

# Understanding and responding to trauma

## General

### Day 1



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Childhood  
Foundation



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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians and owners of the land and waters across Australia.

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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  	<p><b>Part 1: 9.00am - 11.00am</b>          Introducing the SMART PRACTICE Framework &amp; ACF Model of PRACTICE  <i>Morning Tea: 11.00am – 11.15am</i></p> <p><b>Part 2: 11.15am – 12.45pm</b>          The Brain, growing up and the impact of trauma  <i>Lunch Break: 12.45pm – 1.15pm</i></p> <p><b>Part 3: 1.15pm – 3.15pm</b>          Healing ways to respond: SMART Circle of PRACTICE  <i>Wrap Up &amp; Evaluations 3.15pm</i>  <b>Finish: 3.30pm</b></p>
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**SMART PRACTICE**


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## Introductions

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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## We acknowledge you and what you bring...

- Knowledge
- Practice skills
- Experience
- Passion
- Compassion
- A desire to bring about change



gettyimages  
courtneyk



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## Learning together

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**Your emotional safety is paramount**  
**Our learning is about shared wisdom**  
**Curiosity and learning build our brains**



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## Success Criteria

- **develop** an enhanced understanding of complex abuse related trauma, with a particular focus on its effects on the brain and body.
- **apply** frameworks for assessing and responding to the impact of trauma on students.
- **build** a toolkit of practice skills to respond, which promote recovery and healing for students.

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**SMART PRACTICE**

**PART 1:**

**Introducing the SMART Framework and  
ACF Model of practice**



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## Resources to assist you...

### Australian Childhood Foundation SMART PRACTICE – Site Audit Tool

This is an opportunity to reflect on the current application of the SMART PRACTICE framework across your site. This tool can also be used to plan further implementation strategies as a site plan. It is acknowledged that not all sites will be relevant to all items however each site has value in terms of a holistic application of the skills and knowledge underpinning SMART PRACTICE.

In the following table, list strategies, policies or other processes that are currently undertaken that support each of the listed groups in each of the elements of the SMART PRACTICE framework.

SMART PRACTICE	Whole site	Staff team	Group / Room	Small group	Individual child
P PREDICTABLE					
R RESPONSIVE					
A ATTUNED					
C CONNECTING					
T TRANSLATING					
I INVOLVING					
C CALMING					
E ENGAGING					



# SMART PRACTICE



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## What is the SMART PRACTICE Framework?

The SMART PRACTICE Framework and Site Audit Tool is a framework to **guide practice** through a trauma-informed lens

This framework is a starting point for **responding** and outlines the key points in terms of effective and healing work with traumatised children.

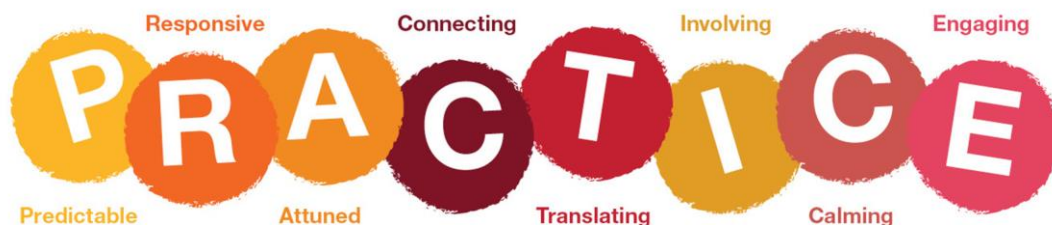
The framework should **inform best practice** when supporting children and young people who have experienced trauma

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# SMART PRACTICE



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## Using the Site Audit Tool – celebration and reflection....

### Australian Childhood Foundation SMART PRACTICE – Site Audit Tool

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- **Leadership** – Whole Site and Staff
- **Classroom Educators** – Classroom/Group and Individual Student/Child
- **Specialist Educators/SSO's/BSSO's** – small groups and Individual Student/Child

SMART PRACTICE	Whole site	Staff team	Group / Room	Small group	Individual child
<b>P</b> PREDICTABLE					
<b>R</b> RESPONSIVE					
<b>A</b> ATTUNED					
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<b>C</b> CALMING					
<b>E</b> ENGAGING					



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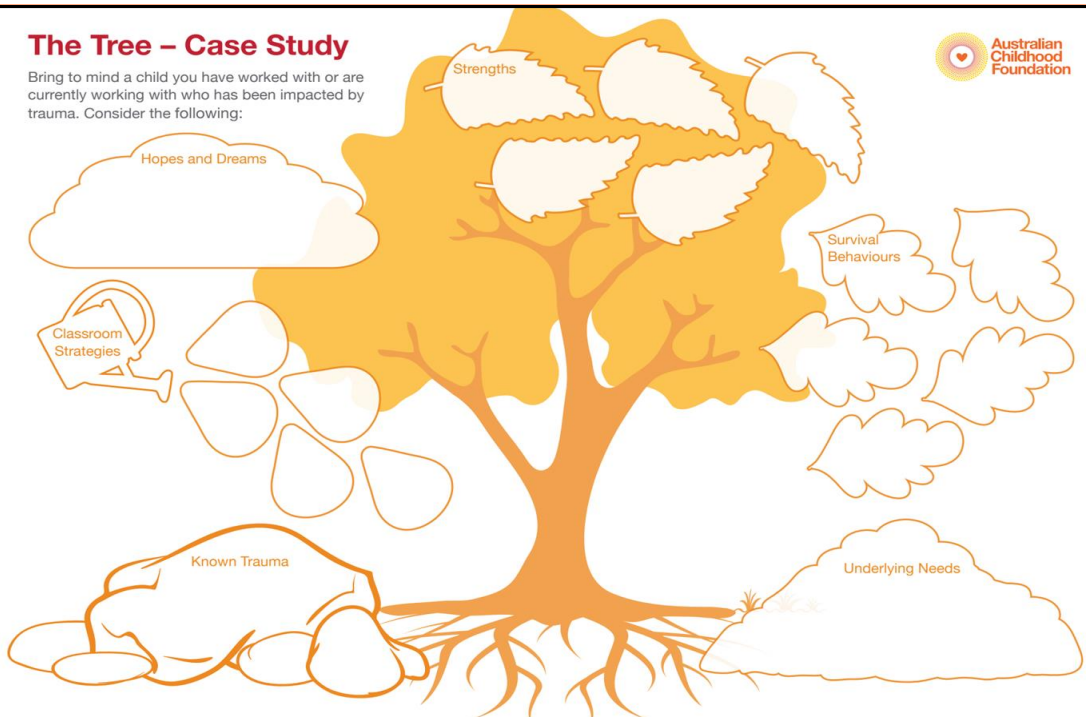
# Introducing the ACF Model of practice



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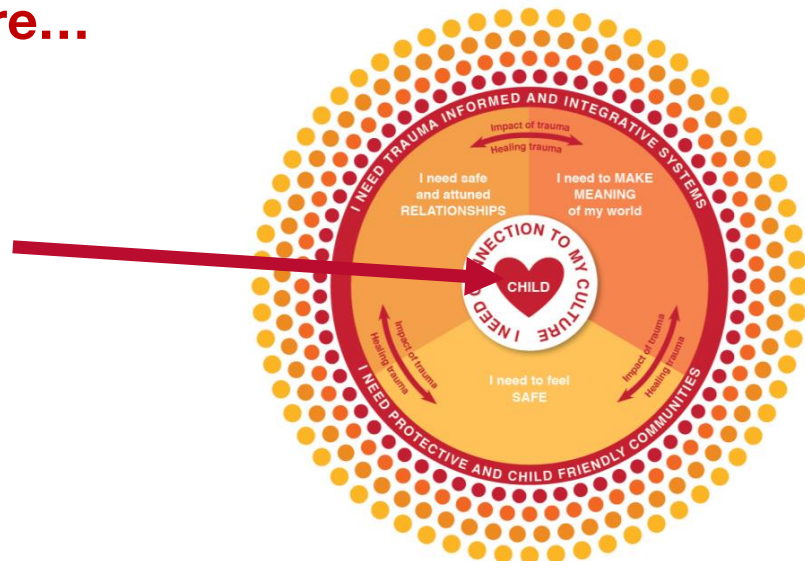
## The Tree – Case Study

Bring to mind a child you have worked with or are currently working with who has been impacted by trauma. Consider the following:



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## Holding the student at the centre...



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## I need connection to my CULTURE



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**How did you become who you are?**



image:crestwoodchildcare.com

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**The importance of culture – a protective factor**

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



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# I need to FEEL SAFE



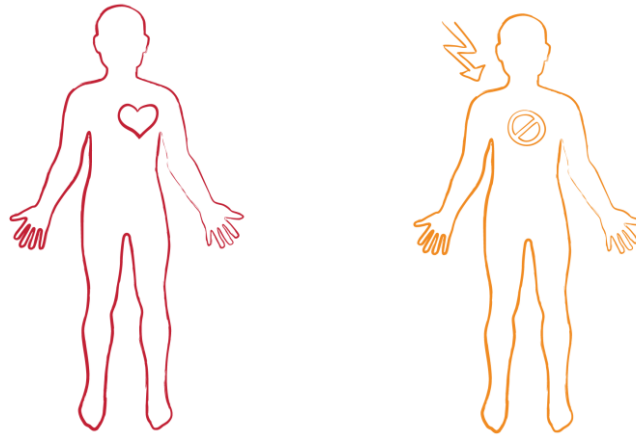
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# The importance of safety



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## ACTIVITY: The felt sense of safety

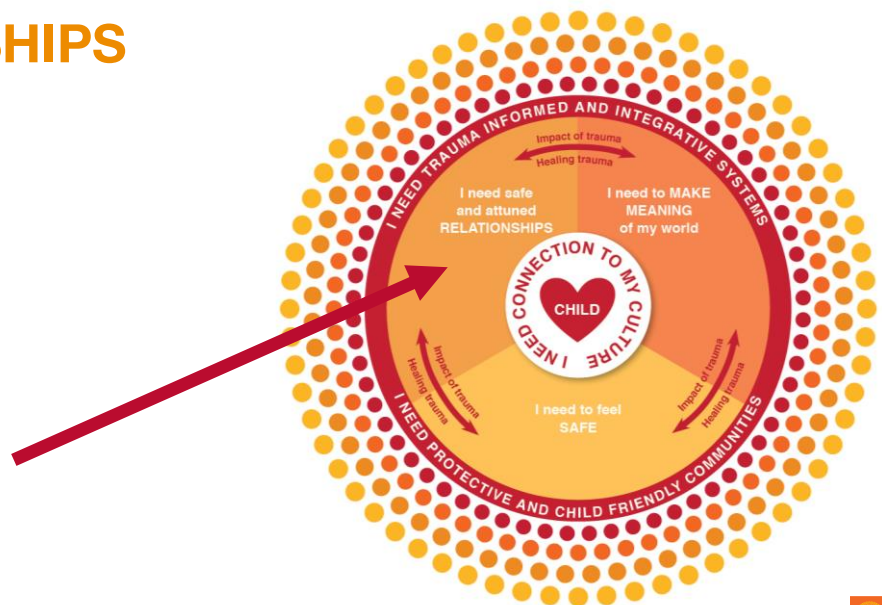


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## I need safe and attuned RELATIONSHIPS



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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 are central to how a student experiences themselves and others**



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## Hand to Hand Attunement

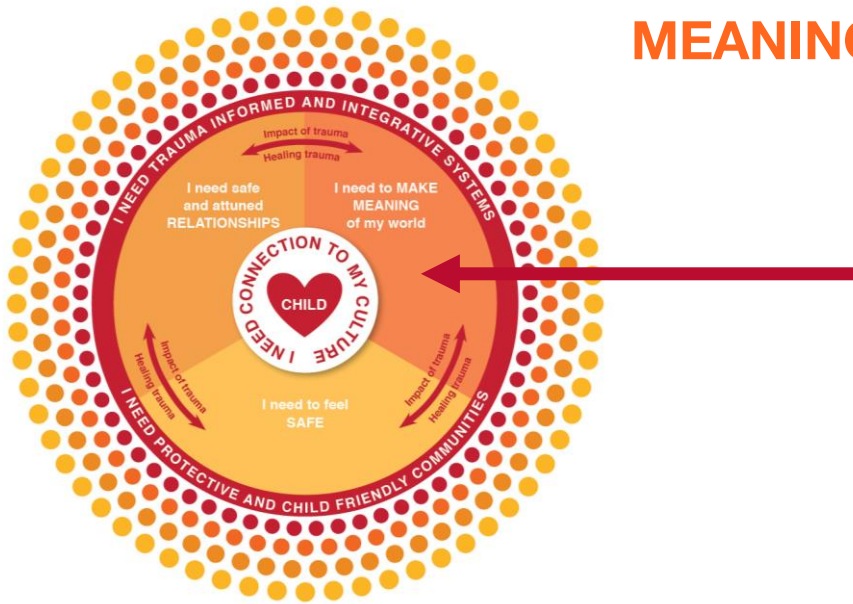
Let's work together to hold an object up between our hands or fingers and *not let it fall.*

We will need to synchronise our movements and attune to one another. What object feels right to hold between us? A big gym ball? A sports ball? A cushion? A balloon? A pencil? Let's try moving the object around. What is that like for you? As you move together, notice if one person is leading or if the movement initiation is swapping between you. Play around with this. When you become accomplished, add another object so you are using both of your hands to hold up two objects between you. What does it feel like to be in synch with another person?



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## I need to MAKE MEANING of my world



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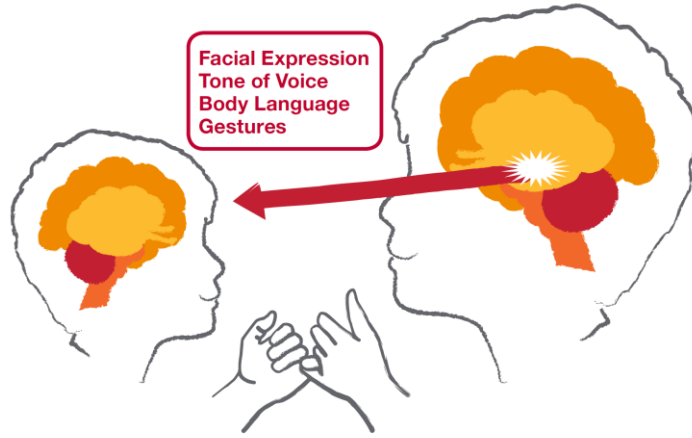
## How do I make meaning of the world?

We are deeply impacted by both our surrounding relationships and the environment on 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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# How do I make meaning of the world?

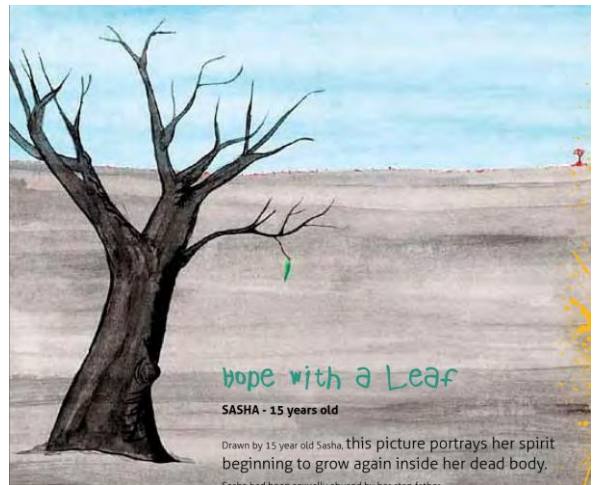


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## ACTIVITY: Meaning making – Heartfelt



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## Reflection

Thinking about your school, what activities do you do that relate back to the **needs\*** of the students?

**What will you add to your classroom tomorrow?**

\*needs as a *child* not as a learner. This is a small but important distinction.

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**PART 2:**

**The brain, growing up and the impact of trauma**



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## Brain development - vertically

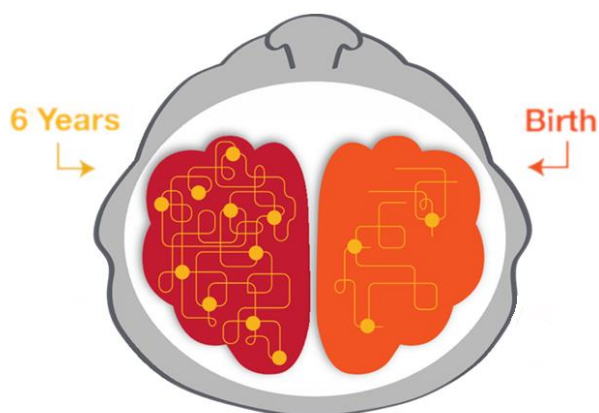


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## Brain development – horizontally



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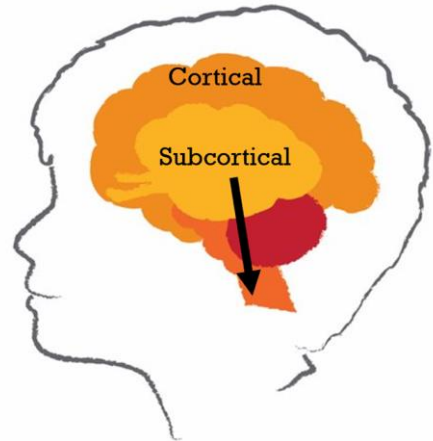


## Cortical

- Cortex
- Prefrontal Cortex
- Medial Prefrontal Cortex

## Subcortical

- Brainstem
- Cerebellum
- Limbic System – Amygdala & Hippocampus



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## Cortical

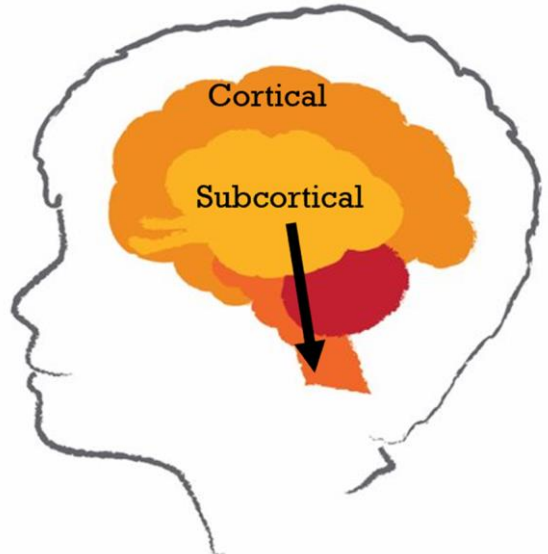
- Consciously activated for reflection

**Responsive**

## Subcortical

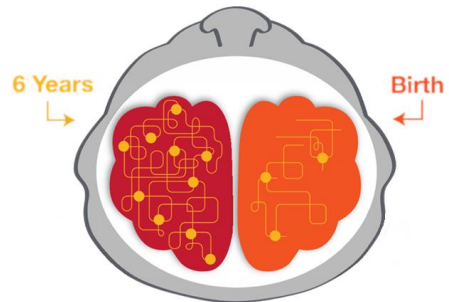
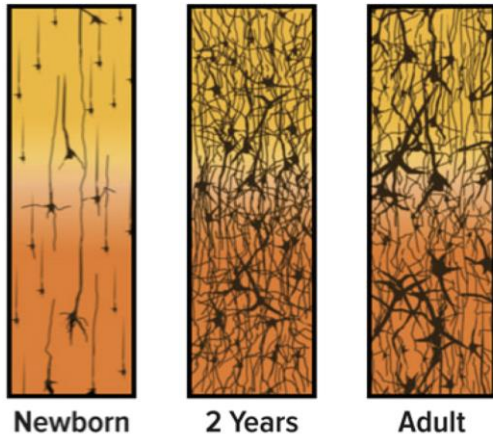
- Unconsciously activated for constant survival

**Reactive**



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## Life span /child development



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### ACTIVITY:

**Predictability & Repetition the foundation of neuronal pathways...**



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## Survival



Our brain's first priority is to survive.

Responding to a perceived threat initiates an immediate whole-body experience where we either:

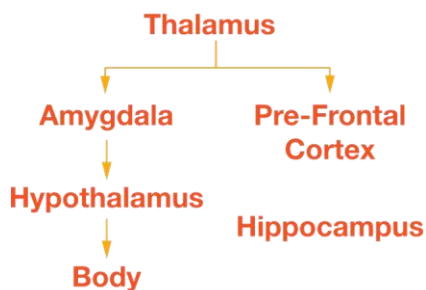
- **Seek relationship (Social Engagement)**
- **Fight, flight, actively freeze (Mobilise)**
- **Flop (Immoblilise)**

- During this time, the cortex and hippocampus are offline. We are not able to 'consciously think'; we are in the moment and reactive.
- During this time, we can become terrified, uncontained and disconnected from our body.



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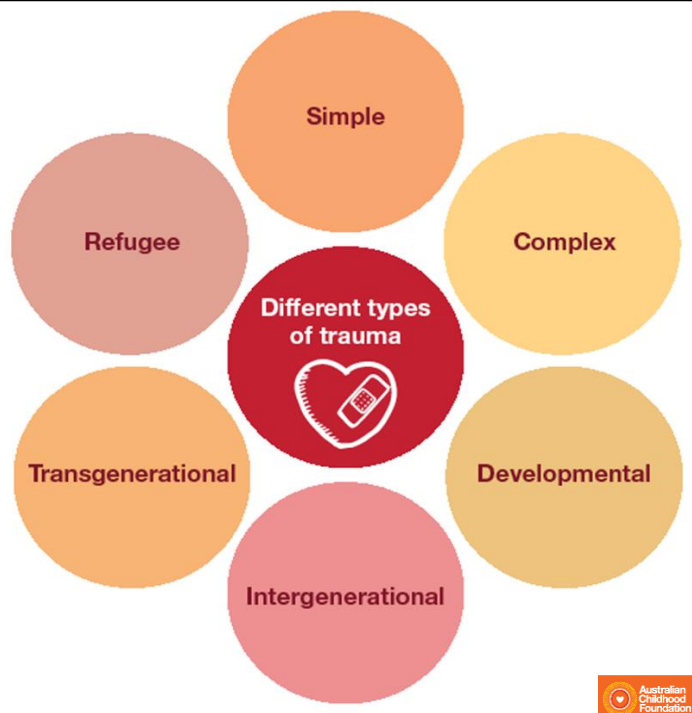
## Sensory information response sequence



Survival mode message sent to defend oneself

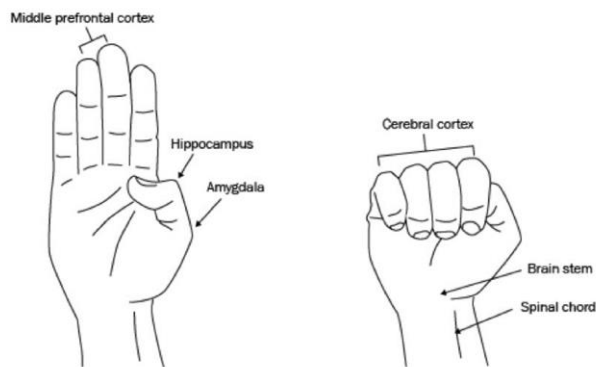
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## Experiences of trauma and the impacts at school



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## Flipping a Lid – the impacts of toxic stress on the higher brain parts



Hand model courtesy of Dan Siegel

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## Residual Messages of Trauma

**We learn through our relationships with others and the environment around us. Developing beliefs about how we connect with others, influence the way we see our self, and how we interact with the world.**

Below are some residual messages of trauma that may influence one's developing relational templates:

- Alpha: "You're either the attacker or the attacked"
- Submission: Follower, submit at all costs
- Perfectionist: Outside of perfect is unsafe
- Police officer: I need to have everyone follow the rules my world needs to be predictable and consistent



image:istock

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



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## Brain and Body Break

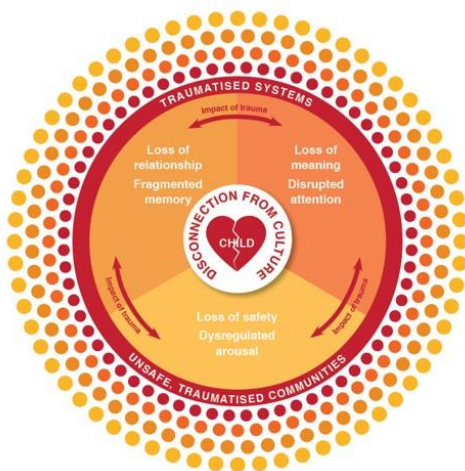


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## Effects of trauma on behaviour



To cope with trauma children use initial adaptive responses to survive

This is reasonable as a once off occurrence, but, if they continue they can become maladaptive patterns of behaviour

These responses will be different for an individual child at different developmental stages

Often a combination of appropriate developmental behaviours and maladaptive patterns of behaviour emerge

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## Activity

Think about the students you have interacted with this week.

In the classroom, on yard duty, before school, students leaving early, or within a formal meeting.

What behaviour have you seen that could be the impact of trauma?

What did it

- *Look like*
- *Sound like*
- *Feel like*

Trauma can impact on all elements of children's development.



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**PART 3:**

**Healing ways to respond: SMART Circle of PRACTICE**



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## Reframing our view

“what’s wrong with you”

versus

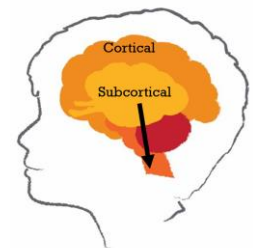
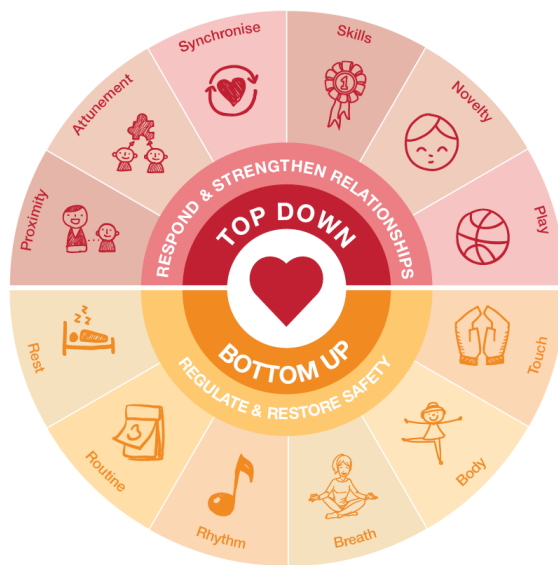
“what has happened to you?”

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## SMART Circle of PRACTICE – responsive ways to co-regulate



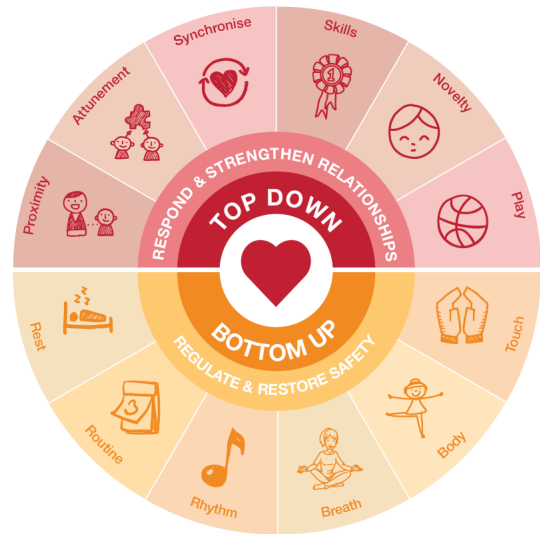
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## What is the SMART Circle of PRACTICE?

The **SMART Circle of PRACTICE** is a tool designed by the Australian Childhood Foundation to conceptualise ways to support and co-regulate students using what is called “Bottom Up and Top Down” responding and strategies.

When under stress or having been impacted from trauma, a student’s ability to stay engaged in their learning and social interactions is significantly impacted...



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## Bottom Up

“Bottom Up” responding refers to engaging the subcortical (lower) parts of the brain to regulate the higher parts of the brain.



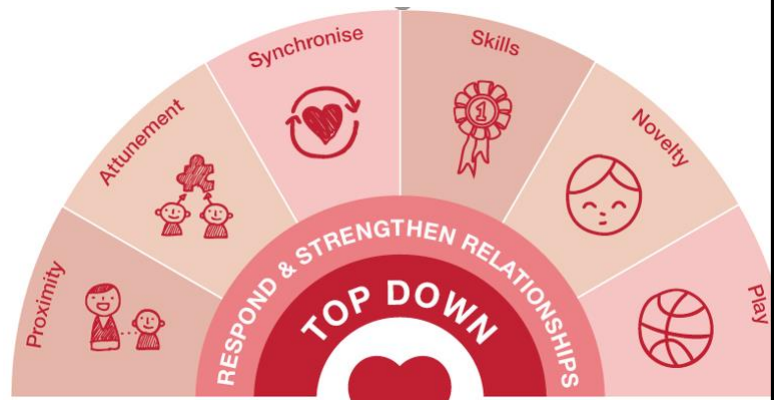
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## Top Down

“Top Down” responding refers to engaging the cortical (higher) parts of the brain to regulate the lower parts of the brain. regulation



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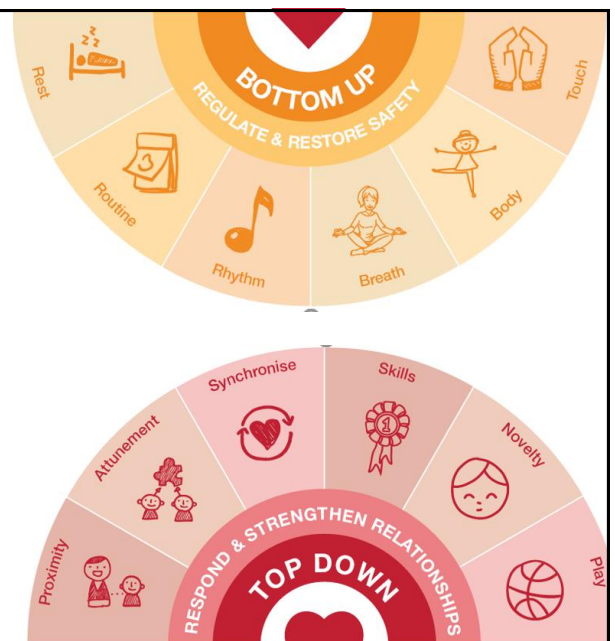
## Intention

### Bottom up

to regulate and restore safety

### Top Down

to respond and strengthen relationships



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## When to use each of the approaches

### “Top Down” approach

when students are in, or able to still engage, a regulated state to help them stay there



### “Bottom Up” approach

to help students access a regulated state when feeling distressed, unsafe or disconnected.

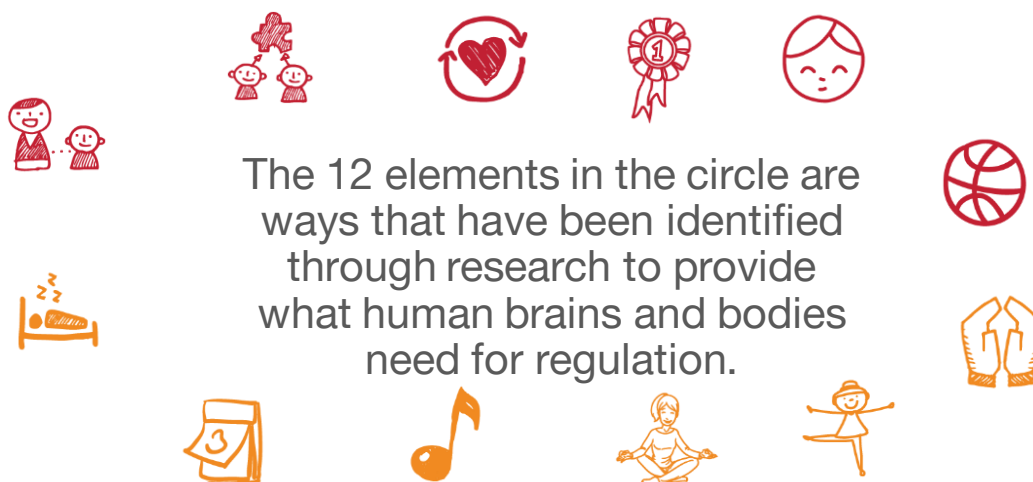


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## The 12 elements of the CIRCLE of PRACTICE



The 12 elements in the circle are ways that have been identified through research to provide what human brains and bodies need for regulation.

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**SMART PRACTICE**  
Responses and Strategies

**Activities and Discussions**







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## Building our toolkit:

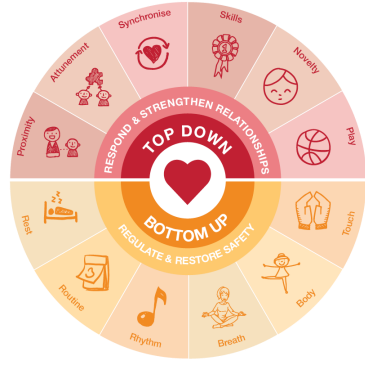
### Responsive Activities and Strategies


**BOTTOM UP**

- Breath
- Body
- Touch
- Rhythm
- Routine
- Rest

**TOP DOWN**

- Proximity
- Attunement
- Synchronizing
- Skills
- Novelty
- Play





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## Five steps to helping children manage big feelings

### Five steps to helping children manage big feelings



#### Listen to the child's feelings with your whole body

- Stop what you're doing
- Get down to your child's level
- Look at the child (their focus is on the expression on your face and tone of voice)
- Speak using a calm voice (their focus is on the tone of your voice)



#### Put your child's feelings into words

- "It looks like you're pretty angry/sad/scared about that"
- "You sound cross"
- "I can hear this is really frustrating for you"
- "I can see you are feeling hurt/worried/anxious"



#### Help him/her to notice what is happening in their body

- "How does that feel in your tummy?"
- "How does that feel in your head?"
- "Your arms look really stiff and tight, can you notice that?"
- "I wonder what you can notice happening in your body at the moment?"



#### Empathise with them

- "It's tough when..."
- "I can understand that you might feel annoyed when..."
- "If that happened to me, I'd be angry too"
- "Wow, that's really tough, I can see how much ... upset you"



#### Help him/her to solve their own problem

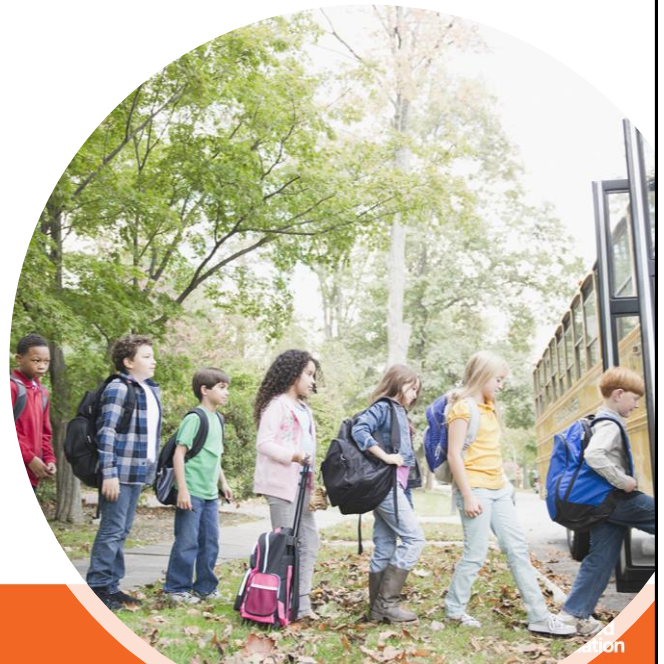
- "What could you do about it?"
- "Next time that happens what would you like to do?"
- "I wonder what would help?"



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## Introducing the first element of the SMART PRACTICE Framework –

**PREDICTABLE**



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## Understanding SMART PRACTICE

For each of the elements of PRACTICE we invite you to:

- consider the main **PRINCIPLE** and **OUTCOMES**
- reflect on what the **NEEDS** are of students (as children/young people)
- understand the **PRACTICE GOAL**
- Identify helpful and supportive **RESPONSES, ACTIVITIES** and **STRATEGIES**

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## SMART PRACTICE - PREDICTABLE

### Principle:

- Students who have experienced trauma may experience any change as a potential threat. Even if the familiar is difficult and destructive, the familiar is safer for them than the unfamiliar.

### Outcomes:

- Students will come to trust, and rely on their reference point(s) as an interpreter of their environment. They will respond in a less volatile way to changes in the classroom and build a platform for responding to change overall.
- Students will learn to use others as a resource to support them at school.

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## Understanding the needs - PREDICTABLE

- I need safe and attuned relationships
- I need a felt sense of safety

### PRACTICE Goal:

Create environments that are routine and predictable and prepare students for change

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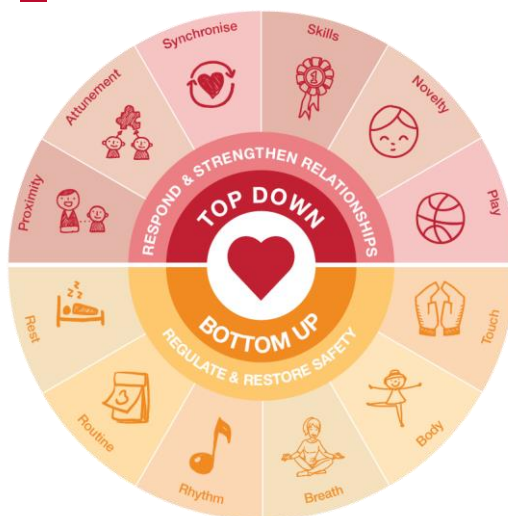
## PREDICTABLE responding – whole class and students

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<b>E</b> ENGAGING					



### SMART PRACTICE



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## PREDICTABLE responding – whole class and students

Being predictable... would your students be able to answer these questions?

- How you greet them each lesson?
- Do they know what's coming up in the lesson?
- Do they know the general routine of the lesson?
- Do they know where they will sit?
- Do they know how you will give them their instructions, tasks, work, feedback..?
- Do they know where to find what they need?
- Do they know what to do if they are struggling with a task? Do they know how you will react?



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## PREDICTABLE responding – whole site and staff

- Policies & procedures
- Routines
- Classrooms
- Yard
- Excursions and incursions
- Evacuations and invacuations
- Supporting Children in Care



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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



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SMART

Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma

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# SMART PRACTICE

Checkout  
Feedback  
Keep in touch  
SMART Learning Pathway  
ACF & SMART Resources  
References



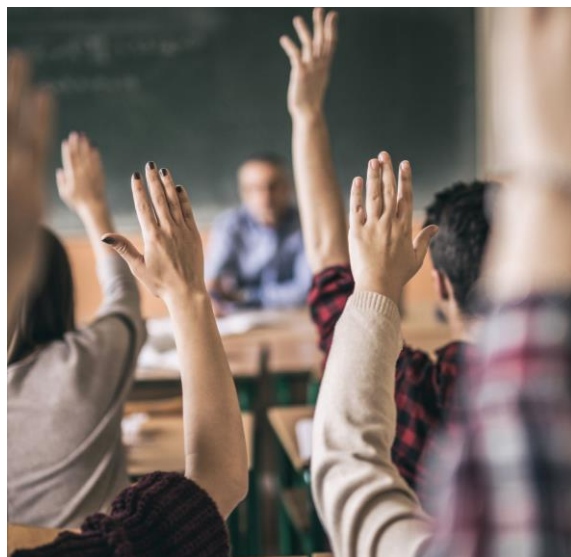
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## Check out

What are you taking back to your classroom tomorrow?

- Strategy?
- Activity?
- New perspective?



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## Feedback



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## Keep in touch with ACF and DfE

Carolyn Grace, Senior Consultant, ACF

- [cgrace@childhood.org.au](mailto:cgrace@childhood.org.au)

Melissa Powney, Senior Consultant ACF

- [mpowney@childhood.org.au](mailto:mpowney@childhood.org.au)

Karen Perry, Policy Officer, Child Protection and Trauma-informed practice, DfE

- [Education.SMART@sa.gov.au](mailto:Education.SMART@sa.gov.au)

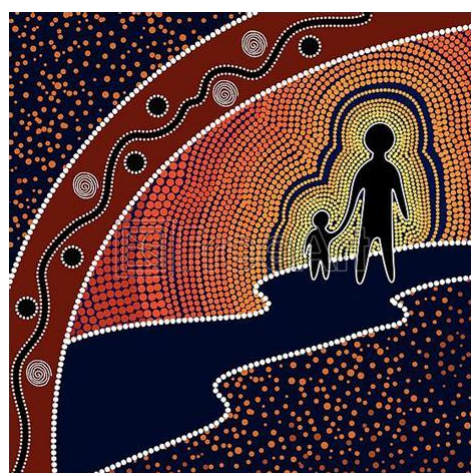
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## SMART Learning Pathway

- SMART Online Training – register through Plink – self-paced
- SMART – 2-hour training – facilitated by a local SMART Trainer
- SMART PRACTICE – Day 1 – *(includes specialist packages ie Early Years, Refugees, Adolescents, Working with Aboriginal communities)*
- SMART PRACTICE – Day 2
- SMART Train the Trainer program – 2 days



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## ACF & SMART Resources

- SMART training – register through PLINK
- Discussion papers – available on TLC Teams page
- Prosody Blog

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/professional-community-network/>

- Other ACF Training

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/training-development/course-list/>

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## References

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