


Understanding and responding to trauma

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R-12

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Australian Childhood Foundation **SMART PRACTICE 2023**

1

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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2

MORNING → **Part 1:**
Practice Framework
ACF Learning model
Definition of trauma

MIDDLE → **Morning Tea:**
Part 2-3:
Neurobiology and the Adolescent Brain
Refresher on the Possible Impacts of trauma
Identifying States of Being – Our Nervous System

AFTERNOON → **Lunch Break:**
Part 4-5:
Safety and Relationships
SMART Circle of Practice – Bottom Up and Top Down

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3

We acknowledge you and what you bring...

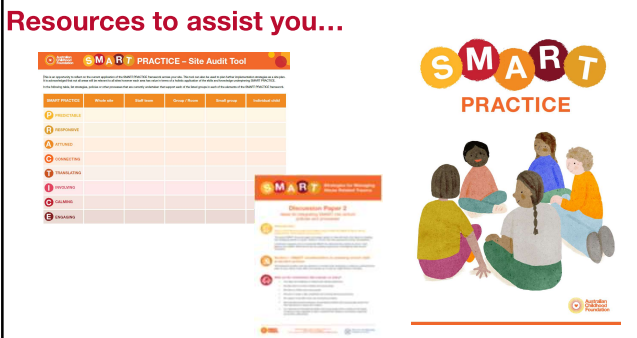
- Knowledge
- Practice skills
- Experience
- Passion
- Compassion
- A desire to bring about change



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4

Resources to assist you...



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5

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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6

Learning together



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

7

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



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8

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FELT SAFETY FOR ALL



SAFE RELATIONSHIPS

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9

SMART Circle of PRACTICE


The foundational approaches for SMART PRACTICE



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10


Introducing the ACF Model of practice



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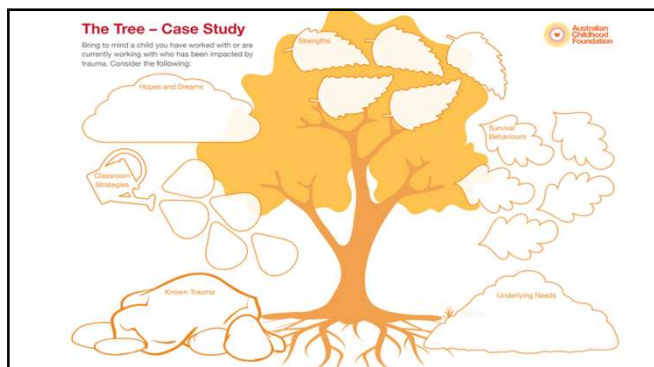
11

Experiences of trauma and the impacts at school



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12



13

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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14

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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15

How do I make meaning of the 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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17

The importance of safety


If I don't feel SAFE then I will struggle to learn because...

- Arousal**
 - Staying alert
 - Shutdown or hide
- Attention**
 - Trying to take in too much
 - Trying to avoid stimulation
- Memory**
 - Indiscriminate on what to store and what to let go
- Exploration**
 - It's not safe to explore
 - I need to prioritise finding a safe base, so I can't focus on new learning

18

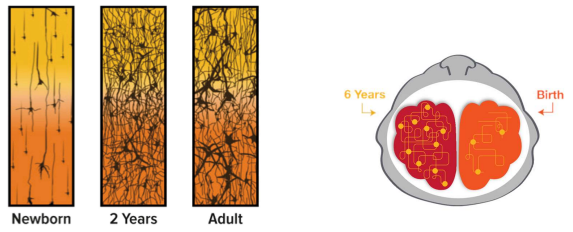
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PART 2:
Neurobiology and the adolescent brain




19

Life span /child development



Newborn 2 Years Adult

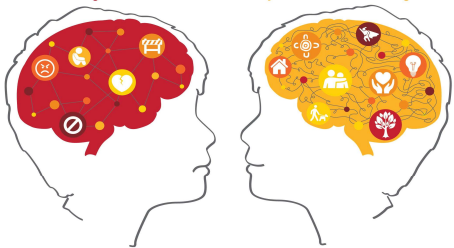
6 Years Birth




20

Early experiences shape the architecture of our brain

Threat and Neglect → Survival Safety and Connection → Integration




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21

Understanding the needs - PREDICTABLE



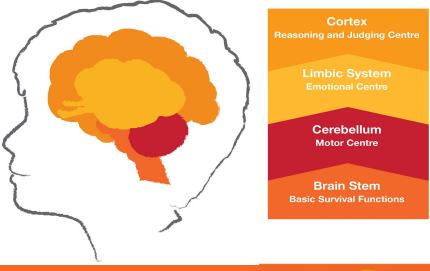
- I need safe and attuned relationships
- I need a felt sense of safety

PRACTICE Goal:
Create environments that are routine and predictable and prepare students for change




22

Brain development - vertically



Cortex	Reasoning and Judging Centre
Limbic System	Emotional Centre
Cerebellum	Motor Centre
Brain Stem	Basic Survival Functions

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23

Cortical

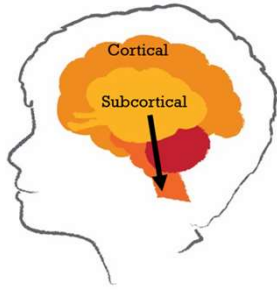

- Consciously activated for reflection

Responsive

Subcortical

- Unconsciously activated for constant survival

Reactive

24

Sensory information response sequence

Thalamus

- Amygdala
- Pre-Frontal Cortex
- Hypothalamus
- Hippocampus
- Body

Survival mode message sent to defend oneself

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25

Survival

Our brain's 1st priority is to survive. Responding to a perceived threat initiates an immediate whole body experience where we either:

- Seek relationship (most advanced)
- Fight, flight, actively freeze (Mobilise)
- Flop (Immobillise)

Depending on the degree of the response, the cortex and hippocampus can be difficult to access. We become less able to 'consciously think', and in the moment and reactive.

In a full survival response, we are terrified, uncontained and disconnected from our body.

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Cortical

- higher executive functions including emotional regulation, planning, reasoning and problem solving, impulse control, processing sensory information such as hearing, recognising language, visual processing, and forming memories

Subcortical

- Survival and living systems such as maintaining homeostasis and reacting to responding to a loud bang

All brain regions use interlinked systems / pathways, they do not work in isolation

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27

The Prefrontal Cortex

Final part of the brain to reach maturity in one's mid to late twenties. During adolescence the cortex, including the PFC, is undergoing significant remodeling!

- self awareness
- reasoning and judgement
- foresight and anticipation
- focusing and sustaining attention
- planning organising and prioritising
- decision making
- reflecting
- enthusiasm, motivation and persistence
- impulse control
- working memory

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Vulnerabilities – the impact of trauma on the PFC

Behaviours associated with an underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex

- Short attention span
- Impulsivity and increased risk taking
- Procrastination (lack of motivation or internal reward systems)
- Disorganisation (trouble working through long term goals)
- Poor judgement and problem solving
- Reduction in ability to see things from other's perspective

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29

Harnessing the power of the teenage brain

Testing boundaries and a passion to explore what is unknown and exciting, helps move from dependence to independence

Essential time of emotional intensity, social engagement, and creativity. They are primed to think outside the box, push boundaries, to seek out novel experiences and become more integrated (efficient) at regularly used processes amongst many other changes!

Image source: ©2014 Brainstorm Dan Siegel

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30

Being the External Brain

Trauma can cause difficulty regulating arousal, poor memory, lack of impulse control, poor judgment, and difficulty with 'cause and effect' reasoning.

Your students may need you and other trusted adults to act as their External Brain.

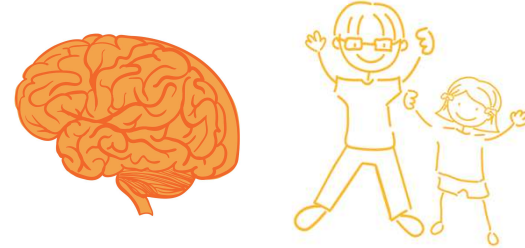
Our brains need to be ready to provide that support. Our nervous system needs to be grounded.



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31

Brain and Body Break



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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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Possible impacts

- 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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34

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PART 3:

Impact of trauma on our physiology

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Detecting Safety with our Social Engagement System

- Finding comfort in the presence of others
- This is a calm behavioural state
- Often characterized by mirroring and reciprocation.
- Tell tale signs– people are orientated towards one another with engaged faces, relaxed movement, smiling/ laughing
- Open to learning, new experiences, taking on challenges



Neuroception of Safety
Neuroception = the way our neural circuits quickly and implicitly work out if situations or people are safe or dangerous

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36

Mobilisation Fight, Flight, Active Freeze	I don't feel safe	I am filled with energy I need to move I need to act now	Red Faced, hot and sweaty Fast beating heart Muscles tensed Moving body, hard to find stillness
Social Engagement	I feel safe	I am all set to play and explore I am ready to connect I am open to your ideas	Making Eye contact Orienting towards those around Listening Relaxed, loose, flowing body
Immobilisation Flip	I don't feel safe	I am numbed out I am retreating inside I am collapsed, small, and distant	I have cold extremities Glazed eyes, distant stare Slow movement Lethargic & passive body

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37

Mobilisation

SAFETY **DANGER**

Play **Fight or Flight or Active Freeze**

Neuroception of Safety Neuroception of Danger

Access to Social Engagement System No access to Social Engagement System

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38

Immobilisation

SAFETY **DANGER**

Being still with others for pro-social reasons like sharing a hug. Finding pleasure in stillness.

Submission or collapse

Neuroception of Safety Neuroception of Danger

Access to Social Engagement System No access to Social Engagement System

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39

Principles for supporting for arousal

1. Mobilisation **2. Immobilisation** **3. Social Engagement**

- Rhythm
- Containing
- Grounding
- Orientation to space
- Orientation to senses
- Engaging the spine
- Prosody
- Breathing

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Social Engagement System = Window of Tolerance

When we are able to use our Social Engagement System (Porges, 2009) we are within our Window of Tolerance (Siegel, 1999).

Mobilisation **Immobilisation**

Social Engagement **Window of Tolerance**

TRAUMA OFTEN CREATES A NARROWED WINDOW OF TOLERANCE / SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

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41

My Day feeling safe and unsafe

Mobilised
I don't feel safe zone

Socially Engaged
I feel safe zone

Immobilised
I don't feel safe zone

My Day

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42

Understanding the needs – CONNECTING

- I need support to connect with how I'm feeling in my brain and body
- I need help to express how I am feeling in my emotions and in my body.

PRACTICE Goal:
Help students to be more in touch with their feelings as they relate to language, bodily sensations, and behaviours

What do my sensations mean for me?

<p>Body Sensations: Achy, Dull, Stretched, Sharp, Blurred, Electric, Staccato, Light Heavy, Smooth, Breathless, Energised, Sore, Achy, Brittle, Bruised, Burning, Buzzy, Open, Pounding, Spinning, So Hot, Cold, Clenched, Pulsing, Throbbing, Tight, Tingling, Twitching, Itchy, Dry, Itchy, Shaky, Damp, Full, Rapid, Irregular, Puffy, Prickly, Ticklish, Flushed, Numb, Tense, None</p>		<p>Emotions: Happy Sad Scared Worried Disgusted Surprised Angry Calm</p>
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43

Understanding the needs - TRANSLATING

- I need you to help me understand why I respond or behave in the way I do...especially in my body
- I need you to help me remember what I need to do (both in my learning and in my emotional and body regulation)

PRACTICE Goal:
Aid students to interpret and organize their experiences

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TRANSLATING responding – whole site and staff

- Understanding a student's behaviour
- Helping a student to understand their behaviour
- Behaviour Management Plans
- One Plans
- IESP Applications
- Escalation Profiles
- Understanding arousal – Zones of Regulation/Window of Tolerance
- Sharing of information
- Parent/Teacher days

What do I notice about her/his body?
What do I think she/he might need at this time?
What would I like her/him to know at this time?

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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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46

9 Points of curiosity:

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...)

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47


Words Matter – how behaviours are perceived/understood in the classroom

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48

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PART 4: Safety and Relationships



49

The importance of safety

If I don't feel SAFE then I will struggle to learn because...

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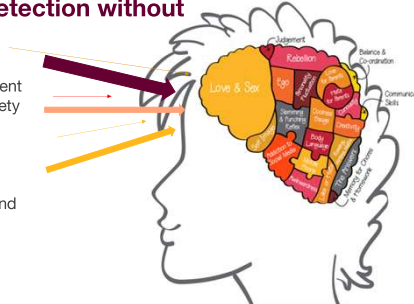



50

Neuroception - 'detection without awareness'

What cues in the environment are linked to perceived safety and what are linked to perceived threat?

Our past experiences will influence this perception and autonomous cueing.

Familiar is linked to safety, unfamiliar to threat.

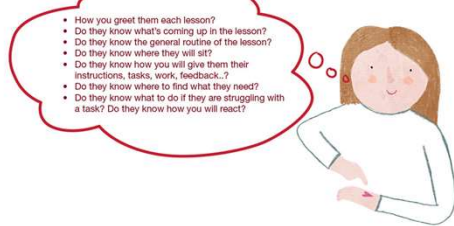





51

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?

52

The importance of culture

Culture provides a protective factor

Safety: Belonging
Relationships: Connection
Meaning making: Identity

- Guides our interactions with self, others and our lands
- Provides us with a navigational framework, a sense of certainty and predictability = security
- Provides a mental framework that supports meaning making- narrative of self, others and natural world








53

The importance of relationship


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

54

Regulation response & strategy principles

- **Co-regulate** before expecting self-regulation
- **Determine** whether a student is hyper or hypo aroused before using certain strategies
- **Focus** on the principles of "bottom up" to regulate the higher parts of the brain and the body, and "top down" to regulate the lower parts of the brain and the body



55

Using relationship to help healing – Rupture and repair



- Always start by developing a felt sense of safety for the students, acknowledge them as individuals
- Build predictability and consistency
- Know yourself, your triggers, and how to ground yourself so that you can...
- Use your relationship to help healing – seek to connect, co-regulate, repair ruptures, lead by example, hold space for their distress in whatever way it shows up
- This helps role model how to exist in safe relationships
- Learn to translate trauma related behaviours so you can understand and respond to what is needed
- Recognise students strengths and reflect this back to them

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56

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PART 5:


Smart Circle of Practice: Bottom up Top down



57


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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58

Intention

Bottom up

to regulate and restore safety

Top Down

to respond and strengthen relationships



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59



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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60

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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61

Bottom Up

REST – Rest, moments of calm and quiet, sleep
ROUTINE - Predictability and consistency
RHYTHM - Body movement, rhythm of the day/year/lesson
BREATH - Understanding and using breath to regulate/ the importance of understanding breath for alerting/ calming/ staying in the WOT
BODY - Body awareness/ what’s happening in my body/ how am I feeling somatically & emotionally/ body sensations
TOUCH - Safe & sensory

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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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63

Top Down

PROXIMITY – mindful use of students and our own comfort zones, eye contact
ATTUNEMENT - connection/tuning in to what I need/what the student needs
SYNCHRONISE - working together, working alongside one another
SKILLS - building understanding and capacity – in learning tasks/emotional literacy/social/emotional competence
NOVELTY – mindful use of novel experiences
PLAY - inclusion of fun and laughter

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Supporting curiosity and playfulness

- Trauma can smother curiosity and playfulness; there is no room for these if you are trying to survive and have your basic needs met
- Play and the experience of awe and wonder can spark the creation of neuronal connections, promote attunement and experience of healthy relationships, promote exploration of identity, personal growth and a sense of connection; all factors that encourage healing
- Play can lift the burden of lived experience and healing, allowing the process of healing to happen organically.
- Play is linked to wellbeing in adults too!

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65

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

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66

Check out

What are you taking back to your classroom/site tomorrow?

- Strategy?
- Activity?
- New perspective?



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67

Keep in touch with ACF and DfE

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68

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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69

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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70

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71

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72