



Supporting Children and Young People to Heal from Family Violence

Salvation Army
Thursday 9th of September 2025
Presenter – Sharon Duthie



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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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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



- Define family violence and increase knowledge of family violence abuse related trauma, and its impacts on children and young people's functioning
- Explore a framework for trauma responsive practice when working with children and families affected by family violence – the Safe and Secure Framework
- Examine the impacts of trauma on the brain, body, emotions and behaviours of children and young people
- Explore safety and neuroception of safety through a polyvagal lens
- Consider the application of a trauma responsive model of practice that can support recovery in children and young people

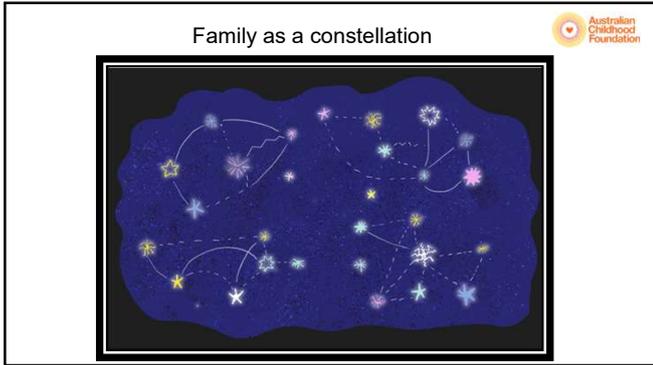
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ACF Knowledge Areas

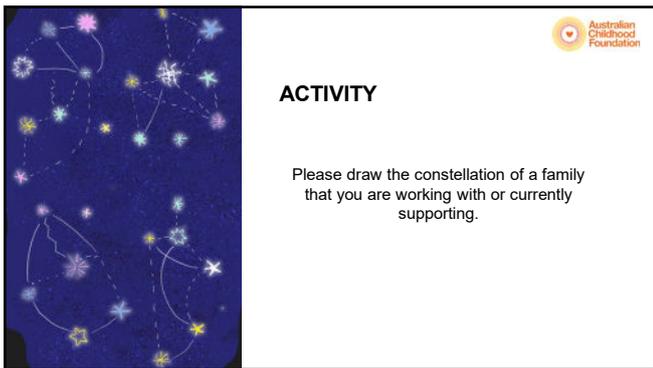



- ❖ Embedding evidence-informed approaches, from neuroscience and current research
- ❖ Valuing and incorporating victim/survivors lived, and living, experience
- ❖ Including and honouring Cultural knowledge
- ❖ Incorporating and amplifying the practice wisdom of practitioners

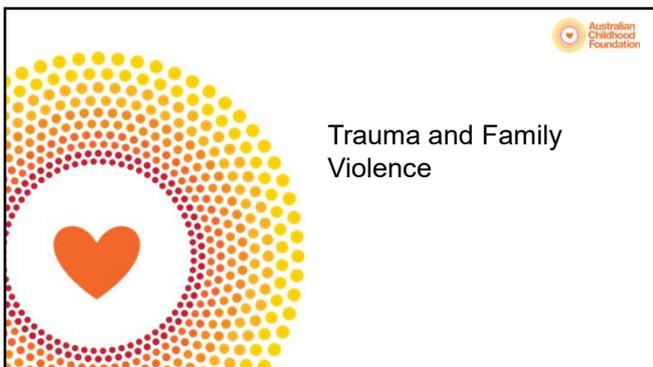
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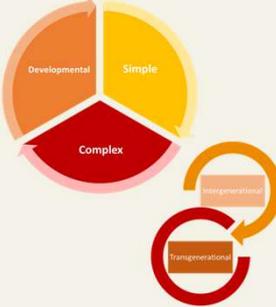
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Trauma is...

Any single, ongoing or cumulative experience which:

- is a response to a **perceived threat**, usually to survival
- **overwhelms** our capacity to cope
- feels/is **outside our control**
- often evokes a **physiological** and **psychological** set of responses based on fear or avoidance



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Neurobiology of Trauma

- Neurobiology informs us of how the brain and body responds to trauma and help us to understand the various ways that victim-survivors, especially children, react
- 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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Warm up discussion

"How do you define or understand family violence, and what personal beliefs, experiences, or cultural perspectives influence that understanding?"

Please discuss in pairs, then share together if comfortable



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What is family violence? 

- Family violence is any violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past family, and intimate, relationships
- The behaviours may include verbally, emotionally, physically, psychologically, financially, or sexually abusive
- Family violence includes spiritual, religious and cultural abuse
- Coercive control is a pattern of abusive behaviours and tactics used by the person using violence to gain power and control over a victim-survivor, including stalking, monitoring and manipulation

(Family Safety Victoria, Victorian Government website)



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Children who experience family violence... 

"... Are forced to live with the disorganised internal systems of the adults around them... Their invitation to engage is met with indifference or neglected altogether in favour of the adults fulfilling their own needs as a priority. The contingency of the interactions with their carers that children's neurobiological systems crave is absent at the best or deliberately and cruelly misattuned."



Tucci, Mitchell, Porges and Tronick (2024)

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Coercive control 

- Coercive control is a pattern of behaviour 'known to involve a range of tactics intended to intimidate, humiliate, degrade, exploit, isolate and control' (Katz, 2016)
- It involves 'repetitive tactics of abuse that include exploitation, isolation, and the micro-regulation of everyday life' (Gill & Aspinall, 2020, as cited in Nonomura & Baker, 2022)
- 'Victims/survivors tend to experience control-based domestic violence as ongoing and cumulative rather than as episodic' (Katz 2016).



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Coercive control 

- Control of time, movement and activities in the home
 - control of how a mother parents/spends time in the home
 - restricting opportunities for fun, play and affection
- Narrowed space for action and isolation from sources of support
 - limits on children's freedom to say and do things in the home (play, sing, dance)
 - control of movement outside the home
 - preventing children from engaging with extended family, peers and extra-curricular activities
 - cultural celebrations and activities

(Katz, 2016)



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Impacts of Coercive Control for Children 

Experiences of less sensitive, harsher, and at times abusive parenting responses, with limited access to emotionally available caregivers may lead to:

- Corruption and distortion of parent-child relationships
- The narrowing of children's worlds is accompanied by an isolation from supports
- Limited opportunities for socialisation, and extra-curricular activities and access to services may be
- Children's adaptive options become quite limited; children may fight, run, shut down or engage some combination of these
- Being passive and compliant "being good so no one gets hurt"
- Loss of independence and autonomy
- Impacts are exacerbated by systemic barriers associated with factors of intersectionality



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Reflection

In what ways do you see coercive control show up in your work with children, young people and families?



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Impacts of family violence on children



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- Children and young people 'experience' violence in their family rather than 'witness' the violence
- Children's relationships are impacted and may be distorted by the violence
- Risk is experienced by the mother and child/young person simultaneously
- The impact of being forced to live around adults who engage in violent behaviours towards others in a family remains even after the traumatic situation has passed
- Young people may engage in family violence in the home, often with siblings
- The knowledge base associated with the neurobiology of trauma and attachment disruption has become a primary explanatory framework for understanding the impact of family violence on children.

(Safe and Secure Practice Guide)

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Impact of trauma on families



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Shared experiences faced by families affected by trauma:

- Shame
- Grief
- Disconnection
- Secrecy and stigma
- Fear, anxiety, guilt
- Adaptive ways to survive
- Intergenerational trauma

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Intergenerational trauma



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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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Reflection 

What are the impacts of intergenerational trauma on the children, young people, families and communities you work with?

Please share



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Closer look at the impacts of family violence on children and young people 

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Impacts of trauma 

Family violence can have serious, long-term impacts on the physical, psychological, developmental, emotional safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Let's take a closer look at how the trauma of family violence impacts a child's –

- Brain
- Body
- Emotions
- Behaviour
- Relationships
- Culture



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Trauma and the Brain

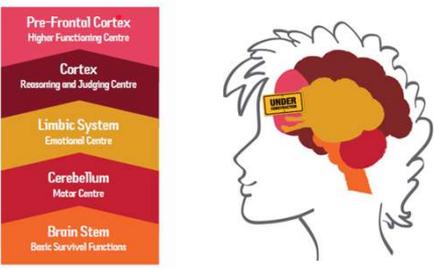


- Trauma reduces the capacity of children's brains to shape the way they react to the environment
- Children have few or no effective internal maps to guide their actions, and may have relational templates impacted by fearing or mistrusting adults
- Their brains are so over-activated that they struggle to take in information and learn new things
- Children's memory systems (eg. working memory) remain stressed, and as a result, their capacity to remember even the easiest of instructions is compromised
- They may find it difficult to separate the past from the present, often reacting to sensory triggers and other reminders of past experiences that were fearful and unsafe



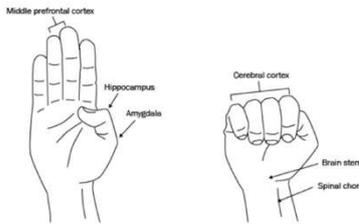
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Sequential Brain Development

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Hand Model of the Brain



Hand model courtesy of Dan Siegel



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Dr Dan Siegel explaining the hand model of the brain



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Trauma and the Body



- When under perceived threat, children's bodies are mobilised towards survival
- Chronic exposure to family violence can cause the brain-body system to become stuck in a hypervigilant state
- Children lose the capacity for adaptive and flexible responses to change
- Any change, good or bad, is experienced as a threat that can quickly trigger a significant stress response which overwhelms the child
- Children's muscles and bodies may continue to react in ways that they have learnt to, in order to survive the violence and the associated distress and fear
- Children's developmental trajectories are altered

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Trauma and Emotions



- Children and young people's experience of inconsistent, misattuned, unpredictable and sometimes dangerous responses to their emotions can impact their internal working model
- They may become disconnected from their feelings, cannot name or describe these feelings
- Children cannot trust their external world to acknowledge, value, or verbalise their feelings, so they learn not to trust their own feelings
- Children's arousal systems are often elevated
- Feelings can be experienced as big and overwhelming, leaving them confused and fearful
- Anger is often used to mask or express sadness, distress, uneasiness, confusion and frustration

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Trauma and Behaviour



- Trauma based behaviour, in general, serves important adaptive and survival functions, and often makes sense in the context in which it first emerged
- Trauma based behaviours often reflect ruptures in children's relationships
- Trauma based behaviour can be categorised in a range of ways:
 - Stress Oriented Behaviour (fight, flight and flop responses)
 - Comfort Seeking (patterns and routines of behaviour aimed at self soothing)
 - Self - Protection (behaviour becomes self protective in the face of abusive relationships, and adults who have stopped being sources of comfort)
- We can understand these trauma-based behaviours through the Polyvagal lens; informed by the work of Dr Stephen Porges and Dr Deb Dana



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Trauma and Relationships



- Relationships in the context of violence are complex
- Relational resources may be difficult to access
- Children may find themselves in a family without effective allies
- Without healthy relational models to guide them, some children engage in behaviour that reinforces the values and beliefs of the offending parent
- Children's relationships with the perpetrator of the violence are often complex and complicated. For some, any contact triggers fear responses. While for others, the ending of violence can be a catalyst for reconnection that is safe, validating and connecting



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Trauma and loss



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Trauma and loss 

"Loss is a significant dimension of trauma."

Family violence can lead to experiences of loss on multiple levels for children. These include:

- a loss of safety and connection in relationships
- a loss of predictable and what is familiar
- a loss of family
- a loss of home, friends, school, belongings and community
- a loss of hope for what is possible for them
- a loss of future hopes and dreams

Are there other losses you can think of?



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Trauma and loss of Culture 



Family violence disconnects children and young people from their culture

- It disconnects them from the meanings associated with their beliefs and community
- It disconnects them from cultural principles as maps to understand relationships and the world
- It disconnects them from an experience of understanding belonging and connection to resources through rituals and stories

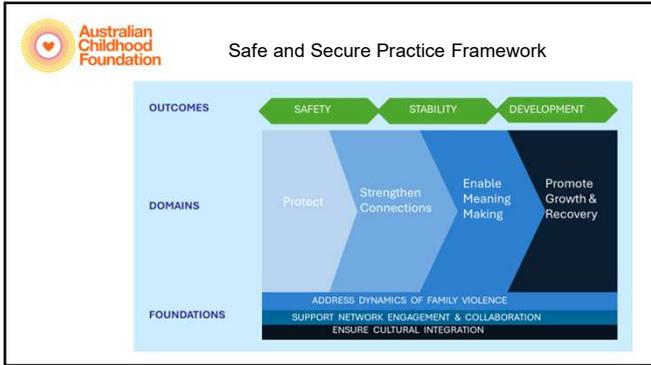
Children have shared that family and domestic violence had impacted their opportunity to learn traditions, know their mob, to connect with and further understand their culture.

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Trauma Responsive Practice 

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Safe and Secure

These principles offer a shared set of guidelines to support collaborative systemic efforts.

Children who have experienced family violence need responses and interventions that:

- Prioritise all elements of their safety
- Support their connection to culture
- Are coordinated and collaborative
- Are child-centred and needs oriented
- Build trust with and for them
- Are tailored to their unique circumstances
- Hold an understanding of trauma-based behaviour
- Privilege their voice and participation
- Are recovery focused
- Protect and repair relationships with those around them

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Safe and Secure Practice Framework

Components of intervention relate to work that is done with children, their mothers, families, community and the system around them. The service system that engages with children and their relationships needs a map for supporting children to recover and reconnect with hope in their lives.

"Safety and security spreads in concentric circles around children affected by family violence, locating the basis of change in their relationships with their mother and siblings, with their father, their extended family, their community and their friends."

(Safe and Secure Practice Framework 2014- Australian Childhood Foundation and Eastern Regional Family Violence Partnership)

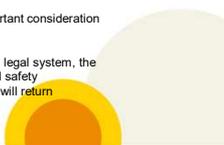
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Safe and Secure 

An understanding of the dynamics of family violence
 - consider how we can support strategies which hold men who use violence accountable for their violence, and resource them to make the necessary changes for safety to be sustained

Embed cultural safety and wellbeing
 - ensure that cultural considerations are built into all forms of intervention
 - services need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to respecting and integrating the child's culture and traditions into their healing.
 - supporting healing and sense of belonging and wellbeing is an important consideration

Protection and safety for the child
 - safety is an experience for children that can be provided through the legal system, the professional system and in intervention that focusses on physiological safety
 - safety is experienced when children no longer fear that the violence will return



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Safe and Secure 

Network engagement and collaboration
 - a collaborative approach by agencies can support joint planning, assessment, risk management and intervention
 - collective consideration and work can be mediated and communicated through structures such as care teams

Strengthen the relational connections around the child
 - children need to locate themselves in relationships that are safe, committed, attuned to their feelings and reinforce positive identity experiences for them
 These relationships are committed to them, nurture them and acknowledge the pain, fear and confusion



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Safe and Secure 

Enable and support meaning making experiences for the child
 - children need multiple opportunities in collaboration with safe adults, to make sense of the violence, and the attributions that are held for them. This experience may or may not involve processing of the trauma

Promote ongoing recovery and integrative relational and developmental experiences
 - children require support to consolidate and integrate the progress they have made in their worlds, identities and relationships, and opportunities for developmental resolution
 - recovery and growth is a significant theme and involves a focus on building on individual strengths, connectedness, hope for the future, a positive sense of self, and making decisions in line with personal priorities.



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Safe and Secure



Foundations of Intervention

The Safe and Secure Practice Framework has three foundational elements that underpin interventions offered to children and young people affected by family violence.

- These are:
 - Ensure Cultural Integration
 - Support Network Engagement and Collaboration
 - Address the Dynamics of Family Violence



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Safe and Secure



The domains of intervention specifically relate to work that is undertaken directly with children, their parents and important adults in their network.

- While they progress in sequence, there is also significant overlap between each domain and the strategies within them.
- The domains are:
 - Protect child and create safety
 - Strengthen the relational connections around the child
 - Enable meaning making
 - Promote growth and hope based recovery



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Safety

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Practical responses to risk and safety 

- MARAM
- CISS and FVISS
- Safety planning
- Organisational policies and procedures
- Child protection notifications

What else, in your varying roles?



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Safety 

- Children and young people who have experienced family violence often lack a sense of safety – not only physical safety, but emotional safety, psychological safety and relational safety
- For children and young people who have experienced family violence the absence of harm does not equate to safety
- Safety is a central, whilst complex concept, in the therapeutic work with children and young people
- Safety can hold a range of meanings of us, and for the children and families we work with



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Reflection 

"How do you actively foster and sustain safety within the relationships and environments you create in your work?"

Please turn and talk



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Neuroception of safety

- "The removal of threat is not the same as the presence of safety." (Porges, 2014)
- The polyvagal theory provides a neurobiological understanding of how threat and perceived threat impacts children and young peoples nervous systems
- Neuroception is the way that neural circuits of the brain distinguish between whether situations or people are safe, dangerous or life threatening
- The detection of this triggers neurobiologically determined pro-social or defensive behaviours
- The process of neuroception detects the familiarity and safety of others through voices, faces, gestures, prosody and body movements.
- "Connectedness is a biological imperative."

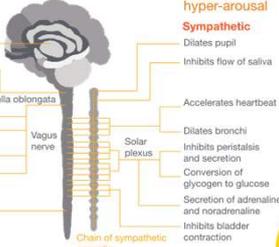
Stephen Porges (2021)



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Polyvagal theory: the vagus nerve



<p>Immobilisation hypo-arousal</p> <p>Parasympathetic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ganglion Stimulates flow of saliva Slows heartbeat Constricts bronchi Stimulates peristalsis and secretion Stimulates release of bile Contracts bladder 	<p>Mobilisation hyper-arousal</p> <p>Sympathetic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dilates pupil Inhibits flow of saliva Accelerates heartbeat Dilates bronchi Inhibits peristalsis and secretion Conversion of glycogen to glucose Secretion of adrenaline and noradrenaline Inhibits bladder contraction
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Chain of sympathetic ganglia



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The social engagement system: polyvagal theory



<p>MOBILISATION</p> <p>In this state we feel unsafe</p>	<p>We are active and mobilised without a sense of safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We fight, or flee, or our bodies actively freeze with tensed muscles.
<p>SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT</p> <p>We feel safe in these states</p>	<p>We are active and mobilised with a sense of safety</p> <p>We are socially engaged</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 feel in synch and connected with others. • We are oriented towards each other with welcoming voices & open faces. • We find pleasure in stillness.
<p>IMMOBILISATION</p> <p>In this state we feel unsafe</p>	<p>Our body slows into an immobilised state without a sense of safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are withdrawn, submissive, collapsed, numb.

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Social Engagement

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

Our bodies are filled with energy, and we need to move.

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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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Immobilisation

Our bodies are slowed right down

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Being still with others for pro-social reasons, like sharing a hug. We find pleasure in stillness

We experience a blend of immobilisation and social engagement in a **safely immobilised state**.

Withdrawn, submissive, collapsed or numb

We experience immobilisation **without a sense of safety** in this state.

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I am showing you....	On the inside....	I need you to....
<p>Social engagement</p> <p>Facing 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 Distard 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 with me Tell me I am safe and demonstrate it with your actions, gestures and tone of voice Help me to orient 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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What trauma responses can look like in children ...

<p>Cognitions & Behaviours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking lots of questions Bravado (speech or actions) Attention, concentration and memory difficulties Black & White thinking, negative thoughts Generalised worries Rigid thinking & behaviours Compulsions/ repetitive behaviours Ruminating – what if's, should, cyclic thoughts 	<p>Mobilised Responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hypervigilant Eddy/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 	<p>Immobilised Responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 with appetite
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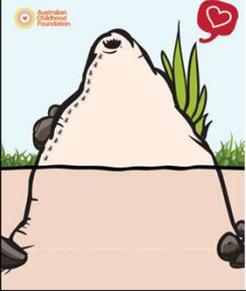
Working with Protective Responses

Increase Resources – Regulatory Capabilities

<p>Calm the brain with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long outbreaths Mindful activities Orienting outwards Connection & Co-regulation "Name it to tame it" 	<p>De-activate Mobilised Responses with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhythm (drumming, music, swinging, rocking, bouncing) Stretching/Yoga Carrying heavy items Heat pack, weighted blanket Reduce stimulation Hugging a teddy/cushion 	<p>Counter Immobilised Responses with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grounding through the senses Proprioceptive input Splash face with cold water Something cold or sweet to drink Chewing candies/sucking a mint/lollipop
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Behaviour as communication



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- Develop openness and curiosity about behaviour
- 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

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What does behaviour tell us?

What we see are the behaviours that challenge - the learned behavioural responses to survive their pain and betrayal!

Underneath it all is all the pain and sadness, the fear of not being good enough, not loved and the shame of not even being wanted

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Underneath it all is all the pain and sadness, the fear of not being good enough, not loved and the shame of not even being wanted

- Feeling and hearing "I am so bad I can't even live with my family."
- My life is a constant struggle of hurt and pain. Everyone asks why I am so angry? Why do I push people away and try and hurt myself and them?
- I feel like nobody cares about me
- The people who are supposed to love me and keep me safe, hurt me
- I will end this relationship before it starts so it won't hurt so much
- I don't need anybody. Do I even matter?
- I believe I am unlovable, I am bad, only I can keep myself safe
- I really want to feel safe, loved, cared about just for who I am. I want to have friends and fun like other kids
- I want to feel capable, included, respected and connected. I want to belong, but I don't know how!
- I'm trying to tell you all this but you are not hearing me.

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Unpacking and responding to behaviour

What lies beneath the child's behaviour?						What does the child need?	What do I need to be able to respond to the child? What can I do to ready myself to respond?	What can I do to meet the child's needs?
What can I see, hear and sense? (Describe observed behaviour)	Body responses	Trauma experiences	Feelings	Thoughts	Beliefs about: • Self • Relationships • World			

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Words Matter: How behaviours are perceived/understood

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Activity

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How does this apply in the context of your work with children and families?

- Using the **Words Matter Resource** consider what may be happening underneath the surface for a child in a family you work with...
- How might we support the child, parent or the networks around the child, to have a deeper understanding of the behaviours?

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A graphic featuring a central red heart surrounded by concentric circles of yellow and orange dots, resembling a ripple effect. The text 'Relational Safety' is positioned to the right of the graphic. The Australian Childhood Foundation logo is in the top right corner.

Relational Safety

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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 are central to how a children experiences themselves and others



An orange line-art illustration of a woman with a ponytail hugging a child from behind. The Australian Childhood Foundation logo is in the bottom right corner.

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Components of relational safety

- Safety
- Attunement
- Accompaniment
- Mutuality
- Repair



Three hearts of different colors (red, orange, and yellow) arranged in a cluster. The Australian Childhood Foundation logo is in the top right corner.

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Safety 

"Feeling safe is the treatment." (Porges, 2020)

- Recovery is through the embedding of visceral experiences of comfort, new stories, memories and anticipation of love and trust
- Deep relational safety is how children who have been hurt come to find the comfort and love they need to recover
- Relational safety can be displayed and shared with a child through a regulated physiological state

"Realising such deep safety is both the intervention and the end goal of therapy with traumatized and vulnerable children and the important adults who care, educate and support them."

Tucci, Weller and Mitchell (2020)



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Attunement 

It involves:

- An understanding of how we respond to a child's state of relational defensiveness
- The provision of synchronised non-verbal communication
- Prosody
- Relational experiences of attunement include:
 - Matched affect
 - Joint attention and clear intention
 - Affiliation - Shared joy playfulness "mutual delight" meandering, musicality (Dan Hughes)
- Language that is intentional

This enables reciprocal conversations that can lead to a felt sense of safety



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Accompaniment 

The experience of relational safety through accompaniment involves:

- The provision of the neuroception of safety for a child
- A child feeling heard, met, felt, understood and accompanied
- Sensory and somatic attunement and connection - a shared internal embodied experience
- Co-creating new relational meaning, that is occurring inside the child and between them and the other – shared meaning making
- Supporting the child with curiosity to find their own wisdom, and elaborate on new actions and qualities



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"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 (2018)



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Mutuality



- Shared somatic resonance and reciprocity in the present moment – a shared internal embodied experience
- Shared meaning making experiences
- The creation of an expanded felt sense of compassion and understanding
- Scaffolding and holding children
- Understanding their capacities around regulation and supporting them in developing this
- Mutual regulation in the form of physical play
- Noticing each other, and sharing in mutual delight



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Repair



- Understanding the importance of repair as making transitions possible
- Repair and rupture are intrinsic to all relationships
- Repair models experiences of mismatch transforming into positive feelings when people achieve a match
- An opening which enables a child to feel pleasure trust and security. It provides an implicit belief and knowledge that problems can be overcome
- Cycles of rupture and repair are a parallel and reciprocal process
- Emotional connection can be disrupted, and then restored
- 'Still face experiment'

"A parent knows how to bring us back together."
(Ed Tronick, 2020)



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Relational safety

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



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



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Strengthening relational connections



Relationships that support recovery and healing in children:

- Are tuned into children's needs
- Show children that they are understood
- Offer comfort and co-regulation
- Define violence as unacceptable
- Reflect back to the child a picture of themselves as worthy, loveable and deserving
- Include adult-initiated REPAIR after RUPTURES



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Reflect on the components of relational safety...

- How could you support families to create more relational safety?
- What does rupture and repair look like for the families you work with?
- What do you already do to strengthen relational safety?



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Meaning making

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Meaning making

- Meaning making is a process within a trauma responsive approach
- Children need to be involved in supported processes of meaning making which involves us having an understanding of their experience, how they made sense of it, how they survived it, what self-adaptive behaviours emerged in them to help them survive, and how the world interpreted and reflected these self-adaptive behaviours back to them in ways that shaped their identity.
- Within this, children need alternative interpretive resources offered to them.
- Meaning making enables the emergence of children's needs



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Making sense together

- Play
- Story telling – Bella's Story
- Stories imbedded in culture
- Art making – paint, drawing, collage, craft, multi-media etc.
- Clay, play dough, modelling clay...
- Symbols, miniatures and sand play
- Movement and music
- Celebrate strengths
- Writing and poetry
- Somatic and body awareness



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Play 

- Play is the predominant language of childhood and is integral to children's development
- Play is an activity that is intrinsically motivated, entails active engagement, and results in joyful discovery
- Traumatized children often do not have words for their inner life. They need a relationship to discover the words, sometimes through gentle and imaginative play
- In accompanying them in play it creates the "we" in terms of meaning making and connection.



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Play 

Encouraging parents and 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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Olden Days Rhythm and Rhyme 



Follow the Leader
One follows the other one. Can you walk in a line? Can you hop together? Can you walk as though you are both on a tight rope? Can you tiptoe in a line with your arms straight? Bounce in on your right foot and out on your left foot. Can you walk backwards together? Can you jump together? Can you see who is together? Can you wave together? Can you make arm actions and sounds together like you are a team? What is a fun song you know in the house?

3 Legged Race
Stand back to back and tie your inside legs together with a cut up length of fabric. Practice moving together. These games are a challenge. See how back you can get.

Old Fashioned Skipping Song
Skip together while you are reciting these rhymes:
You could skip and jump when it you have time.
Pony, Binky, sugar and candy,
Pencil, paper, peas, and
Dinner and butter for your supper,
We don't want you.

Who Walks in a Tight
In the middle of the night,
She is silent,
Cutting hair,
Knocking in a lamp post.
Two, four, six, eight,
Don't forget to knock at the cottage gate,
Cutting hair, off a pony,
Two, four, six, eight.

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Olden Days Rhythm and Rhyme

Hand Clapping Games
 Pick one another and follow the rhymes with the accompanying hand movements.

Miss Mary Mac

Rhyme
 Miss Mary Mac, Mac, Mac,
 We played in back, back, back,
 With one in three, in three, in three,
 We went for back, back, back.
 She asked for mother, mother, mother,
 For three, one, one, one,
 To see the duck, the duck, the duck,
 Jump over the fence, fence, fence,
 He jumped so high, high, high,
 He reached the sky, sky, sky,
 And don't come back, back, back,
 In the fourth of July.

Active
 Miss - cross arms and step over shoulders
 Mary - uncross arms and step right, step over heads
 Mac - step right hand with partner behind - step over hands
 Mac - step left hand with partner behind - step over hands
 Mac - step partner's hands
 Continue the sequence for remaining verses.

Double This

Rhyme
 Double, double this the
 Double, double that the
 Double the
 Double, double this that.

Active
 Double - hands folded, touch knuckles
 The - partners step partner
 That - partners step back of hands.

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Storytelling

Storytelling: Children will listen to stories, and create stories.

- Storytelling- rhythm, suspense, holding attention. Non-verbal and verbal, pulls a child into the story
- Move from storytelling on neutral topics to more pertinent topic- but voice does not change ie maintain storytelling style
- Notice child's response and talk about this in the same storytelling way. Use enthusiasm, pausing, wandering, build suspense and drama

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Meaning making with therapeutic stories

Bella's Story
 by Makeysha and Skye
 Illustrated by Jess Racklyett

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/prosody/2023/06/journey-into-darkness-reaching-the-heart-of-therapeutic-storytelling/>

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Meaning making

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

Did you know that every family has a special suitcase for their most precious things? This is a suitcase that can't be lost 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 things that show how family members got their names
- Pictures of favorite places the family has been
- Items that have been shared
- Special family songs
- Favorite family recipes
- Family stories about family members
- Songs that family members played over and over
- Stories of family celebrations
- Conversations with family members that helped people to feel cared about

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

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

I wonder what things you have in yours?




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Art making

- The process of art making can support a child or young person to express how they are feeling in the moment
- Art making is also conducive for self-expression, creating a visual narrative and trauma processing
- Art making is a safe, non-verbal and developmentally appropriate way of
- Art making provides children opportunities to engage in mastery, supporting agency and a sense of control




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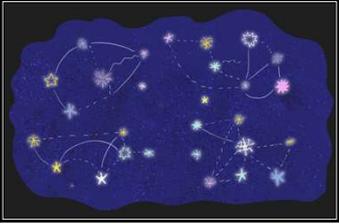

From the artist

Even though I'm only 20, I've experienced things in my life which no person should ever have to live through. I keep my family safe and work to ensure that my daughter will have a strong future.

The concepts for this project are inspired by the natural growth of our plants. For me, seeds, roots and leaves, and the colour they transition through, reflect my own journey. From dark to light, trauma to safety.

“
I want my daughter to grow up with no violence and surrounded by love and respect. To live a happy life without fear and dread.
”
 — Deisy Taylor, mother and artist

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Reflection

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

Reflect on what supports, relationships, and environments the child or young person needs to feel safe, understood, and able to heal from their experiences.

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My Family Constellation

What if you were to use a star constellation to represent your family rather than names to form a constellation in a group or what if all the stars were people? What if you were to think about each of the stars in your family as part of a constellation of people? Family Constellation.

You can choose from the stars below, use star stickers or stars or dots, use your imagination to place members of your family. Then you will be able to place them onto a piece of black paper. As you do this, think about the person or relationship represented—every star represents a person or relationship in your family. What are the members of your family? Consider what they give others to think about. How do you feel about each of them? What are the members of your family? Consider what they give others to think about. How do you feel about each of them? What are the members of your family? Consider what they give others to think about. How do you feel about each of them?

After all this, you will have a constellation that represents your family. You can use this constellation to help you think about your family and how you feel about each of them. You can use this constellation to help you think about your family and how you feel about each of them. You can use this constellation to help you think about your family and how you feel about each of them.



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Hope-based recovery



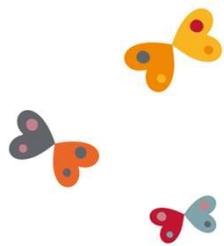
"Hope is a resource for healing. It evolves in the moment-by-moment exchanges between victims and survivors and those who seek to support them... It is the continuity of a promise that the impact of trauma will end."

Mitchell and Tucci (2024)



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Hope-based recovery



"Shoutout to all the mums... please believe me when I say, that when your children look at you in the darkness, all they see is your light."

Trent Dalton, author of *Boy Swallows Universe*



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

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