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Working with children and young people with disability

Developing a relationship focused, strength based, neuroinformed and inclusive framework for children and young people experiencing neurodivergence and disability

Territory Families
Care and Protection Induction
August 2023



Professional Education Services
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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of this land and waters. We payour respects to their elders past and present and to their children who are the 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.





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 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.

Learning outcomes

Understanding disability and neurodivergence


- ADHD
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Emotional Spectrum Disorders
- Physical disability

Explore responses to behaviour that are grounded in a needs-based approach

Integrate culturally safe and strong practice into response planning and implementation


Learn the importance of safety and trust - ensuring relationships are central to practice, and, practice is child centered

Building networks of support that neurobiologically enhance learning and relationships

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Neurodivergence and Disability

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The definition of 'Disability' under the Federal *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) is very broad to encompass physical, sensory, mental and intellectual disability.



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Children with disabilities are a higher proportion of the in-care population than in the population at large.

Some children enter care with disabilities caused by the abuse or neglect that brought them into the care system.

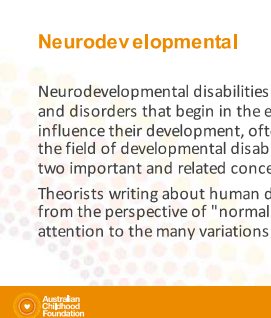

Some children who already have disabilities are relinquished into state care by parents who lack the resources to manage the parenting challenges they present.



Neurodevelopmental

Neurodevelopmental disabilities" refer to a diverse group of conditions and disorders that begin in the early years of children's lives, and influence their development, often for life. As professionals working in the field of developmental disability we may fail to recognize and link two important and related concepts - "development" and "disability".



Theorists writing about human development have traditionally done so from the perspective of "normal" or "typical" development, with little attention to the many variations that include "disability"



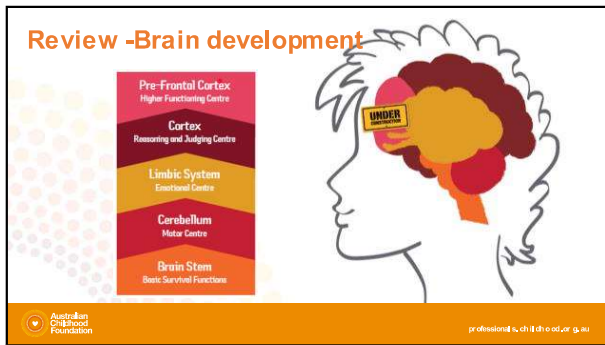
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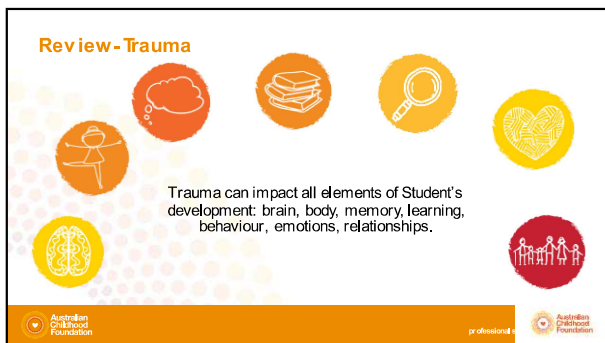
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Culture and Disability









Culture is inclusion

- First Peoples with disability and their families are amongst the most seriously disadvantaged and disempowered members of the Australian community.
- Any support or intervention must be driven by the client and include the client's voice and testimony.
- A culture of inclusion acts as a buffer for the client



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Our Way Planning-First Peoples Disability Network



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Relational templates – SUMMARY

- The brain develops in interaction/attachment to other human beings
- Attuned, responsive care by primary carer is critical. Becomes the template for all relationships throughout life
- Shame causes break in attunement. Needs to be repaired by primary carer & connection re-established

Infant learns to self soothe, regulate stress and emotions, trust environment to meet needs, see world as safe enjoyable place, develops identity based on this



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Development impact on children and young people with disabilities

- In the first years of life a child is learning the essential building blocks of development. Learning about:
 - the foundations of connection in building relationships
 - building early affect tolerance & regulation strategies through the co-regulation of his/her caregivers,
 - exploring his/her world
 - establishing foundational understanding for problem solving & awareness of objects and space,
 - basic awareness that he/she has the capacity to have an impact on the world (agency)



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Children and young people with disabilities

- In the absence of a safe environment the child's ability to explore the world is further impacted on.
 - When the caregiver has been unpredictable, the child may sacrifice exploration to remain close to the caregiver
 - A child whose carer is rejecting may explore regardless of the signs or cues of danger.



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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's 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-20211230645>



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Children and young people with disabilities

- In a stressed environment with inadequate soothing strategies and without available external regulation the child is exposed to overwhelming arousal.
- The connections being laid down and the child learns that emotions, are frightening and that arousal in the body is a potential danger.
- The young child may disconnect from or guard against physical experience or may express arousal and affect through behaviour and actions



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Interoception and Sensory Processing

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Interoception



[Interoception: The New Topic in Autism - YouTube](#)




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Interoception

Low levels of interoception means a reduced capacity to understand or connect with the body in ways that would enable them to self-regulate.

Interoceptive awareness may directly inform the capacity to regulate arousal states.


It is important to integrate the teaching of interoception activities into developing interoceptive awareness.



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Interoceptive strategies for young people

Move	Tense & Stretch	Find your pulse	Yoga
Map your feelings	Mindfulness	Relaxation	How hungry am I?
	Breathing	When I get.....	



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Sensory needs

Many children and young people with ADHD and Autism also suffer from sensory processing disorder (SPD) making it difficult to process and act on information received from the senses.

Most children with SPD display elements of extremes where they suffer from sensory overload sometimes and seek stimulation at other times.


It is important to understand their sensory needs and implement strategies to enable a positive experience in the education or care setting.


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New Innovations in Intervention

Research and clinical experience suggest the efficacy of individually combining interoceptive awareness, sensory processing, behavioral (Khalsa et al., 2018) and trauma-informed treatment (Warner et al., 2014).


The need to merge sensory integration with interoceptive awareness intervention is supported by emerging clinical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of sensory integration interventions in PTSD (Warner et al., 2014) and its recent inclusion as an evidence-based treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorder.




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ADHD

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Children with ADHD can be creative problem solvers, good public speakers, energetic and enthusiastic and have good conceptual skills and intuition.



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STRENGTHS

- Creative
- Intelligent
- Problem solving
- Determined

STRENGTHS

- Energetic
- Eager to try new things
- Hardworking
- Perseverant

WEAKNESSES

- Difficulty dealing with change due to fear
- May have problems with punctuality
- May be forgetful
- May have trouble listening
- May seem depressed and lack motivation

WEAKNESSES

- Difficulty connecting with others
- Excitement that can lead to trouble in anger
- Impulsivity
- May have learning difficulties
- May seem disorganised and lack motivation

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Brain signals that may be affected by ADHD

NEUROTRANSMITTERS

RECEPTORS

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Neurobiology of ADHD

- is complex and involves multiple brain pathways
- Pathogenesis in neurotransmitters dopamine and noradrenaline
- Altered dopamine signalling leads to altered reinforcement sensitivity

Dopamine: attention, energy

Noradrenaline: attention, motivation, pleasure, reward


Attention: decisions, computations

↓

Hyperactivity
Compulsive movement
Impulsivity
Dysregulation
Risk taking

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Neuroscience of ADHD




[The Neuroscience of the ADHD Brain - YouTube](#)

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ADHD Research

Traditional behavioural moderating techniques such as reward and punishment may not be effective:

- reinforcer quickly loses its value
- only short sequences of responses can be reinforced
- there is a short window where responses can be effectively received.



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Autism Spectrum Disorder

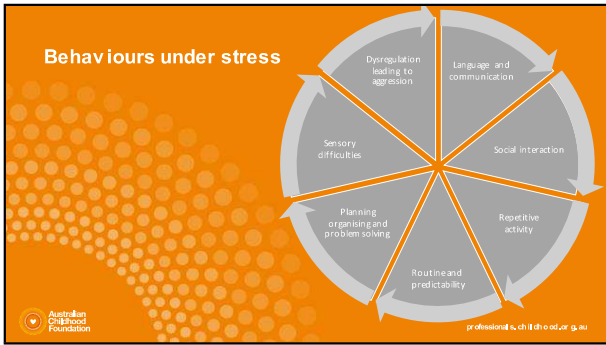


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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the term used to describe a condition that affects development of an individual across their lifespan.

- Social communication
- Restricted interests and behaviours
- Sensory processing differences
- Every child is different and has unique abilities
- Individualised approach needed

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Pathological Demand Avoidance


I have **pathological demand avoidance**, an autism spectrum condition affecting social interaction and communication. It can also mean I get lost in my imagination. My main challenge is that demands (you must/you need to/you have to) make me very anxious. It can look like aggression or being naughty, but actually I'm panicking. Please be patient, allow me to make my own decisions where possible, give me time to process change, and help me calm down if needed.

Stickman Communications 2015

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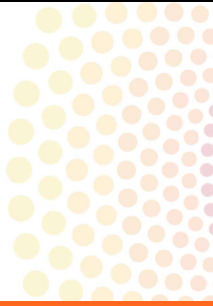

How can you help?

Use	Use clear and simple language
List	List events sequentially
Give	Give one instruction at a time
Take	Take time to listen and communicate
Warn	Warn of changes or transitions
Simplify	Simplify the environment where possible
Offer	Offer a quiet space



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How to build a hug



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FASD



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10 Neurological impacts of FASD

- Brain structure and neurology
- Cognition
- Language
- Academic achievement
- Memory
- Attention
- Affect regulation
- Adaptive behaviours
- Executive function
- Motor skills



The infographic features a silhouette of a human head filled with various icons representing different areas of impact: memory, attention, executive function, social skills, and academic achievement. The text 'FASD Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder' is prominently displayed in the center of the head.

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Neurodevelopmental Challenges

- Structure
- Sequences
- Cause and affect
- Abstracts and generalisations
- Ongoing learning

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Marulu Strategy; an example of working in remote regions with FASD

- [Variety - the Children's Charity & Kimberley Diamond Company - supporting the Marulu Strategy \(WA\) - YouTube](#)



A cartoon illustration of a brown kangaroo sitting and looking forward.

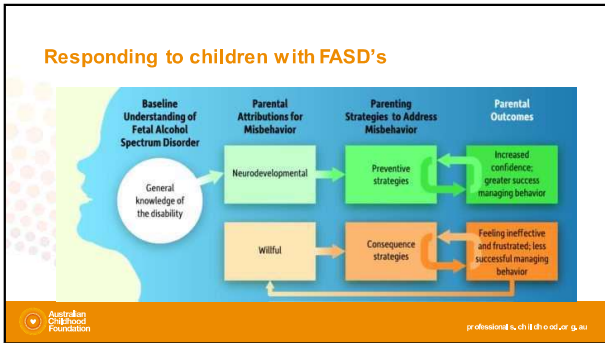
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FASD and intersectionality with youth justice

- [FASD Youth Justice](#)



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How to help...

- Use as few words as possible.
- Always clearly state what you want to happen—the desired behavior.
- Don't argue, debate, or negotiate.
- Being direct is good, but don't become too authoritarian, or doors will close quickly.
- Don't expect the person to be reasonable or to act their age.
- Go for a few "Yes" responses first. Use short questions you think the person will answer "Yes" to, just to get them out of being stuck in the "No" loop.
- Be nonjudgmental.

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How to help

Start with a clean slate:
Don't have any assumptions as to why the person is behaving the way they are. There is a good chance you may be incorrect

Don't get Frustrated:
Don't get frustrated that you just dealt with this same type of issue yesterday. It may seem like the same issue, but to the person it's likely a completely unique and unrelated crisis. It's not that they aren't paying attention; it's that their brain isn't letting them make the connection.


Remember nonverbals
Be extra attentive to your nonverbal and paraverbal communication. The person with FASD may not understand all the words you're using when they're going through a crisis, but they are likely tuned in to your appearance and sound.

Keep in mind the strong Precipitating Factors related to the person's brain damage as a result of prenatal alcohol exposure. It can help you maintain your Rational Detachment in a tough situation.

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Trauma informed practice with children with a disability

- **Safety:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety
- **Relationships - Trustworthiness:** Maximising trustworthiness through relationships, task clarity, consistency and interpersonal boundaries
- **Collaboration:** Maximising collaboration and sharing power
- **Choice:** Maximising choice and control
- **Voice:** Prioritising the person's voice being heard and heeded.
- **Child focused/centred practice:** "Quality of Life Domains"



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Responding Developmentally



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Responding to Children with Disability

- Expressive communication. The child with disability and trauma may:
 - have difficulty being understood
 - not have words to express basic needs & wants, to tell others that they are in pain or bored
 - have difficulty expressing emotions
 - express themselves using gestures/facial expressions and body language that others don't understand or misinterpret
 - use their behaviour - often perceived them as being manipulative, rude, stubborn or non-compliant
 - Understand their health needs



Responding to Children with Disability

- The child with disability and trauma may require:
- Requests broken down
 - Key words emphasised
 - Time to process and respond
 - Language stimulation activities/opportunities
 - Support of visual tools or adaptive technology



Responding cont... - Visual tools - hints

- Match the child's communication and cognitive development skills so they are able to be successful
- pre-intentional communicators - personal profiles or personal communication dictionaries
 - intentional communicators - personal profiles, personal communication dictionaries & object chat books
 - symbolic communicators - personal profiles, object/photo/symbol chat books




In brainstorming accommodations, here are some key questions to ask yourself:

What is the task or expectation the child is expected to do (and failing at/"refusing" to do)?

What does the brain — anyone's brain — have to be able to do in order to successfully complete that task or meet that expectation?

What do you know about how your child's brain functions in those areas? Do they have those skills?

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In brainstorming accommodations, here are some key questions to ask yourself:

How old is your child developmentally (which might be different than their chronological age)?


What are the secondary behaviors you see in this environment or with this specific situation?


What are your child's strengths and interests?


Based on all the information gathered from the above questions, what accommodations need to be implemented to help the child be successful?


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External Brain



 The cognitive impairments in children with FASD can cause them to have poor memory, lack of impulse control, poor judgment, and difficulty with 'cause and effect' reasoning.

 This means they often need support from others to help them think through decisions, behaviours, and consequences as well as help them remember their routine, schedule, and how to complete tasks assigned to them.

 In other words, your child may need you or a trusted person to act as their External Brain.

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Trauma, Disability and me in Care and Protection

- The better integrated the different parts of the brain are the more adaptive we can be to our environment
- **Developmental trauma is dis-integrative, disconnecting, and disruptive** to both brain and body
- *Where has trauma touched my life?*
- *What does it mean for me, to be working with traumatised children with a disability?*

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'Yarning About Disability'
book by
Caris Jalla




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Questions/reflections
What are you taking away from today?

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Resources:
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/participation/tipsmanagingadhdinclass.pdf>
<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/supporting-students/health-e-safety-and-wellbeing/health-support-planning/managing-health-education-and-care/neurodiversity/interception>
https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/regulation-scale-hsp432-example-symbols-reduced-language.pdf?acsf_files_redirect
<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/information-processing-issues/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-child-with-slow-processing-speed?fbclid=IwAR1lF9TGQNugAsiMNX7sJhjFtYjjoP3KlVeQTU2eKX2hE6cVJOY2CqepSA>



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Resources:
<https://autismfriendlycharter.org.au/app/>
<https://www.spectrumnews.org/features/special-reports/autism-brain-region-by-region/>



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Professional Education Services
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Find additional resources at:
<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/resources/>
<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/covid-19/>