled with energy, and we need to move.

**Play & Exploration**  
We experience a blend of mobilisation and social engagement in a **safely mobilised state**.

**Fight or Flight or Active Freeze**  
We are mobilised **without a sense of safety** in this state.


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Mobilisation without feeling safe

**Tell Tale Signs in the Classroom** \* Our bodies are filled with energy, and we need to move.

- 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





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Immobilisation

**Tell Tale Signs** \* Our bodies are slowed right down




**Being still with others for pro-social reasons, like sharing a hug. We find pleasure in stillness. This is an intimate state.**

We experience a blend of immobilisation and social engagement in a **safely immobilised state.**

↔

**Withdrawn, submissive, collapsed, numb**

We experience immobilisation **without a sense of safety** in this state.



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## Immobilisation without feeling safe

**Tell Tale Signs in the Classroom** \* Our bodies are slowed right down

- 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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### 3rd Session Reflective Question:



Think of a student described as naughty. Look at the Words Matter resource and pick out some of the labels used when describing them. Look at what's potentially motivating the behaviour. How could this knowledge influence your practice?



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# 4th Session: Connected and Enabled



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# Connected



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## Connected

### What is Relational Safety in the classroom?

**Accompaniment** is an experience for a child that offers emotional reciprocity, validation, care and comfort. In this experience they feel heard, met, felt and understood.

*“Children internalise the people who understand and comfort them, so that they often have the felt sense of accompaniment when they are alone.”*

Bonnie Badenoch



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## Connected

- Children’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 children 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.

**I need to feel like I am connected.**

**I need to feel safe.**

**I need safe connections in my life.**



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## Connected

### Relational Safety

- Safety occurs in relationships that support physiological growth and renewal
- It is integrated into stories of meaning that offer predictability, security and stability
- It is connected with memories of family and home and experiences of strength love and nurture.
- It ritualises care and empathy

*“ Safety and healing gives us back to ourselves. Not to hide or fight any more. But to sit still calm our minds, listen to the universe and allow our spirits to dance on the wind. It lets us enjoy the sunshine and be bathed by the golden glow of the moon as we drift into our dreamtime... Safety in relationships gives us back to our country. To stand once again in our rightful place, eternal and generational. It keeps us strong and gentle at the same time.”*

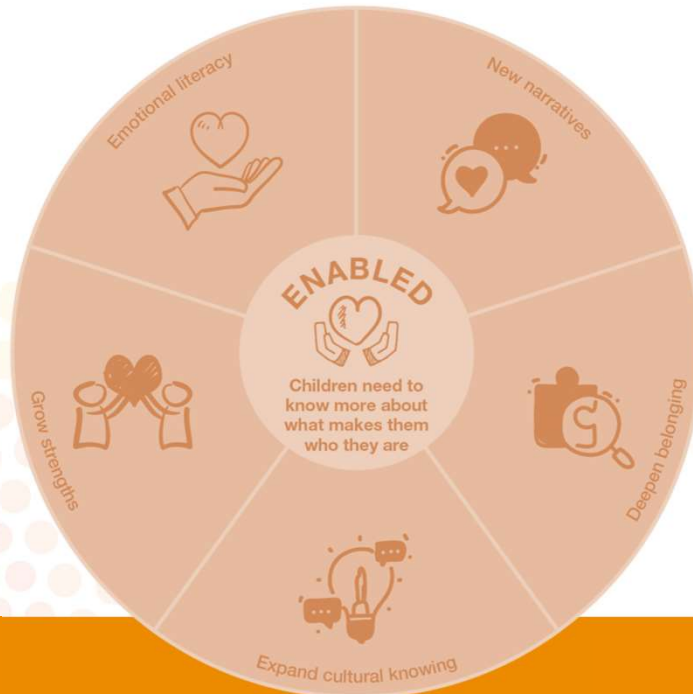
Helen Milroy (2018)



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## Enabled



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## Enabled

- Engaging students in the process of understanding themselves can build social and emotional learning.
- 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.

**I grow stronger as I learn more about what makes me, me.**



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## Enabling positive meaning making



Photo credit: iStock

How children understand and make meaning of their world often occurs through what is reflected back to them through their interactions with significant adults.

If adults respond to the child's behaviour in a punitive way, it reinforces negative self narrative.

So how we experience a child and reflect that back to them influences how they come to understand themselves and build their identity.

**WHAT DO YOU REFLECT TO BACK?**





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**4th Session Reflective Question:**

**Look at the I've Got One Lesson tool. Go to the Connected and Enabled sections. Reflect on any of the questions in these sections.**



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**Circle of Strategies**



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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
<b>S</b> Staged					
<b>P</b> Predictable					
<b>A</b> Adaptive					
<b>C</b> Connected					
<b>E</b> Enabled					

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRATICIPATION**

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