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# Trauma Responsive Practice with children and families

Benevolent society 2023



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



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## The importance of you

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



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

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

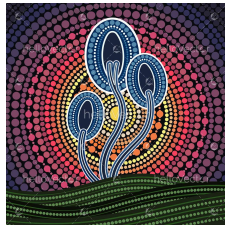


Image: Hellovector.com



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### Our journey today....

- Importance of relationships and culture
- Brain development
- Understanding the impacts of trauma
- Creating Safety
- 5 Parenting Systems
- Repairing the impacts of trauma all the way through today



Image: Aboriginal Art Store



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### Importance of relationship and culture



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I need connection to my CULTURE

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The Importance of Culture

A protective factor

Safety: Belonging  
 Relationships: Connection  
 Meaning making: identity

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

- Sense of safety
- Relationships
- Meaning making

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Understanding the impacts of trauma

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### Defining trauma

Any single, ongoing or cumulative experience which:

- is a response to a **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

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### Trauma impacts

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

Image source: GACF 2021

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### Brain Development

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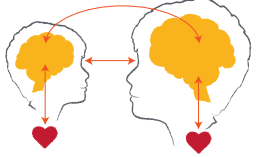
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### Brain development

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



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### Neuroplasticity is hope

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



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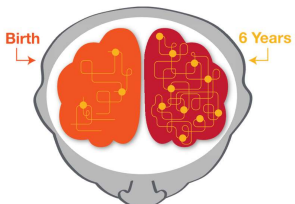
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### Neuronal connections

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



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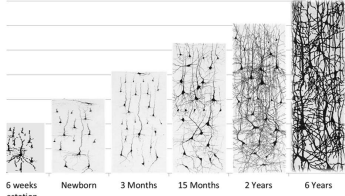
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### Neuronal development



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

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### Sequential brain development – building blocks



- The Thinking brain**  
3-5 Years
- The Emotions and Memory Brain** - Birth to 4 years
- The Movement Brain**  
Birth – 2 years
- The survival brain**  
Pre birth to 8 months

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### Brainstem - basic life functions

- Basic life functions
- First part of our brain to develop
- This is the most developed brain part at birth
- Responsible for our heart beat, breathing, sucking, temperature control, blood pressure



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**The brain stem under stress and trauma**

- may experience fast or slower heart rate
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- sleep disturbances and unsettledness
- sucking and swallowing and digestion difficulties
- may feel hot or cold or not notice changes in temperature

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**Cerebellum- movement and balance**

- Helps us to know where our body is in space
- Helps us with our posture and balance
- Helps us not to fall over and to control our movements
- Has its own connective pathways between the 2 halves- cerebellar vermis



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**The cerebellum under stress and trauma**

- Difficulties coordinating cognitive processes such as planning & working memory
- difficulty in maintaining posture & balance
- difficulty in undertaking tasks that require balance
- lack of awareness of their body in space
- difficulty with voluntary movement tasks – walking or writing




Image source: Shutterstock

**What do you notice and what can you do?**

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**The Rhythm of life- Capacity building**

HEART BEAT RHYTHM RHYME INTONATION BREATH

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**Emotional centre**

Limbic Lobe  
Amygdala  
Hippocampus

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**Limbic lobe- emotional gateway**

- The part of the brain that helps us attach an emotion to an experience or memory
- This part of the brain is particularly involved with the emotions of fear and anger
- Also heavily involved in attachment processes
- This area develops mainly after birth

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**Limbic Lobe- Building Capacity**

Relies upon attunement

What is attunement to you?

The carer being the investigator: the connector, the nurturer, the container.

We look at emotional regulation more deeply in connection later..

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**Limbic lobe- Building Capacity**

- Co-regulation
- Body awareness
- Emotional literacy
- Play
- Praise

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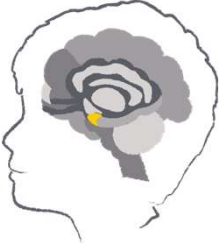
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**Amygdala – smoke alarm**

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



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**The amygdala under stress and trauma**

- can be over active or under active
- can evoke reminders and flashbacks of the trauma (awakenings)
- will have difficulty in emotional regulation
- will have difficulty in reading facial expressions
- Constantly 'firing' – can hijack the cortex (thinking goes offline)

**What do you notice and what can you do?**




Image source: Shutterstock

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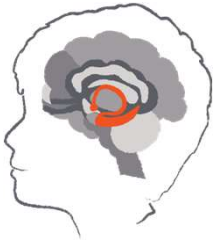
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**Hippocampus – Brain's historian**

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



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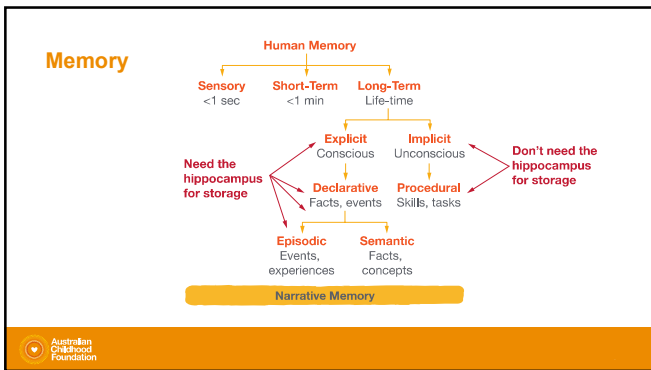
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### Encoding memory

**Implicit Procedural Memory**

- Non-verbal
- Separate fragments
- Emotional/sensational
- Outside conscious awareness

**Explicit Memory**

- Develops at 2-3 years of age
- Consciously retrieved
- Eg. Autobiographical story

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### Encoding traumatic memories

**Implicit Procedural Memory**

- Non-verbal
- Separate fragments
- Emotional/sensational
- Outside conscious awareness

**Explicit Memory**

- Develops at 2-3 years of age
- Consciously retrieved
- Explicit memory systems can become shut down when trauma is present

terrifying sounds  
terrifying smells  
terrifying visions  
terrifying thoughts  
terrifying bodily sensations  
Hippocampus

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### Implicit memory

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### Attention – impacts of trauma

- Affects sustained and focused attention
- Focus remains on the perceived threat
- Difficulty in focussing on task at hand, listening to instructions or following directions
- Shark music – always playing

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**Working with attention issues**

- **Check yourself** – your body language, tone of voice, facial expressions
- **Check the environment** – reduce overstimulation
- **Know the child** and their triggers
- **Use relationship** to help the child regulate – co-regulation
- **Provide sensory tools** that the child can ground with
- Try music, song, rhythm, to calm the brain stem and reduce bottom up hijacking by the survival brain

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**Strategies for transforming – Hippocampus**

- Repetition
- Visual Reminders
- Review
- Reinforce

*Calming the brainstem, quietening the amygdala and boosting the cerebellum will all help the hippocampus to function more effectively*



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**Cerebral cortex- complex thinking**

- The largest part of the brain
- Associated with higher brain function such as thought and action
- Examples of functions:
  - Reasoning
  - Logic
  - Judgement
  - Voluntary movement



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### The prefrontal cortex- executive function

- Responsible for executive functions, such as judgement, reasoning, and self-awareness
- Final part of the brain to reach maturity in one's mid 20s
- Under reconstruction in adolescents from the age of approximately 12 years



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### Strategies for building healthy brain development

Brainstem & Diencephalon	Basic survival & sensory processing	Pacification or stimulation. Activities in the child's preferred sensory modality
Cerebellum	Coordination of movement	Using music, rhyme and movement activities
Limbic	Emotional processing	Building relational connection through plays, animals, games
Cortex	Thinking processes	Linking experiences and sensations to words and descriptions
Prefrontal cortex	Analytical and abstract thinking	Challenges and safe risk taking activities

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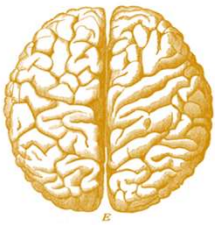
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### Lateral brain development

#### Left Hemisphere

- Evaluates language content
- Optimistic hemisphere
- Understands beginning, middle and end
- Learns from the past and expects the future
- Looks for patterns



#### Right Hemisphere

- In the present moment
- Eye contact
- Facial expression
- Tone of voice
- Posture
- Gesture
- Intensity
- Is mute
- Grasps the whole

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## Creating Safety



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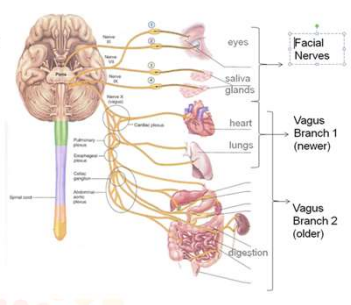
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### The Vagus Nerve



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### Polyvagal theory and Protective Responses

by Stephen Porges

Behavioural Functions	Body Functions
<b>Social Engagement</b> Soothing and calming Indicates safety	• Lowers or raises vocalisation pitch • Regulates middle ear muscles to perceive human voice • Changes facial expressivity • Head turning • Tears and eyelids • Slows or speeds heart rate
<b>Mobilisation</b> Fight or Flight Active Freeze Moderate or extreme danger	<b>Hyper arousal</b> • Increases heart rate • Sweat increases • Inhibits gastrointestinal function • Narrowing blood vessels - to slow blood flow to extremities • Release of adrenaline
<b>Immobilisation</b> Collapse or submission Death feigning Increased pain threshold Conserves metabolic resources Life threatening situations	<b>Hypo - arousal</b> • Slows heart rate • Constricts bronchi • Stimulates gastrointestinal function

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### When I am terrified

- Containment- help me feel back in my body
- Grounded- Help me feel present in the Here and Now.
- Present- Stay with me, help me know I am not alone in my distress

**Notice and name**

5 things you can see  
 4 things you can hear  
 3 things you touch/sense  
 2 things you can smell  
 1 thing you can taste

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### Creating Safety

A young person's cortical capacity is impaired by trauma-as a result subcortical functioning becomes dysregulated  
 In order to regain cortical capacity, essential for learning, we must restore emotional regulation.  
 How do we create:

- Regulation (calm)
- Engagement
- Connection
- Control

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## Working with nervous systems

Increase Resources – Regulatory Capabilities



**Social Engagement**

- Heat snap pack
- Something weighted
- Reduction in stimulus
- Physical task

**Mobilising** →

**Offer...**

- Punching bag
- Screwed up paper to kick / throw
- Change environment
- Pool noodle

**Immobilising** →

**Offer...**

- Drip cold water on the skin i.e. palm initially
- Music, hum
- Voice of safe person
- Seek small movement

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## Polyvagal Theory

I am showing you....	On the inside....	I need you to....
<b>ORAL MOBILITY</b>	<b>I am feeling:</b> • Safe, Calm, Happy, Sad, Anxious, Reflective, Proud, Grateful	<b>Help me to play regulate:</b> • Play and have fun with me • Set boundaries and natural consequences • Use reflective and problem solving skills as I can learn from too • Notice and acknowledge my strengths and my skills
<b>CRANIAL NEURALGIA</b>	<b>I am feeling:</b> • Distrust, Frightened, Lonely, Hurt	<b>Help me to down regulate:</b> • Regulate me safely • Co-regulate – be safe, attuned and responsive to me • Use movement – big floor mat jumping, laughing, singing, chanting, and jingles • Create a safe space near you where I can retreat to until I feel safer • Model deep breathing • Repair our relationship – we are ok and our relationship is strong!
<b>MOUTHING</b>	<b>I am feeling:</b> • Confused, Overwhelmed	<b>Help me to up regulate:</b> • Co-regulate – be safe, attuned and responsive with me • Tell me I am safe and demonstrate it with your actions, gestures and tone of voice • Hold me or close to the body so we can be holding for specific things like something green, something on the floor or something on the floor
<b>INTERNALISATION</b>	<b>I am feeling:</b> • Disconnected, Unbothered, Flat, Withdrawn, I'm disappearing	<b>Help me to feel my body for noticing different parts, such as my feet on the floor and my action on the chair:</b> • Repair our relationship – we are ok and our relationship is strong!
<b>INTERNALISATION</b>	<b>I am feeling:</b> • Fear, Anxious, Sad, Disappointed, I feel heavy	

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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 gum 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 to 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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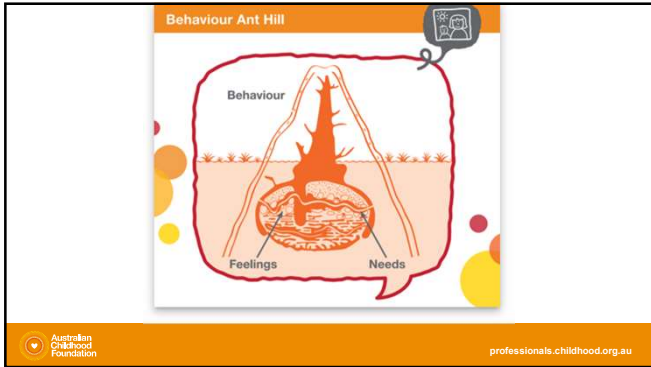
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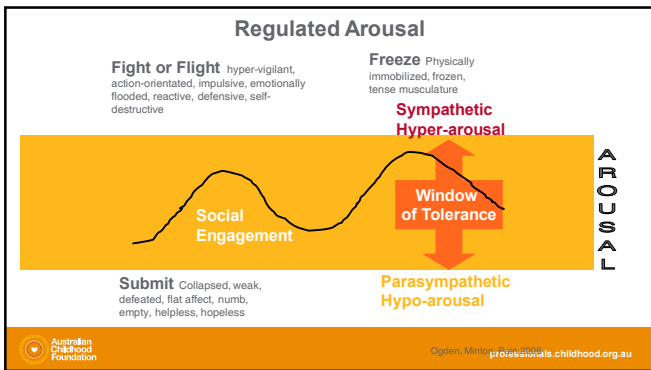
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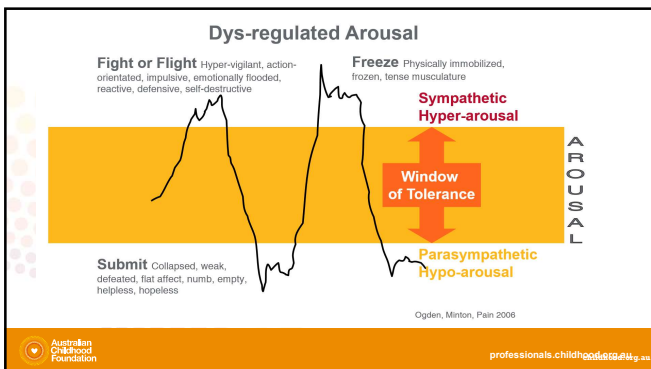
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**Interpersonal Regulation**

- When people are in relationship, the ability of one to regulate him/herself, affects the other's ability to regulate
- The child's arousal shapes, are shaped by, calming and engaging relationships

Child's movement in her/his window of tolerance

Movement in my window of tolerance

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**Working with families:  
Understanding the 5 Parenting Systems**

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

**Parental Approach System**

- Get close to the child without becoming defensive.

**Parental Reward System**

- Enjoy interacting with the child.

**Parental Child Reading System**

- Understand the mind of the child.

**Parental Meaning Making System**

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

**Parental Executive System**

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

Image source: Dreamtime

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### Approach System

estrogen  
prolactin  
oxytocin

hypothalamus

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### Early Adversity impacts our Parenting ability

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

Left side of brain  
Right side of brain

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### Reward System

1. We become a parent which generates hormones that talk to our hypothalamus.
2. Our hypothalamus releases oxytocin (the love hormone) which activates the reward system.
3. The reward system works by this area sending dopamine to the orbitofrontal cortex and the nucleus accumbens.

hypothalamus

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

accumbens

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

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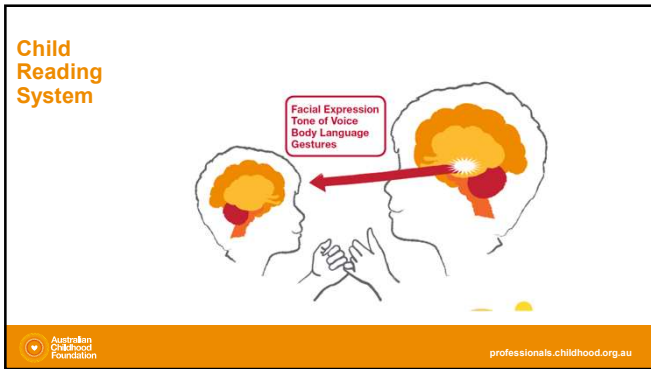
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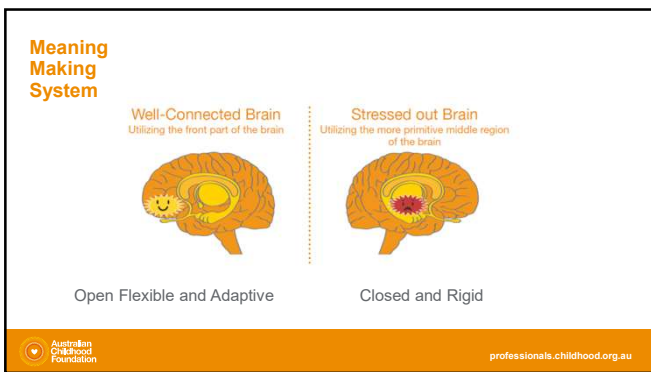
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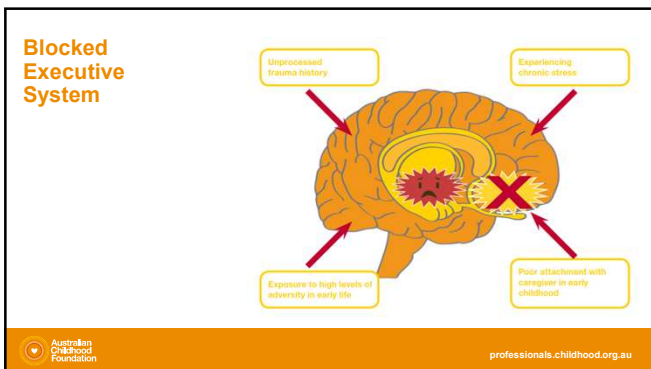
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## Repairing the impacts of trauma through trauma responsive practice



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### Repairing the impacts of trauma

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

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





Image: hellovector.com



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### Safety and listening the child

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



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## Trauma informed approaches

- Understanding **trauma and its impact**
- **Promoting safety**
- Ensuring **cultural humility**
- Healing happens in **relationships**
- Having a sense of control/power in **decision making – having a voice**
- **Integrating care** (collaboration)
- Belief in **hope based recovery**
- **Empowerment/** strength based
- Understanding trauma in the context of **child development**
- Worker **Self care** (NCTIC cited in Steele & Kuban, 2013:53)



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## Helping caregiver and child to repair their relationship

- **Empathise** with how difficult it may be for both parents & infant/child.
- **Encourage/promote** consistent, sensitive, responsive, attuned, caregiving and replicate this in the therapeutic relationship.
- The therapeutic relationship needs to **mimic secure attachment** characteristics including:
  - worker provides consistency, reliability, attunement, reflective capacity,
  - containment by worker (ability of the worker to tolerate the intolerable feelings/thoughts of the parent(s) and/or child and not pass judgement on these feelings/thoughts.



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## Helping caregiver and child to repair their relationship

- **Explore** what is getting in the way of parent providing this consistent, sensitive, responsive, attuned, caregiving
- Help parents to **identify arousal states** in their child and explore what's underneath the behaviour
- **Respectfully challenge** the parent about punitive or authoritarian approaches – explore the impact that this style of parenting had on them
- Help families to create **new ways of relating** through:
  - ✓ play, and
  - ✓ exploratory discussion in order to increase their capacity to reflect and to offer what their infant/child needs.



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**PACE**

- Playfulness
- Accepting
- Curious
- Empathetic



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**PACE Helps**

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

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

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