

**Understanding and responding to trauma**

**Early Years Day 2**



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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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**Introductions**

- Name
- Role



*What are you passionate about in the work you are doing, with children who have experienced trauma?*

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### Outline of our day

MORNING

Part 1: 9.00am - 11.00am  
Morning Tea: 11.00am – 11.15am

MIDDLE

Part 2: 11.15am – 12.45pm  
Lunch Break: 12.45pm – 1.15pm

AFTERNOON

Part 3: 1.15pm – 3.15pm  
Wrap Up & Evaluations 3.15pm  
Finish: 3.30pm

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### Secure relationships

As we know a secure relationship is central to the development of:



- a positive sense of self
- empathic and sensitive interaction
- adaptive and flexible emotional regulation skills.

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"It's connection not control that cultivates cooperation, trust, love, resilience and independence. Connection is at the heart of our relationship."  
Kerry Spina



Positive Parenting Connection

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### Relational Environments



<https://www.burtonandson.com.au/relational-environments/>

Photo: @margaretmiller.com.au

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### How do you.....

- Build relationships?
- Be playful?
- Be empathic?
- Engage?
- Be curious?
- Be accepting?



Photo by Sarah Widdings on Unsplash

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### Play

“Play is naturally pleasurable and generally thought to be the organising activity that shapes the child’s physical, social, emotional, and cognitive perceptual view of the world”

(Gaskill & Perry, 2012, p.42)



Photo by Andrea on Unsplash

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### Play

The system of spontaneous, non-stereotypical, intrinsically pleasurable activities and orientations free from fear and anxiety.  
 It requires safety to engage.  
 If safety is threatened, play is instantly terminated.  
 If threat is prolonged, play is typically lost.

Joe Tucci - ACF CEO




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### Trauma and Play

How can we support children to heal from trauma?

- Promote physical activities
- Provide playful experiences
- Engage positively with peers
- Soothe children with trauma related reactions
- Handle stress
- Play therapy

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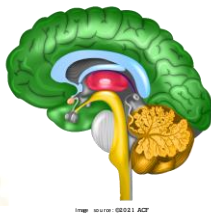
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### Brain development - review

- Cortex
- Limbic Lobe
  - ✓ Amygdala
  - ✓ Hippocampus
  - ✓ Diencephalon
- Cerebellum
- Brain Stem




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### How stress changes a child's brain

3 Year Old Children

Normal      Extreme Neglect

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### Detecting Safety with our Social Engagement System

- We feel safe together in this state.
- This is a calm behavioral state
- Often characterized by mirroring and reciprocation.
- Tell tale signs– people are orientated towards one another with engaged faces

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

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### Detecting Safety with our Social Engagement System

	<b>Mobilisation</b> 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	
	<b>Social Engagement</b>	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	
	<b>Immobilisation</b> Flow	I don't feel safe	I am numbed out I am retreating inside I am collapsed, small, and distant	I have cold extremities Glassy eyes, distant stare Slow movement Lethargic & passive body	

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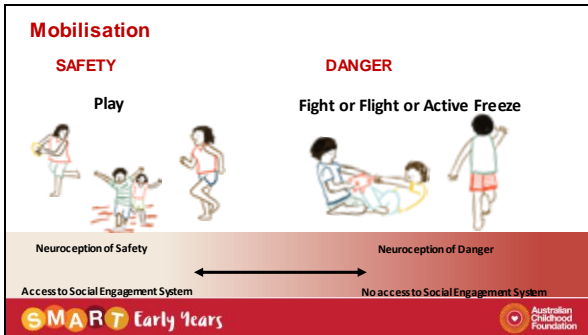
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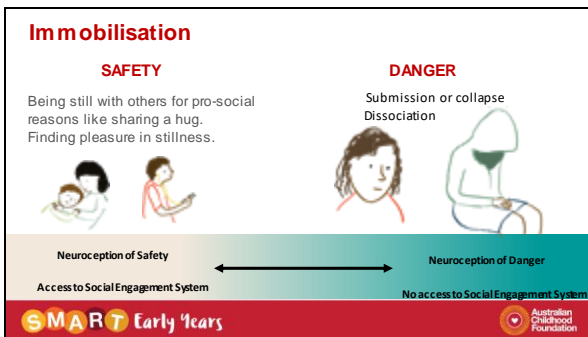
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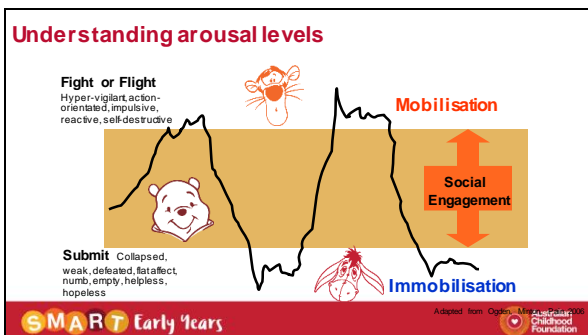
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### Strategies for arousal

- 1. Mobilisation**
  - Rhythm
  - Containing
  - Grounding
- 2. Immobilisation**
  - Orientation to space
  - Orientation to senses
  - Engaging the spine
- 3. Social Engagement**
  - Prosody
  - Breathing

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### Strategies for Social Engagement – staying within their Window of Tolerance

- Routine and predictability
- Breath based activities
- Grounding activities
- Movement & Regulation activities
- Use of self – Social Engagement



Image: iStock (642702)

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### Use of self - Social engagement: engaging muscles from heart to head

For children who have experienced relational trauma, social engagement through eye contact is perceived as threatening and may elicit defensive responses. Other facial muscles can be safely engaged - e.g. middle ear (Porges)

- prosody
- use story-telling voice/upper register pitch
- singing/music
- use breathing techniques to regulate heart beat

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### Social engagement

What does living in window of tolerance look like for each child?

What do you do to widen their window of tolerance?



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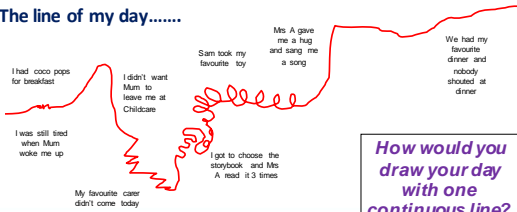
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### Making sense of experience

The line of my day.....



How would you draw your day with one continuous line?

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### Building safety and connection

- Children effected by trauma need stable, safe, consistent environments and relationships to help them to be calm and open to learning
- Responding to children from a relational perspective
- Safety = predictable and consistent routines, relationships and responses



Image source: GACF 2021

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### Routine and predictability: a metaphor for SAFETY

Children affected by trauma experience any change as a potential threat.

Consistent caregiving and continuity of care is vitally important to traumatised children.

**Protective and predictable relationships and routines provides attachment security.**

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### Building predictability

Predictability is achieved by:

- Reliable routines e.g. bedtime story/song
- Using visual cues to help children prepare for the day – sequencing...better to use photos of the actual child, than clipart
- Preparing children for what's coming next
- Talking to baby/child about your intentions
- Same caregiver/s every day



Image: GAZ2021

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### Creating Safety - Routine and Predictability

MORNING



MIDDLE



AFTERNOON



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### Building safety and connection

Managing transitions and change is extremely difficult for traumatised children

- ▶ transitions are experienced as a threat
- ▶ they feel a lose of their sense of safety
- ▶ they may revert to survival mode



Image source: GACF2021

How can you help children to feel safe during TRANSITIONS?

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### Transitions

List all the transitions you expect children to traverse in one ordinary day

- How many are essential?
- How can you provide safe passage for children through the transition?
  - ❖ Safe Person
  - ❖ Safe Activity
  - ❖ Safe Place



Image source: GACF2021

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### What might you change to ensure the following in your work with children:

- Predictability
- Consistency
- Safe transitions
- Engagement



Image source: GACF2021

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**Implications for our learning environments**



<http://www.earlychildhood.edu.au/2012/02/28/what-to-look-for-in-a-classroom-to-see>

Serbiaume Children's Centre Crepton

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**Implications for our learning environments**



Only About Children Highgate

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**Implications for our learning environments**



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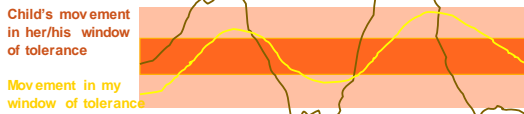
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**Interpersonal attunement**

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



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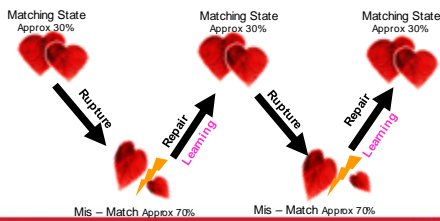
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**Attunement, misattunement & repair (Ed Tronic)**  
 'good enough' parenting



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**How do we.....**



Image source: <https://unsplash.com>

- Build relationships with children and learn their stories?
- How do we ensure there is relational repair after a conflict/rupture in our relationships with children?

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### Engagement with safety

- understand & respect the child's need for distance in relationship
- increase your tolerance for 'stuckness' and 'crisis'
- practise mindfulness
- use phrases like: 'I noticed that...'; 'Isn't that interesting!'
- practise self-care and seek support
- practise calming techniques

(Janina Fisher)



Image source: ©2021 ACF

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### Understanding behaviour

- What is the behaviour telling me?
- How does this behaviour serve to protect the child/young person and help him/her survive?
- What is the impact on me?



Image source: ©ACF2021

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### Behaviour Iceberg



Illustration: ChildhoodFoundation.org.au

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### Trauma- based behaviour and you...

- Don't take the child's behaviour personally
- Don't take the parent's behaviour personally
- Be aware of what presses your own buttons
- Get comfortable with discomfort!



Image source: ©2021 ACF

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### Reflecting on our practice - SMART PRACTICE




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#### SMART PRACTICE - Site Audit Tool

This is a summary of what to be looked for in the SMART PRACTICE framework across your site. The tool can also be used as a tool for understanding progress in a particular area and for identifying areas for improvement. It is not intended to be used as a checklist or a scorecard. The tool is a summary of what to be looked for in the SMART PRACTICE framework.

SMART PRACTICE	Whole site	Staff team	Group / Room	Small group	Individual child
P PREDICTABLE					
R RESPONSIVE					
A ATTUNED					
C CONNECTING					
T TRANSLATING					
I INVOLVING					
C CALMING					
E ENGAGING					

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# SMART Early Years

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



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## Check out

What are you taking back to your classroom or centre tomorrow?

- Strategy?
- Activity?
- New perspective?



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## Feedback



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### Keep in touch with ACF and DfE

Parenting and Early Years Team, ACF

- [parenting@childhood.org.au](mailto:parenting@childhood.org.au)

Karen Perry, Policy Officer, Child Protection and Trauma-informed practice, DfE

- [Education.SMART@sa.gov.au](mailto:Education.SMART@sa.gov.au)




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### 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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### 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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