

Understanding and responding to trauma

Adolescents
Day 1



Australian Childhood Foundation **SMART** Practice Adolescents

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.



Australian Childhood Foundation **SMART** Practice Adolescents

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

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



SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation

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






Image source: © Josh Mills 2022

SMART Practice Adolescents 

Success criteria

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


SMART Practice Adolescents 

Part 1: 9.00am - 11.00am
 Introducing the SMART PRACTICE Framework and ACF Model of PRACTICE
Morning Tea: 11.00am – 11.15am


Part 2: 11.15am – 12.45pm
 The Brain, growing up and the impact of trauma
Lunch Break: 12.45pm – 1.15pm

Part 3: 1.15pm – 3.15pm
 Healing ways to respond: SMART Circle of PRACTICE
Wrap Up & Evaluations 3.15pm

Finish: 3.30pm

SMART Practice Adolescents 

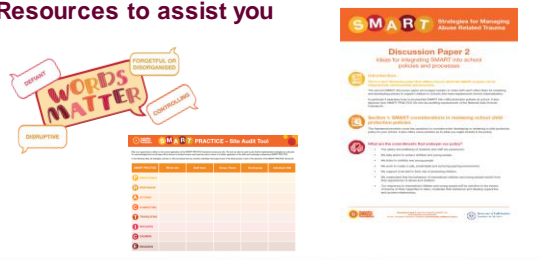
Introductions



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?

SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation

Resources to assist you



SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation

SMART Practice Adolescents

PART 1:
Introducing the SMART Framework and ACF Model of practice

Australian Childhood Foundation

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



SMART Practice Adolescents



Using the Site Audit Tool

The Site Audit Tool INVITES Educators, Leaders and Support Staff to **celebrate and reflect** on their current practices, policies and processes

Invite your participants to consider their main area of influence/work and what processes/policies and strategies support staff and students.

- Leadership – Whole Site and Staff
- Classroom Teachers – Classroom/Group and Individual Student/Child
- Specialist Teachers/SOs/BSSOs – small groups and Individual Student/Child

Practice Area	Attuned	Translating	Healing	Connecting	Empowering
Leadership					
Classroom Teachers					
Specialist Teachers/SOs/BSSOs					

SMART Practice Adolescents



Introducing the ACF Model of practice



SMART Practice Adolescents



I need to feel SAFE

SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation

The importance of safety

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

- Focus**
 - 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 forget
- Exploration**
 - It's not safe to explore
 - I need to prioritise finding a safe base, so I can't focus on new learning

SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation

What do you think provides psychological safety for our students?

What threatens their safety?

How can you increase safety for students at your high school?

SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation



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 is central to how adolescents experiences themselves and others.

SMART Practice Adolescents 



I need to MAKE MEANING of my world

SMART Practice Adolescents 

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

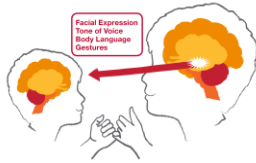


SMART Practice Adolescents 

How do I make meaning of the world?

Relational Templates:

- Our brains grow through connection with another brain.
- Our early attachments provide us with right hemispheric cues on how we interpret and respond to the world around us.
- Mirror neurons help us to mimic social cues and learn new skills from others.
- Effective communication is reliant on access to relationships who are available, consistent and safe.



SMART Practice Adolescents



Reflection

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

What will you add to your classroom or practice tomorrow?

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



SMART Practice Adolescents



SMART Practice Adolescents

PART 2:

The brain, adolescence, and the impact of trauma



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.

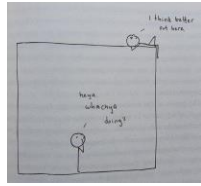


Image source: ©2014 Brainstorm Dan Siegel

SMART Practice Adolescents



Brain development



SMART Practice Adolescents

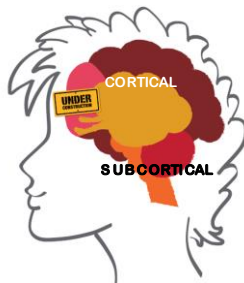


Cortical

- Cortex
- Prefrontal Cortex
- Medial Prefrontal Cortex

Subcortical

- Brainstem
- Cerebellum
- Limbic System – Amygdala & Hippocampus



SMART Practice Adolescents



Cortical

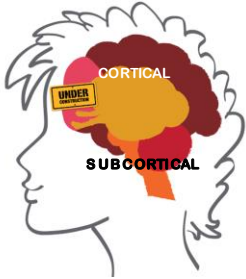

- Consciously activated for reflection

Responsive

Subcortical

- Unconsciously activated for constant survival

Reactive



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)

During this time, the cortex and hippocampus are offline. We are not able to 'consciously think', we are in the moment and reactive.

During this time, we are terrified, uncontained and disconnected from our body.

S M A R T Practice Adolescents



Life span development



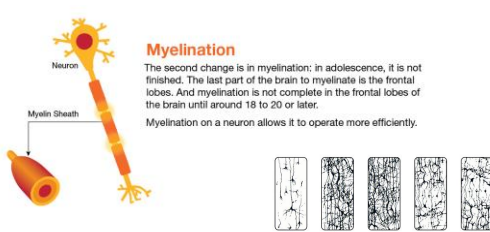
Birth 2 Years 6 Years 12 Years Adult

Image source: IQ022 ACT

S M A R T Practice Adolescents



Pruning & myelination in the adolescent brain



Myelination
 The second change is in myelination: in adolescence, it is not finished. The last part of the brain to myelinate is the frontal lobes. And myelination is not complete in the frontal lobes of the brain until around 18 to 20 or later.
 Myelination on a neuron allows it to operate more efficiently.

SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation



What does this mean for our students - the importance of rest and sleep...

- Pruning and myelination occur during sleep
- Sleep strengthens learning and memories

What impacts our adolescents' sleep?

- Later release of melatonin during adolescence
- Lack of safety to sleep well, if at all
- Poor sleep hygiene
- Use of devices

SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation

What can we do? – The four C's


- **Compassion and empathy** is so important. There may be many reasons why your student is turning up to school or your class tired. Be gently curious as to why they may be tired.
- **Check in** during homegroup/home room time with students – how did they sleep? Have they had breakfast? Can breakfast or food be provided at school? What else do they need? Check in also at the beginning of each lesson.
- **Consider** adjusting morning lesson structures /content that leans towards movement and invigoration, before heavy cortical work.
 After lunch more allow more creativity rather than problem solving, or analytical work as their concentration may dip in the afternoon.
- **Create** spaces for students to have power naps or short rest breaks, if possible, or to complete homework tasks at school.


SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation

The Prefrontal Cortex

Final part of the brain to reach maturity in one's mid to late twenties

- 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



S M A R T Practice Adolescents 

Vulnerabilities – the impact of trauma on the PC

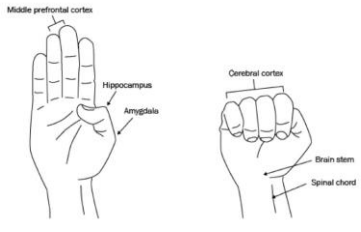
Behaviours associated with an underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex

- 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





S M A R T Practice Adolescents 

Flipping a Lid



Hand model courtesy of Dan Siegel

S M A R T Practice Adolescents 




The double whammy!

Behaviours associated with an overactive limbic lobe and under-active pre-frontal cortex

- Lack of impulse control
- Increased risk taking
- Emotional dysregulation
- Inability to regulate
- Misreading of social cues of others
- Reactive, rather than responsive

SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation

Experiences of trauma and impacts



Different types of trauma

- Simple
- Complex
- Developmental
- Intergenerational
- Transgenerational
- Refugee

SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation



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.

SMART Practice Adolescents Australian Childhood Foundation

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

Impacts on behaviour

When a student is feeling 'unsafe' and feeling a sense of powerlessness, we may see:

- Aggression
- Overactive stress responses
- Withdrawal
- Agitation
- Tiredness due to lack of sleep
- Loss of fine motor skills



What is the behaviour communicating?

The Tree - Case Study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

Researcher's name and year level of study

The Shield of Shame

Blame
"It was his fault!"

Deny
"I never did anything!"

Minimise
"He wasn't really hurt"

Rage
"You always blame me for everything!!!"

SMART Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation

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

DEFIANT

WORDS MATTER

FORGETFUL OR DISORGANISED

DISRUPTIVE

CONTROLLING

SMART Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation

SMART Practice Adolescents

PART 3:

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

Australian Childhood Foundation

SMART Circle of PRACTICE

S M A R T Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation

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...

S M A R T Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation

Bottom Up

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

S M A R T Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation

Top Down

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

S M A R T Practice Adolescents

Intention

Bottom up
to regulate and restore safety

Top Down
to respond and strengthen relationships

S M A R T Practice Adolescents

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.

S M A R T Practice Adolescents

The 12 elements of the CIRCLE of PRACTICE

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

S M A R T Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation

Bottom up and top down responding

Increase cortical brain functioning

- Strengthen relationship
- Respond

Manage lower brain responses

- Create safety
- Self and co-regulation

S M A R T Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation

Top down to support regulation

Medial Prefrontal Cortex

The centre of self awareness and mindful, focused activity

Mindful, focused activities de-activates the **amygdala**

S M A R T Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation


SMART PRACTICE
Responses and Strategies

Activities and Discussions




SMART Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation



Reframing our view

“what’s wrong with you”

versus

“what has happened to you?”

SMART Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation


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

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

SMART Practice Adolescents

Australian Childhood Foundation

SMART PRACTICE - PREDICTABLE




Principle:

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

Outcomes:

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


SMART Practice Adolescents




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




SMART Practice Adolescents



Transitions – how do we ensure predictability in these transitions/changes?

<p>Micro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitioning between classrooms Transitioning between buildings, going past certain buildings Transitions within class time – one activity to another, individual work to group work Friendships/relationship changes Dealing with changing weather issues – hot, cold, wet Navigating free time (<i>free time is not always predictable – it can be a time of dysregulation</i>) 	<p>Macro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitioning from childhood to adolescence Transitioning from Year 6 – Year 7 Transitioning from Middle School Changing schools or campuses Friends from primary school not transitioning with them to high school Children in Care – changing carers/placements or changing schools/friends
---	--

SMART Practice Adolescents



Reflection - thinking about transitions....

- For individual educators or support staff - What kinds of transitions happen in the context of your subject lesson?
- As a whole school how many transitions would your students go through in any given day?
- How can we assist students who have experienced trauma to manage these?
- For leaders – how can the number of transitions be minimised?



SMART Practice Adolescents



Group Activity

Think about the demands of the school/ classroom environment and the capacities of the students to cope.

Where may there be differences?



Image source: © iStock 2022

SMART Practice Adolescents



I've got one lesson!

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?



SMART Practice Adolescents



PREDICTABLE responding – whole class and students

- Focus on creating an environment that is predictable and familiar
- Always prepare the student for what is coming up next
- Establish a supportive pattern of one to one communication with the student that explains the immediate and short term future
- Be particularly sensitive to transition experiences



S M A R T Practice Adolescents



PREDICTABLE responding – whole site and staff

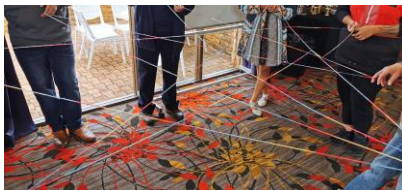
- Policies, procedures
- Routines
- Classroom environment
- Yard
- Excursions and incursions
- Evacuations and invacuations



S M A R T Practice Adolescents



Predictability & Repetition...



S M A R T Practice Adolescents



Key takeaway messages

- Develop connection and belonging – RELATIONSHIPS are key – acknowledge strengths
- Reintegrate experiences of shame (eye contact)
- Experience trust and respect
- Develop a sense of personal competence
- Be predictable
- Regulate to engage - be present, be connected, be authentic

SMART Practice Adolescents



SMART Practice Adolescents

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



Check out

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

- Strategy?
- Activity?
- New perspective?



SMART Practice Adolescents




Feedback



S M A R T Practice Adolescents 


Keep in touch with ACF and DfE


Caroly n Grace, Senior Consultant, ACF
cgrace@childhood.org.au
 Melissa Powney, Senior Consultant ACF
mpowney@childhood.org.au
 Karen Perry, Policy Officer, Child Protection and
 Trauma-informed practice, DfE
Education.SMART@sa.gov.au

S M A R T Practice Adolescents 

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 students)
- SMART PRACTICE –Day 2
- SMART Train the Trainer program – 2 days



S M A R T Practice Adolescents 

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/>

SMART Practice Adolescents



Reference List

- Australian Childhood Foundation (2010). *Making Space for Learning: Trauma informed practice in schools*
- Borwick, L. M., & Hughes, D. A. (2013). *Settling to learn: Settling troubled pupils to learn: Why relationships matter in school*. Worth Publishing.
- Golding, K., Toner, M., Womell, H., Cadman, A., & Roberts, J. (2016). *Observing Adolescents with Attachment Difficulties in Educational Settings: A Tool for Identifying and Supporting Emotional and Social Difficulties in Young People Aged 11-16*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Ogden, P., & Fisher, J. (2015). *Sensomotor psychotherapy: interventions for trauma and attachment* (Notion series on interpersonal neurobiology). WW Norton & Company.
- Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2008). *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Pury, B. (2020). *Regulate, Relate, Reason (Sequence of Engagement)*. Neurosequential Network Stress & Trauma Series. <https://www.youthspace.org.au/what-we-do/peel/>
- Porges, S. W. (2015). Making the World Safe for our Children: Downregulating Defence and Upregulating Social Engagement to Optimise the Human Experience. *Children Australia*, 49(2), 114-123.
- Siegel, D. (2014) *Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Scribner Publications Pty Ltd
- Siegel, D., & Bryson, (2012). *T: The whole-brain child framework*. Scribner Publications Pty Ltd
- Smiling Mind (2018). *The Mindfulness Curriculum for Educators - Manual for Educators*. Edition 1.0

SMART Practice Adolescents



www.childhood.org.au



Australian Childhood Foundation SMART Practice Adolescents
