



Trauma Transformative Practice with Families

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Catholic Care and Anglicare
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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. We recognise and accept it is the oldest continuous living culture in the world and that their sovereignty has never been ceded.



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International Childhood Trauma Conference 2025

17 - 22 August, 2025
Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre



Join the over 12,000 past delegates who have attended previous iterations of the Conference, and develop your knowledge and practice in 2025. Scan the QR code or visit our website to find out more: childtraumaincference.org

We look forward to seeing you in Melbourne in 2025.



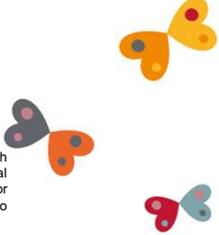
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Our Purpose 

Love has the power to prevent and heal abuse.

At Australian Childhood Foundation love is an action, a daily effort to build positive relationships that keep children safe and help them heal.

We provide counselling to children and carers. We teach adults to understand how they can help children to heal from the trauma of abuse and violence. We stand up for children, and young people's rights to safety. We act to ensure every child gets the love they need.



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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 

- Understand the importance of relationships in the form of families and communities that surround and support children
- Review an understanding of the impacts of trauma on children and their relationships within families
- Be supported to develop a trauma transformative approach and contextualise practice strategies for children and families, and the systems that support them
- Consider a key practice approach, the *Realising Deep Safety Model*, as a way that healing and the restoration of safety is explored within families. This sequenced intervention model aims to nurture and embed resonant experiences and resources of connection within systems of children, their families and communities



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ACF Knowledge Areas 



- ❖ Including and honouring Cultural knowledge
- ❖ Embedding evidence-informed approaches, from neuroscience and current research
- ❖ Valuing and incorporating victim/survivors lived, and living, experience
- ❖ Incorporating and amplifying the practice wisdom of practitioners

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Introducing Trauma Transformative Practice 

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Trauma Transformative Practice 

"An inclusive set of co-ordinating constructs that aim to transform the ways that practitioners, organisations and systems function collectively with therapeutic intent to address the complex and reverberating effects of trauma so that it becomes less influential in the lives of victims and survivors of interpersonal violence which will reduce the pain and suffering they experience over time."

(Mitchell and Tucci, 2024)

Transformative = purpose and intent

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Trauma Transformative Practice 

Trauma transformative practice is a move away from the trauma-informed paradigm.

Trauma transformative practice:

- embraces new ways of knowing and doing
- embraces complexity and multiple perspectives
- focuses on the ability of practitioners, organizations, and systems to drive meaningful change



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Trauma Transformative Practice 

Trauma transformative practice is deeply committed to **decolonising and anti-oppressive practice**. It addresses the biases and ongoing forms of discrimination which can lead to the systematic violation of individuals based on group, or cohort characteristics, related to social constructions of gender, age, ability, socio- economic status, geography and culture.



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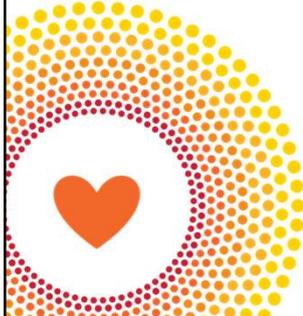
Trauma Transformative Practice 

Trauma transformative practices commits to **Decolonising and anti-oppressive** ways of working

- Promotes First Nations Peoples' ways of knowing, doing and healing
- Engages practices such deep listening or "dadirri" and promotes "truth telling"
- Acknowledges the past, and current, societal and systemic abuses
- Challenges the ongoing effects of colonisation and oppression through practices which are led and determined by First Nations Peoples



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Neurobiology, and families

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Interpersonal Neurobiology

The neurobiology of relationships helps us understand how children live and develop within families.

- Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB), developed by Dr Daniel Siegel, highlights how human connections shape brain structure and function throughout life
- Families are interpersonal neurobiological systems where brains and nervous systems constantly influence one another.



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Interpersonal Neurobiology

"Human connection is a biological imperative."
(Porges, 2022)

- From a Polyvagal perspective, Dr Stephen Porges suggests that a family isn't just a collection of individuals—it's a living, breathing nervous system that can either foster safety and connection or reinforce stress and dysregulation
- The Polyvagal Theory offers a powerful perspective on the family as a neurobiological system. Emphasising how the nervous system is constantly shaped by social connections, particularly within close relationships like family



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Family as a Neurobiological System 

"As social organs of adaption, our brains are shaped and reshaped by the nature and quality of our relationships."
 Louis Cozolino (2024)

- Humans have evolved to form families as "super-organisms"
- Connection equals survival
- Early interactions shape our:
 1. Understanding of safety/danger
 2. Ability to connect with others
 3. Arousal regulation
 4. Future expectations



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Family as a Neurobiological System 

Families don't just connect socially—they shape each other's brains through emotions, behaviours, and shared experiences.

Families: Interconnected Neurobiological Networks

A family is more than just a social unit; it is a dynamic, neurobiological network where emotions, behaviours, and even physiological states are deeply interwoven. Through consistent, loving interactions, family members shape each other's brains in profound and lasting ways



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"... When we interact, we are impacting each other's internal biological state and influencing the long-term construction of each other's brains. This, in essence, is how love becomes flesh..."

Louis Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships* (2013)



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Reflection 

What is a family?
What does 'family' mean to you?

 Create a word cloud



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Word cloud 



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Family as a constellation 



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ACTIVITY

Please draw the constellation of a family that you are currently working with or supporting.

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Families come in all shapes and sizes



- A family can be a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption who live together
- Family consists of the people who are supportive, safe and trusting
- Diversity in family systems, rainbow families
- A community of people and the relationships around them
- The various relationships within family systems - siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, family friends, community members
- Embraces the richness of diverse cultural backgrounds
- Care environments - Kinship care, out of home care, foster care, residential care
- Families are as varied as the people in them



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Trauma and Families

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Trauma 

- Neurobiology informs us of how the brain and body responds to trauma and help us to understand the various ways that victim-survivors adapt
- Trauma is an experience of a violation of relational safety at multiple levels, the external world and internal physiology
- Trauma is an embodied experience, touching all the neural pathways within our bodies
- Trauma creates a rupture in the process of neural integration of ongoing experience



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Impact of trauma on children 

- Interpersonal violence and abuse deeply violates a child's sense of safety and trust
- Trauma from adults causes pain, fear, hurt and isolation without the regulatory resources for children require to feel safe
- Ongoing violence keeps children in a constant state of alert
- Children may feel unsafe both at home and within themselves
- They may give up on safety and their social engagement systems are not accessible
- A child's narrative may become filled with fear, mistrust, rejection, isolation and shame



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Trauma within families 

- Trauma within families refers to deeply distressing or disturbing experiences that disrupt the emotional, psychological, and relational balance of the family. This may include physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, including family violence and neglect
- Trauma is not just an individual experience but a systemic one that affects all family members, often altering how they connect, communicate, and regulate their emotions
- Trauma can occur in communities where families live due to discrimination based on race, gender, disability, or sexual orientation; or where there is economic hardship, poverty; or cultural dislocation such as forced assimilation, colonisation, or displacement of communities

All of the above disrupts relational safety at multiple levels



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Impact of trauma on families 

Shared experiences faced by families affected by trauma:

- Shame
- Grief
- Heightened anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, guilt
- Disconnection
- Impacts attachment
- Secrecy and stigma
- Communication problems, withdrawal, and increased conflict
- Adaptive ways to survive
- Intergenerational trauma



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Intergenerational trauma 

Intergenerational trauma is the psychological and physiological effects of traumatic experiences that are passed down from one generation to the next within families or cultural groups.

It occurs when the original traumatic experience is transferred from parents to children, and then to subsequent generations...

This type of trauma can result from:

- Large-scale historical events such as war, genocide, slavery, or colonization
- Personal experiences like child abuse, domestic violence, or severe neglect
- Collective experiences affecting specific cultural, racial, or ethnic groups



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Intergenerational trauma 

What does intergenerational trauma look like for the children and families you work with?

Please turn and talk
Then share together



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What trauma does to families



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Activity

- draw a child/yp you work with who has experienced trauma, can be from within the family system you drew earlier
- draw the child/yp with your non-dominant hand
- write some words to describe the child – strengths and challenges



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Setting up for successful therapeutic work -

- Resourcing
- Scaffolding
- Safety planning
- **Safety is paramount!**
- Relationship building – unconditional positive regard, respect, empathy, curiosity, acceptance
- Family and child assessments – risk, therapeutic needs identified, family context, history, culture, presenting issues
- Child and family voice
- Minimising re-traumatisation for families
- Understanding ourselves as practitioners

What else can you think of that relates to your practice?



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The Application of Trauma Transformative Practice with Families

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Trauma Transformative Practice

"Trauma-transformative practice is based on 12 core dimensions that, while described discreetly, inherently integrate with each other to best support victims and survivors to meet their needs and achieve the ambitions they hold for their life and their relationships."

Mitchell and Tucci (2024)

Trauma transformative practice with families is an approach to support the creation of sustaining, safe, loving and connected relationships



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Trauma Transformative Practice

These are the core dimensions considered important when working with families:

- Trauma and healing resourced
- Relationally integrative
- Safety dedicated
- Compassion oriented
- Meaning focused
- Hope inspiring



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Trauma and healing resourced



The Trauma and Healing Resourced describes a deep understanding of the impacts of trauma on the brain, body, mind, spirit and relationships of children, young people, families and communities. This then informs a theory of change that includes:

- the potential for all relationships to hold therapeutic intent
- body-based somatic interventions
- sequenced and phased approaches that create safety, process experiences over time, support narrative meaning making and rebuild the relational capability
- embracing traditional cultural practices
- integration of lived, and living, experience wisdom



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Trauma and healing resourced



Therapeutic intent supports:

- Building trust, relational safety and acceptance
- Shared meaning making experiences
- Understanding that the challenging behaviors result from specific vulnerabilities and needs
- Focuses on and amplifies the families' strengths and talents
- Uses consistent and positive reinforcement
- Meets the child where they are at, developmentally rather than chronologically



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Trauma resourced and healing – a body-based intervention

Activity to use with children and their caregivers




Body feelings are visitors, that come and go. Some body feelings are more welcome than others. They can highlight when things are important, and when we should pay attention.

The way we experience body feelings is different for everyone and that is okay.

It can help to share about how body feelings visit our insides through art or words or music or movement.

Learning more about body feelings can help us know more about ourselves and our amazing changing bodies that never stay the same for too long.



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Relationally integrative 

- It is the aim and intention that all interactions with children and families who have experienced trauma are relationally integrative
- The power of relationships to support healing is essential to trauma transformative practice
- When relationships are resourced and purposeful and have therapeutic intent then children and young people can begin to feel relational safety
- Family members can learn to tolerate the activation in their physiology so they can be supported back into safe zones of proximity and relational connectedness



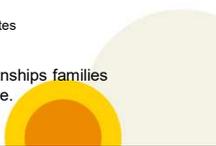
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Relationally integrative 

Families need relationships:

- that support, encourage, process, anchor, soothe and meet the needs of children
- that are purposeful and are resourced to realise therapeutic intent
- to act as agents of change and healing
- that influence and reshape their inner neurosomatic states

Through safe and intentionally organised relationships families can become more open and flexible.



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"Relationships that heal are trustworthy and enduring. They offer predictability. They stabilise. They regulate. They help to create new memories of care and trust." Joe Tucci (2024)



"Relational healing for relational injury." Courtois and Ford (2024)

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HEART BUTTONS

Feeling connected when we are apart

Being in kinder, or school, or wherever means can be hard.
 What if we drew a little heart on the back of each other's hand?
 I will draw you a heart and then draw a line onto it to send in my hand.
 You can draw a little heart or spot on the back of my hand
 and draw a line onto it to send to give mine.
 These are our heart buttons, and they are connected by love.
 No matter where we are, all we have to do is press our
 heart buttons if we miss one another and we will be connected.
 When I press my button, I will think of a fun time
 we had together and send you some love.
 You can do the same.

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Application idea for relationally integrative

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Reflection 



What does safety look like in your practice?
 Discuss in small groups

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Safety dedicated 

"... to be safe, and to feel safe."

- 'Felt safety' is signalled in deep somatic states where the intent of the cues offered to children need to be coherent with the offering of safety
- Safety is negotiated by gestures of attunement and accompaniment between children, young people, families and communities, and the people who support with them
- Safety is negotiated in micro-exchanges between children and the safe adults in their worlds



Work in this area is informed by many theorists including Porges, Badenoch, Hughes, Tronick, Ogden, Malchiodi

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Safety dedicated 

"Connectedness is a biological imperative."

- Relational safety can be displayed and shared with through a regulated physiological states
- It creates the conditions in which the experience of being human is given the time and potency to flourish
- It is integrated into narratives of meaning that offer predictability, security and stability
- It is connected with experiences of strength, love and nurture
- Safety is an experience of connection, found in voices and gestures



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Safety dedicated 

Neuroception describes how humans can distinguish between and interpret safety and danger in people and the environment

Deep relational safety is how children who have been hurt come to find the comfort and love they need to recover.

"Convincing the body it can be safe in the presence of another."

Safety is experienced physiologically, and is a deep visceral experience felt in our bodies

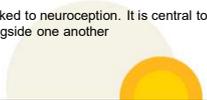


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Safety dedicated 

Polyvagal theory and families

- We want to support families to move towards connection and trust – and away from fear, mistrust and betrayal
- The nervous system adapts - often in unhealthy ways - to protect against emotional pain or discomfort
- Our nervous system is constantly scanning the environment for cues of **safety or danger** through a process called **neuroception**
- Co-regulation is closely linked to neuroception. It is central to connection and allows us to empathise and feel alongside one another



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Safety dedicated

Co-regulation is relational regulation with an offer of safety.

It involves:

- A collaborative process that involves attunement, empathy, and active listening. By working together to regulate emotions and behaviours, individuals can build stronger connections and promote overall well-being
- Growth and development: children can gradually take on more responsibility for their own regulation, with the support of caregivers and other adults
- Involves a physiological connection that involves the sharing of oxytocin and the soothing of the stress hormone cortisol



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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.

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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I am showing you....	On the inside....	I need you to....
<p>Social engagement</p> <p>Feeling safe, staying in relationship, connection oriented</p> <p>You might say I am:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making eye contact • Listening • Engaging in play and exploration 	<p>I am feeling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe, Calm, Happy, Sad, Annoyed, Reflective, Playful, Curious <p>My body says:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach others • Sit still • Breathe deeply 	<p>Help me to stay engaged</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play and have fun with me • Role model positive relationships • Set boundaries and natural consequences • Use reflective and problem solving skills so I can learn from too • Notice and acknowledge my strengths and my skills
<p>Mobilisation</p> <p>Fight, flight, active freeze, action oriented</p> <p>You might say I am:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggressive • Loud • Fighting • Running away • Hyperactive 	<p>I am feeling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious, Frightened, Lonely, Hurt, Confused, Overwhelmed <p>My body says:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run away • I'm hot • I can't sit still • I need to move 	<p>Help me to down regulate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep me safe • Co-regulate - be safe, attuned and responsive to me • Use movement - big then smaller, jumping, hanging, swinging, climbing, star jumps • Create a safe space near you where I can retreat to until I calm down • Model deep breathing • Repair our relationship - "we are ok and our relationship is strong"
<p>Immobilisation</p> <p>Withdrawal, collapse, submission, dissociation, avoidant oriented</p> <p>You might say I am:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawn • Avoiding contact • Distant • Compliant • Hiding 	<p>I am feeling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disconnected, Unfocused, Flat, Withdrawn, I'm disappearing <p>My body says:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid others • I'm not in my body • I want to hide • Curl up in a ball 	<p>Help me to up regulate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-regulate - be safe, attuned and responsive to me • Tell me I am safe and demonstrate it with your actions, gestures and tone of voice • Help me to connect to the room we are in by looking for specific things like something green, something on the wall or something on the floor • Help me to feel my body by noticing different parts, such as my feet on the floor and my bottom on the chair • Repair our relationship - "we are ok and our relationship is strong"

Grounded in the work of Dr Dan Siegel, Dr Stephen Porges and Dr Bruce Perry

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Safety dedicated 

Connection, rupture and repair

"We came to recognize that repair is the crux of human interactions. Repair leads to a feeling of pleasure, trust, and security, the implicit knowledge that I can overcome problems. Furthermore, repair teaches a critical life lesson: The negative feeling that arises from a mismatch can be changed into a positive feeling when two people subsequently achieve a match. One does not have to get stuck in a negative feeling state."

(Tromack and Gask, 2020)

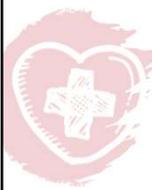
Questions we may pose to families include:

- How do you repair in your family?
- How do you say sorry in your family?



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Rupture and repair



- Develop a felt sense of safety for the children, and adults
- 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
- Recognize childrens strengths and reflect this back to them



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Compassion oriented 

Compassion is an essential quality:

- for responding to the pain and suffering
- compassion drivers sit within our neurobiology
- as it dampens internal neurosomatic cues of threat; and it creates safety within relationships
- it introduces a less clinical frame of reference that acknowledges the therapeutic intent of all relationships; and that tenderness and understanding are important qualities of practice and organisational culture

"Compassion is the antidote to danger, fear and mistrust."



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Compassion oriented 

"It is through compassionate responses that trust is negotiated. Compassion moves into spaces that threat leaves behind when it is no longer needed. First it is compassion for the other, followed closely by compassion for self."
(Tucci, Mitchell, Tronick and Porges, 2024)

- Compassion turns off old patterns of self protection
- Compassion in families leads to growth, recovery and healing



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 **Application for Compassion Oriented** 

Acts of Kindness and Care

Create a kindness jar where family members write down acts of kindness and care they've shown each other, or received. Celebrate those moments together to foster a family culture of love, appreciation and compassion

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Meaning focused 

Meaning focused is the process of meaning making within relationships

- Meaning making takes place at deep neurosomatic levels and shapes the brain and body's behavioural patterns, activation preferences, thresholds and arousal states within families
- Trauma-based behaviour is understood as an expression of adaptation. It attempts to hold both the possible impact of the behaviour with the positive adaptation that victims and survivors were forced to use to create the conditions conducive to their protection
- Meaning making also occurs at the level of families and communities as a dynamic and continuous process of making sense of relationships, truths, and experience.



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Meaning focused 

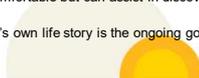
Parent self narrative

"By offering the opportunity to deepen self understanding, to make sense of one's own life, our hope is that parents could make the choice to enhance the security of attachment of their children while at the same time creating coherence and vitality in their own lives."
(Siegel 2006)

By providing assistance to make sense of a parent's life through a supportive, empathic emotional relationship that encourages authenticity, nurturing and direct communication

Accessing internal recollections that can enable a parent to become part of a larger narrative of their life. This is not always comfortable but can assist in discovering new possibilities.

"Becoming the author of one's own life story is the ongoing goal of the making-sense process."
(Siegel 2006)



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Meaning focused 

Coherent life story:

"A coherent life story is one in which the adult has made sense of his or her own childhood experience and has insights into how that past has influenced his development as an adult and as a parent."
(Dr Daniel Siegel, 2006)

- How a parent has come to make sense of their early life experiences, is the most robust predictor of how their children will become attached to them; and children's social and emotional wellbeing



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Meaning making 

Meaning making - connecting parent/carer and child narrative considers:

- Parent/carer's narrative
- Relationship and connection with the child
- Parent/carer interaction and communication



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Meaning making



Parent/carer's narrative

Consider an issue from your life which may be impairing your ability to connect with your child. Focus on the past, present and future aspects of this.

- Focus on emotions and body sensations which emerge
- How is this issue influencing the connection with your child?
- Imagine resolving a leftover issue. Write a story about this. How will this promote the connection with your child?
- Consider your view of a "good parent". What qualities were apparent to you in your parents, which you feel now able to provide to your child?
- Consider the possibility of changing the patterns of the past. How might you do this, what would your child say?

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Meaning making



Relationship and connection with child

- Think of three words which describe your relationship with your child. Do these words reflect your childhood in some way?
- What capacity do you have to shape the future relationship with your child?
- As your child grows how do you support their exploration of the world? How do you recall your experience of this?
- What is your experience of connection and joining? How does your sense of this with your child evolve?

If you had three wishes for your child 20 years from now what would they be?



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Meaning making



Parent/carer and child interaction and communication

- Observe and reflect upon patterns of interaction with your child which trigger emotional memories. Do some result in feelings of fear or anger?
- Consider a time when you and your child had a different reaction to the same experience. How was it different, consider your child's point of view
- How do you respond when your child wants to be close to you, or when they need comforting?
- Can you identify the triggers that take you to "the edge" with your child. Is there a theme that underlies these?
- When communicating with your child are the verbal and nonverbal aspects congruent. Is this surprising?

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Reflection



Consider some of these Meaning Making questions – identify some that would be helpful to use with the parents you work with

Please share



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Meaning focused



Building strength and belonging in families through stories

- Develop Family Traditions and Rituals
- Story Telling
- Family/Child Story Book
- Explore with families their history or ancestry
- Cultural traditions

What's our family story?

How do we want to create our family narrative?



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FAMILY SUITCASES




How Families Carry around Love and Care

Do you know that every family has a special suitcase for their most precious things? This is a suitcase that can never be left behind because everyone carries it with them. **Every family's suitcase is unique.**

Here are some of the things that could be in the suitcase:

- Memories of times the family shared love
- The stories behind how family members got their names
- Recipes of favourite places the family has been
- A letter that has been saved
- Special family tags
- Favourite family recipes
- Family stories about family members
- Songs that family members played over and over
- Snapshots of family celebrations
- Conversations with family members that helped people to feel cared about

Everyone keeps adding to their family suitcase across their lives. People can dip into their suitcase in a quiet moment and take out things to have a look. Sometimes it can feel joyful to think about things in the suitcase, other times it can feel a bit sad or hard.

The things we keep in our family suitcases are always meaningful and important.

I wonder what things you have in yours?



This resource was developed as part of the research of the Australian Childhood Foundation's Family Suitcase Project. It is intended to be used as a guide and not a template. All rights reserved. © Australian Childhood Foundation 2020.

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Hope inspiring 

- Hope is a form of knowledge that results from the integration of neuroscience, practice wisdom and embodied experience
- Hope is a resource for healing
- Strength-based approaches we can support development of a hope-based narrative a family can access
- We can hold hope for families until they can hold hope for themselves
- Trauma transformative practice privileges hope over despair



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Hope inspiring 

"Hope is a resource for healing. It evolves in the moment-by-moment exchanges between victims and survivors and those who seek to support them... It is the continuity of a promise that the impact of trauma will end."

Mitchell and Tucci (2024)



How do you hold on to hope in the complex work you do with families?

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Hope inspiring 

Embracing hope by encouraging families to play

"Play is an experience rich bottom-up process that provides what is needed for trauma to be integrated, paving the way for widespread neural integration." (Kestly, 2024)

- Play promotes presence, trust and deeper connections
- Children take delight in parents/carers playing with them
- Play is a rich resource for children and adults. It is restorative and reparative.
- Play coaxes the physiology of the brain body system to reorganise itself away from states of self-protection towards states of creativity, appreciation and connectedness.
- In these states families become more open to possibility, growth and hope



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Systems around families

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Collaborative and participatory driven

- Collaboration across all areas is fundamental to trauma transformative practice with families - between practitioners, organisations, systems and victim/survivors
- It requires a multi-dimensional and multi-systemic response
- Ensures that families are responded to holistically; their needs are understood and there is congruent planning to meet these needs
- Deconstructing power and expert knowledge to develop ways of meaning making that are inclusive of all knowledge holders and key stakeholders



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Collaborative and participatory driven

"There is power in joint purpose, relationally driven forms of knowledge sharing and experiences of collective solidarity."

(Tucci and Mitchell, 2024)



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A graphic for the 'Realising Deep Safety Model' featuring a central orange heart surrounded by concentric circles of dots in shades of orange and yellow, resembling a sun or a ripple effect. The Australian Childhood Foundation logo is in the top right corner.

Realising Deep Safety Model

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The Realising Deep Safety Model



- We have developed a framework that aims to embed resonant experiences and resources of safety within the relationships between children and their parents and carers
- Deep safety is a conceptual cornerstone in therapeutic work with children
- It is for children, the experience of profound physiological and relational harmony
- It is a sequenced therapeutic process, that connects relationships, physiology, metaphors and play

"Its aim is to merge the relational systems of children and their carers to support and nurture safety as an embodied relational resource."

Weller, Tucci, Mitchell (2018)

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Realising Deep Safety

Retrieving the Lived Experience of Safety for Adults

- The goal is for parents and carers to be able to orient to, and recognize their own experiences of physiological and relational safety, so as to enable them to be able to offer safety to their child
- Carers will have also experienced mobilization and immobilization in response to threat
- They will have had experiences of safety and fear that have been present in shaping their physiology
- Their experiences of relational safety that have provided relief comfort and restoration are important resources in this process



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Realising Deep Safety 

Retrieving the Lived Experience of Safety for Adults

- In knowing these they are able to integrate safety as a resource into the relationship with their child
- We ask questions which promote reflective engagement in a carers lived experience of safety
- We provide regulatory parallels between therapist and carer and those that are and can be embedded in the carer child relationship

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Realising Deep Safety 

Questions

- When you were younger, how and who made you feel safe and protected. What did they do, and what was it about them that enabled this?
- What does feeling comforted feel like for you. What have been some experiences that have enabled this in the face of fear for you?
- How does someone find their way to your heart? Describe this journey. What does it feel like in your body when they arrive?
- Whose voice do you hear when you need to feel safe, calm and protected?
- When you think about your child, what is it that you feel and hold that makes you want to protect her?

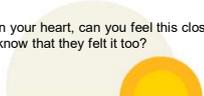


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Realising Deep Safety 

Questions

- If you knew that feeling safe was difficult for your child, how would you share your embedded experiences of safety with her?
- Consider a time when you were able to share this feeling with her in a way that you knew she felt it deeply. How did you know she shared it and what was it like to share this feeling in such an intense way?
- Are there moments that you feel really close to your child. What do you look for. How does she show you?
- When you put your hand on your heart, can you feel this closeness. How would you share this feeling with them and know that they felt it too?



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Realising Deep Safety 

Tempting Safety back into the experiences of Traumatised Children

- The offer of relational safety is the most tender of invitations for a child
- The goal of this phase is for the carer to attune to the internal state of their child, and provide support and harmony between their internal state and the child's
- It starts gently with the carer attending to how the child perceives, feelings in their bodies
- These internal states are softly validated by carers using their social engagement system
- Their voice, gaze, breathing tempts a child's physiology back to safety



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Realising Deep Safety 

Tempting Safety Back into the Experiences of Traumatized Children

- The relational space becomes one of shared intention, togetherness, anticipation and safety
- Attuned regulated states are rehearsed and practiced to become embedded resources
- A child learns to tolerate activation states as they are coaxed back into a safe zone of relational proximity and connection
- A child comes to trust safety in relationships and can begin to use their own social engagement system within relational interactions



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Realising Deep Safety 

Questions

- How does your child communicate internal states related to an experience of threat or safety. What does she show you in her eyes, breathing, voice, words?
- What do you know about your child that signals feelings of anger or distress. Are there triggers or patterns to this?
- How does your child express withdrawal from social connection or sharing of closeness?
- What does your child need from you at times of anger or distress?
- How can you respond to these needs to support her to feel calm and soothed?



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Realising Deep Safety 

Merging Safety Deep into the Relational World of Adults and Children

- The aim of this phase is an explicit exploration of safety within merged relational experiences of the child and carer
- Experiences of shared safety are further explored and embedded through joint enactments of reciprocity. Playful fun exchanges are included that promote intentional matched behavioural patterns
- A collective meaning around how safety is experienced, is developed and practiced through turn taking, mutual recognition and cognitive reflections
- It sets up a "neural expectancy" in the relationship and an embedded narrative and collection of shared experiences of safety that can be resources at times of relational disruption

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Realising Deep Safety 

Activities – Joint Experiences of Play

- You and me on a treasure hunt
- Sandy togetherness
- Feel the music
- Squiggle and giggle
- Joining up the stars in the sky



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Application idea for Realising Deep Safety 

JOINING UP THE STARS

Would you like to go on an adventure into the night sky?
 We can do that together along tonight.
 Let's make the room feel like night time.
 There is your torch to make starlight, and here is mine.
 We can be next to each other and share our torches up
 into the ceiling of our room sky.
 Twinkle twinkle little star
 How I wonder what you are
 Can you make your star twinkle by pointing your torch
 at the ceiling and switching it on and off?
 I will try to match your star's twinkling by switching my
 torch on and off.
 Can you make a shooting star? I will try to follow your
 star with my starlight.
 Can you make your starlight dance around the room?
 Can our stars dance together?
 Can you make your starlight move fast and slow?
 My light will try to stay with yours.
 Up above the world so high
 Like a diamond in the sky
 Twinkle, twinkle little star

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Reflection



Think about the family you drew as a constellation at the start of the training...

What aspects of Trauma Transformative Practice might support their healing journey?

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Trauma Transformative Practice

- 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**/strengths based
- Understanding trauma in the context of **child development**
- Worker wellbeing and **collective care**



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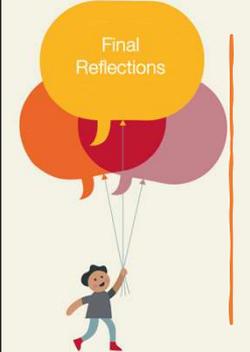


Trauma Transformative Practice with Families

- Trauma transformative practice with families embraces complexity, focuses on collaboration and is healing and trauma resourced
- Trauma transformative practice upholds and honours the wisdom of First Nations people and people with lived and living experience; and acknowledges the power differentials
- Trauma transformative practice upholds hope over despair that families can heal
- The Realising Deep Safety model is at its core transformative practice – it is deeply rooted in developing trust, safety and compassion in families
- Realising Deep Safety supports parents and carers to deeply understand themselves and their children through attunement, connection and meaning making

“Realising deep safety for children is both the intervention and the aim of the work we do with families.”

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Final Reflections

Something that was new to you

Something you could use in your practice

Something that surprised you



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My Family Constellation

What if you were to use a star constellation to represent your family rather than a family tree. A constellation is a group of stars that form a particular shape or pattern in the sky. What if you were to think about each of those in your family as part of a collection of stars - a family constellation.

You can choose from the stars below, use star stickers or draw and cut out your own stars; one for each member of your family. Then you might like to stick them onto a piece of black paper. As you do this, think about how your constellation is arranged - every star constellation is different - just like how families are different. What is the pattern of your family constellation? Using a white or gold or silver thread you could connect your family of stars together somehow. You could draw things on your stars or add names or words within or beside each star.

Alternatively, you could draw or write on each star then hang them up with different lengths of coloured or textured string/fabric and hang them from a circle of wire like a mobile.




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**Thank you for learning together today,
and your ongoing commitment to
supporting children!**

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