

**Making SPACE for Learning**





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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians and owners of this land and waters. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and to the children who are their leaders of tomorrow. We acknowledge their history and living culture and the many thousands of years in which they have raised their children to be safe and strong.




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**The Australian Childhood Foundation**



**We Help Children Heal**

On their own, children do not recover from the devastating impact of abuse, neglect and family violence. They need specialised support to heal. We provide therapeutic services to children.



**We Keep Children Safe**

We build the ability and confidence of individuals and organisations to protect children. We provide parents with education and support to help them raise happy, safe and loved children.



**We Stand Up for Children**

We advocate for changes to laws and policies that help to make all children safer. We work to strengthen community attitudes that prioritise the rights of children to love and safe relationships.



**We Create Understanding for Children**

We educate and support adults who look after and work with traumatised children to be better able to understand and respond to their complex needs.




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**Safety**

The content of this training can evoke strong emotions and may stir up personal experiences of trauma.

Please be mindful of your own wellbeing during this training and if you need support please ask the facilitator.



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**Learning Outcomes:**

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

Develop confidence in building strong and healing relationships with children and young people.

Develop strategies for building relationships with children and young people impacted by trauma that are accessible and applicable.



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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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**Reflective Question:**

What makes the best kinds of learning spaces for children and young people?


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**Making SPACE for Learning**



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




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| Domains     | Translated into needs statements   |
|-------------|--|
| Staged      | Children's brains need support to grow and learn.<br><i>My brain grows upwards, step by step.</i>  |
| Predictable | Children need to know what they can count on.<br><i>I feel better when I know what is coming next.</i>   |
| Adaptive    | Children need support to grow up healthy and strong.<br><i>There are things I need to grow up healthy and strong.</i>                          |
| Connected   | Children need to feel like they are connected.<br><i>I need to feel like I am connected.</i>   |
| Enabled     | Children need to feel safe and know about what makes a safe connection.<br><i>I need to feel safe.<br/>I need safe connections in my life.</i> |
|             | Children need to know more about what makes them who they are.<br><i>I grow stronger as I learn more about what makes me, me.</i>              |




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STAGED ADAPTIVE ENABLED  
**S P A C E**  
PREDICTABLE CONNECTED



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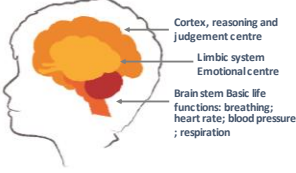
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### Staged

- Brain development is sequential
- One of the ways our brain develops is vertically, from the bottom to the top
- Some neurodevelopmental delays such as those effected by trauma can cause brain changes. However with the right support the brain can be repaired through neuroplasticity.



My brain grows upwards, step by step.

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### The Importance of Culture

How did you become who you are?

Safety: Belonging  
Relationships: Connection  
Meaning making: Identity



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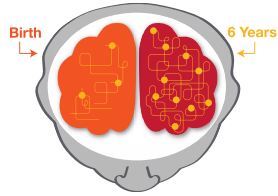
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### Neuronal connections

- 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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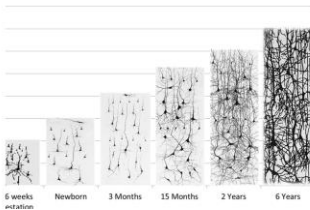
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### Neuronal development



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



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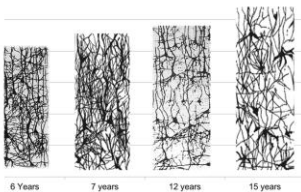
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### Neuronal development



- Early years – period of **rapid growth**
- Followed by onset of puberty in which **synaptic pruning and formation of new neurons** occurs.



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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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### 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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### Diencephalon - sorting & sending centre

- This area of the brain develops mainly after birth
- It sorts out messages coming into the brain and sends them
- It uses hormones to send signals to body
- Hormonal signals tell your body what it needs, eg. food, water, love



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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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### Amygdala & Hippocampus

#### Amygdala

- the 'smoke detector' of the brain
- is mature at birth
- processes & stores implicit memories

#### Hippocampus

- matures between 2-3yrs of age
- provides context to memories & embeds into long-term memory



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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 late twenties to early 30s



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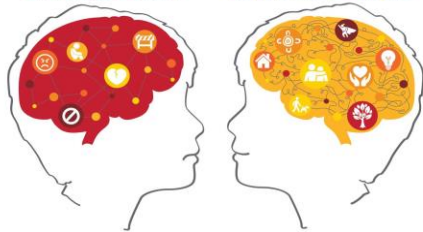
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### Early experiences shape the architecture of our brain

Threat and Neglect → Survival

Safety and Connection → Integration




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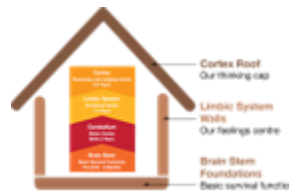
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### Staged- A brain development metaphor - My Brain House

- We build our brain from the bottom to the top- like building a house
- We reinforce parts of our house as we grow, with our roof continuing to develop into our mid 20s.
- A student who is calm and focused at school will likely be functioning with a strong standing brain house, from foundation to roof.
- In times of great stress bits of our brain house can come down and require repair. This is achievable and our brain house can stand strong again.




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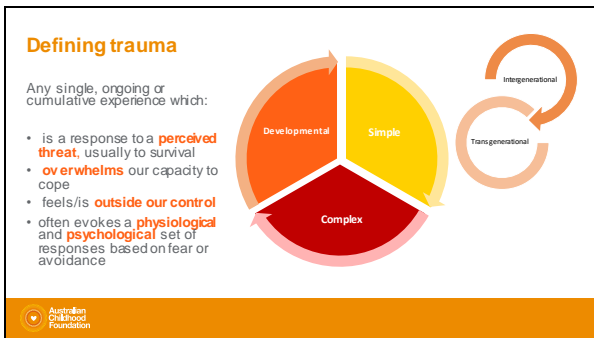
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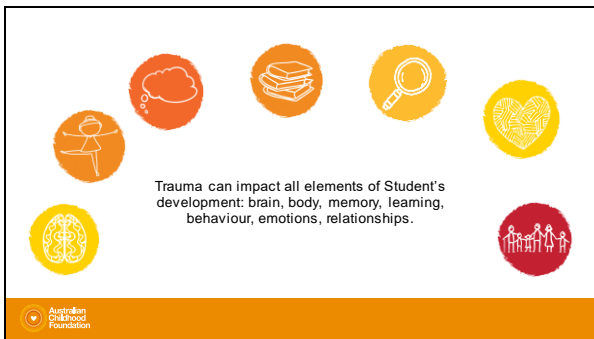
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### Trauma and needs

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

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

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

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



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### Trauma and needs

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

For example:

An experience of being alone, can be met with accompaniment

An experience of fear met with protection, and

An experience of shame met with acceptance.

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



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### Predictable

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



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



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## Predictable

"I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized."

Hiam Ginott


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## Predictable

What might predictability look like in practice?

- For students
- For families
- For all staff
- Systemically

|                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| relationships  | physical activities      |
| routines       | instructions             |
| learning tasks | behavioural expectations |




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## Predictable





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### Adaptive

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




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### Adaptive

#### Behaviour is communication

If we can understand what drives a behaviour, we can work out how to respond to it.

If we can meet the need that is driving a behaviour, the behaviour can start to reduce.

**Behaviours are functional** and almost always makes sense given their specific experiences of trauma.

Openness and curiosity about behaviour is an important response.




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### What does safety look like at school?

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

Dr Steven Porges




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### Safe & Unsafe States of Being

IMMOBILISATION

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

MOBILISATION

**In this state we feel unsafe**

**We are active and mobilised without a sense of safety**

- We fight, or flee, or our bodies actively freeze with tensed muscles.

**We are active and mobilised with a sense of safety**

- Sometimes known as the 'Play Zone' in this state our bodies are active as we socially engage with others.
- Our bodies feel calm and relaxed.

**We are socially engaged**

- We feel in synch and connected with others.
- We are orientated towards each other with welcoming voices & open faces.
- We feel pleasure in others.

**We come to be still with a sense of safety**

- Our body slows into an immobilised state without a sense of safety
- We are withdrawn, submissive, collapsed, numb.

**In this state we feel unsafe**

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### Social Engagement

**Tell Tale Signs**

**We feel safe in this state.**

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



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### Mobilisation

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



**Play & Exploration**

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



**Fight or Flight or Active Freeze**

We are mobilised **without a sense of safety** in this state.

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**Mobilisation without feeling safe**

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

- Hypervigilant
- Edgy/jumpy
- Irritable – easily annoyed
- Poor recovery from distraction
- 'silly', loud, over-excitement
- Unsettled, sleep difficulties
- Outbursts, aggression
- Defensive, taking things personally
- Increased expectations of self and others
- Inflexible, 'controlling'
- Sensitive to sensory input



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**Immobilisation**

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



**Being still with others for pro-social reasons, like sharing a hug. We find pleasure in stillness. This is an intimate state.**  
We experience a blend of immobilisation and social engagement in a safely immobilised state.

**Withdrawn, submissive, collapsed, numb**  
We experience immobilisation without a sense of safety in this state.

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**Immobilisation without feeling safe**

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

- Flat, numb affect
- Disengaged, disinterested
- Withdrawn
- "boredom"
- Lethargic, unmotivated
- Disconnected from peers
- Developmental regression – e.g. with abilities to self-soothe, self-care/hygiene, toileting
- Changes to appetite



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### The Social Engagement System



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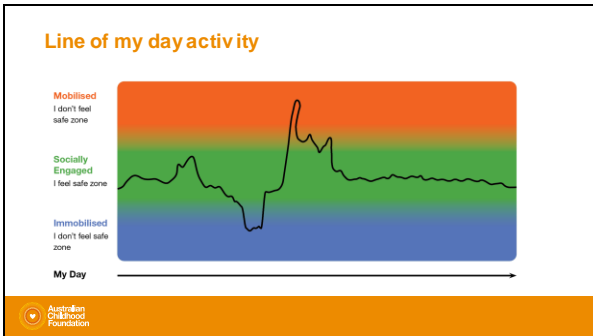
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## Connected

- Children’s relational templates for forming and being in relationships take shape as they grow. They learn what to expect and how to navigate relationships through their experiences of connection with those around them.
- We tend to expect things from relationships based on what we have known from past connections.
- Strategies to support children as their relational templates continue to develop emphasise relationships with safe and consistent adults and peers as the foundation for healthy, strong social and emotional functioning.

I need to feel like I am connected.

I need to feel safe. I need safe connections in my life.

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## Connected

### Relational Safety

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

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

Helen Milroy (2018)

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### Connected

Safety is a central whilst complex concept in this training. It holds a range of meanings for us and for the children, families and communities that we work with

What does a safe space feel like for you?

How do you inhabit it?

What do you bring to it to make it feel safe?

What/ who else is inside the space that contributes to the safe nature of it?



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### Connected

What is Relational Safety in the classroom?

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

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

Bonnie Badenoch



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### Connected



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### Enabled

- Engaging students in the process of understanding themselves can build social and emotional learning.
- When students know about their qualities, their attributes and their talents they can feel good about themselves.
- Knowing about their own special story helps students to build a coherent self-narrative.

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




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### Enabled




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### Making SPACE for Learning – Site Audit Tool

This audit tool can be used to evaluate the policies and practices of a school that resource and equip different levels of the school structure to undertake trauma informed practice. In the following table, the appropriate levels or other processes currently undertaken that support vulnerable students at your school.

|                     | Whole Site | Staff | Classroom / Group | Small Group | Individual Student / Child |
|---------------------|------------|-------|-------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| <b>S</b> Support    |            |       |                   |             |                            |
| <b>P</b> Protective |            |       |                   |             |                            |
| <b>A</b> Accessible |            |       |                   |             |                            |
| <b>C</b> Connected  |            |       |                   |             |                            |
| <b>E</b> Engaged    |            |       |                   |             |                            |




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Evaluation:



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