Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri People, as the Custodians of this land. We pay respect to all Aboriginal community Elders, past, present and emerging who have resided in the area and have been an integral part of the history of this region.

Yarra Ranges Council
Family, Children and Youth Services

Visit www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au to learn more about the programs and resources available through Family, Children and Youth Services such as:

- Maternal Child and Health
- *Smalltalk* Supported Playgroups
- School Holiday programs
- Parent Information sessions
- Profession Development Training for Early Years professionals

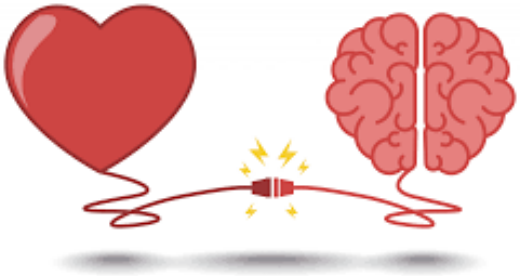
Remember to follow the *Yarra Ranges Families* and *Yarra Ranges Youth* Facebook pages to stay up to date!

We're also available via email: earlyyears@yarraranges.vic.gov.au or youth@yarraranges.vic.gov.au

Reconnecting After Trauma

presented by

Sian Chambers-Vallance and Tony Vallance



Our children's brains are their operating systems — they control their personality, emotions, intellect, talents, actions, resilience, judgment, and ability to form healthy relationships. As parents, we have the *opportunity and the responsibility* to support their mental and emotional growth and health.

The way we relate to our kids in our everyday interactions plays a critical role in building their brains to thrive, not just survive.

About Us...

Sian

I am the owner and manager of Artistic Revolutions and co-owner of Building Better Brains Australia. I am a clinical play therapist working in private practice specialising in early trauma and attachment difficulties. I work with children and families in a systemic way and passionately believe that brain-based parenting education and support is key to helping this next generation of children thrive.

Tony

I am the co-owner of Building Better Brains Australia, Australian Education Awards Teacher of the Year 2019, Secondary School Teacher, Victorian Excellence in Education Awards Finalist 2018, Drumbeat and Mindfulness Facilitator, STEAMWORKS Founder, Leadership team – curriculum development and STEAM, Teacher trainer, Certified Classroom Educator for Positive Discipline, and host of the Edubabble podcast.

Self Awareness + Self Compassion = Self Care

- Be aware that some of the things we may discuss today could trigger feelings or reactions about your own past experiences, parenting, clients, childhood, your own parent and family life growing up, personal traumas *etc*.
- Be kind and compassionate with yourself and mindful that these things may arise.
- We are all here to support each other on our journey of learning.
- If you are feeling upset, irritated, triggered in anyway please feel free to take a short break, a drink of water, some deep breaths, move your body around or resource yourself in some other way.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the definition of trauma
- To define trauma and look at Australian trauma data
- Explore how trauma and toxic stress affect brain, body, relationships, development and behaviour
- Become aware of trauma triggers
- Discuss the ACES study
- Explore the role of brain plasticity
- Examine the key brain needs for trauma processing
- Understand the key strategies for reconnecting after trauma
- Explore ways of therapeutic responding to traumatic events
- Understand how positive parenting practices are essential
- Explore trauma processing strategies such as narrative therapy, art therapy, sensory and rhythmic interventions, therapeutic responding, mindfulness and games for strengthening attachment.

Introduction to Trauma and the Brain

What is Trauma?

Trauma can be defined as " a psychological wound that has occurred due to a **person's perception of a stressful event**") or "an event beyond a person's ability to master")

Traumatic experiences generally include the following:

- Feelings of helplessness, terror or lack of control
- Threat (or perceived threat) to one's physical or mental wellbeing
- Catastrophic responses.

Trauma may result from events such as:

- Grief or loss
- Accidents
- School and community violence
- Domestic violence
- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Man made and natural disasters
- Major surgeries, life threatening illness
- Abandonment or perceived abandonment by caregiver
- Prenatal trauma, birth trauma, prematurity, toxic stress in pregnancy.

1. traumacentre.com.au
2. www.dissociative-identity-disorder.net

Trauma Statistics Australia (1)

Up to 68% of students experience at least one potential traumatic experience.

20-40% of students have complex/developmental trauma histories (3 or more traumatic stress incidents in early childhood) (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010, 2013; Trauma Informed Schools Australia [TISA], 2015b; Rossen & Cowan, 2013).

Research has clearly established the adverse impacts trauma can have on brain functioning, brain development and neurophysiological health.

Trauma can negatively impact:

- language, communication, literacy & numeracy skills & development
- learning motivation
- organisational ability (executive function – cerebral cortex)
- cognitive, attentive, concentration and memory retention/recall skills
- emotional self-regulating skills/behaviours
- interpersonal relational skills/behaviours
- social/emotional intelligence capacities and capabilities[1]

In addition, students with complex trauma histories are:

- 6 x more likely to have severe behaviour problems
- 5 x more likely to have severe attendance problems
- 3 x more likely to fail
- 4 x more likely to have self-reports of poor health (TISA, 2015a)

1. (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010, 2013; Focal Point, 2015; Porges, 2011; Seigel, 2009. 2012, 2013; Van der Kolk, 2005)
2. www.tic.workplacewellbeing.co/trauma-informed/schools

Trauma Statistics Australia (2)

1 in 7 primary school children have a mental illness

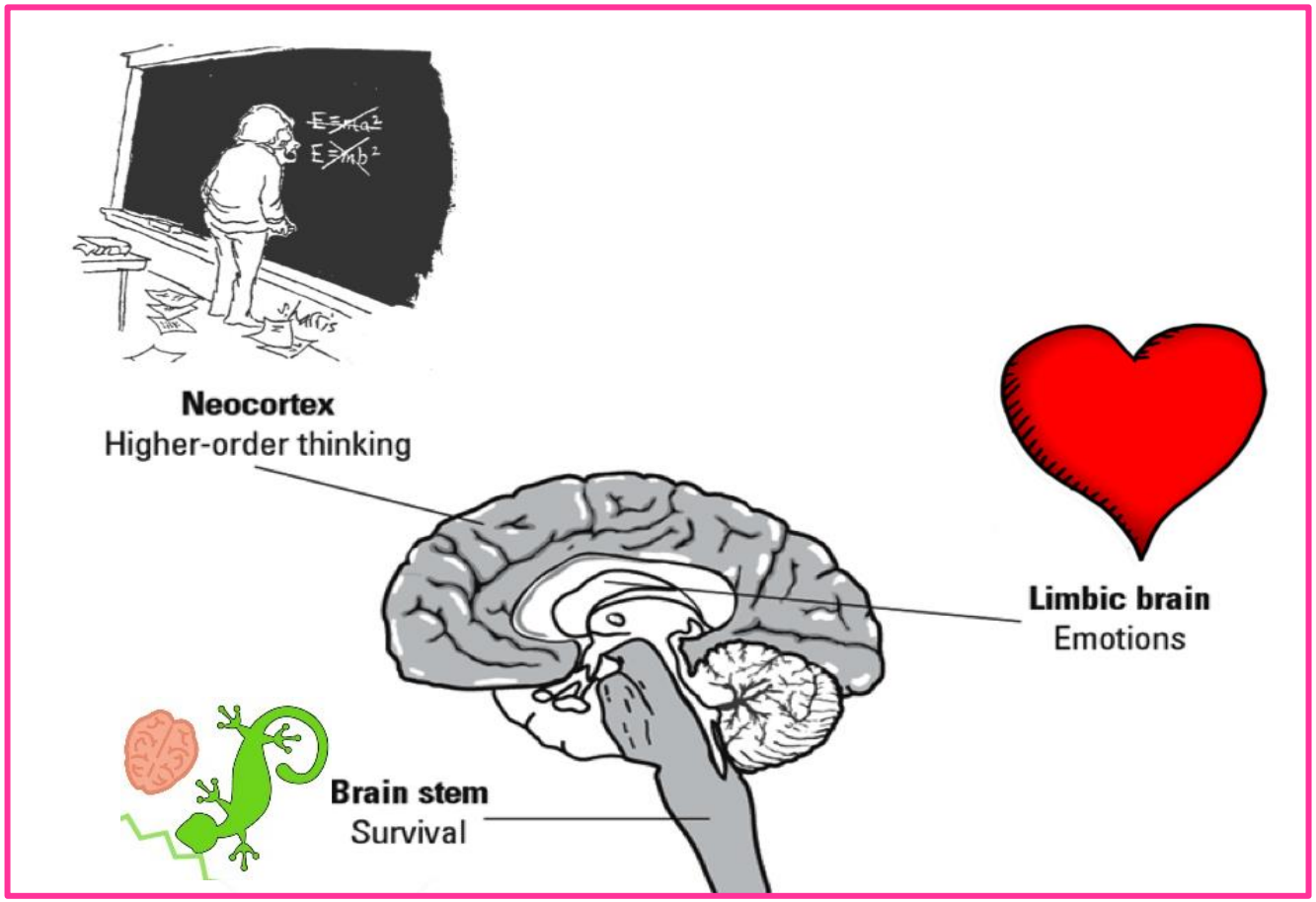
1 in 5 adults will experience mental health problems throughout a year

1 in 3 girls suffer from an anxiety disorder and 1 in 5 boys

1 in 4 adolescents have a mental illness

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

The Biology of the Brain – Simple Version



Meeting Basic Brain Needs

Basic need 1: To feel safe

Basic need 2: To feel connected, accepted, loved, securely attached

- Parenting is 80% connection, 20% behavioural coaching/teaching (helping our child's brain to grow).
- The brain and relationship need 5 positive interactions to every 1 negative (Gottman). The ratio is 6:1 if there has been trauma.
- All behaviour is driven by a need for safety or connection
- Difficult behaviours are mostly automatic survival responses to stress - flight/flight/freeze.

The Amygdala

The brain has a built-in alarm system designed to detect threat and keep us safe called the amygdala – the guard dog.

When feel stressed/scared emotional brain takes over and activates the sympathetic nervous system: flight, fight or freeze.

When the system becomes overwhelmed, the emotional brain remains on-alert and continues to send the body instructions to flight, fight or freeze, even after the threat has passed.

Children exposed to early trauma may remain in survival mode much of the time with limited access to their higher brain – this affects learning thinking, regulation of emotions and behaviour and social functioning.

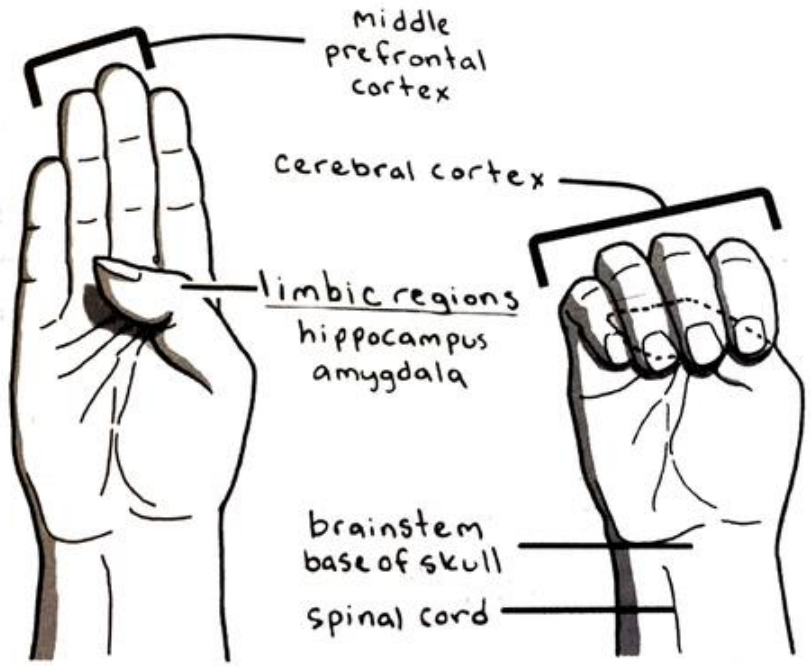
The Prefrontal Cortex

Our prefrontal cortex, or wise owl, is the part of our brain that helps calm the guard dog down, and helps us to think clearly, logically assess the facts or the threat and make reasoned decisions.

The wise owl is great at figuring whether the threat is real or not -whether a situation is actually dangerous.

The pre-frontal cortex can help us to practice breathing, move our bodies and numerous other ways to help us calm our guard dog down.

The Hand Model of the Brain



Dr. Daniel Siegel's hand model of the brain allows us to picture our brain structure and understand why it's difficult to control our reactions when we're overwhelmed with strong emotions, especially stress.

As well as understanding the brain ourselves, it can be very beneficial to explain this to our children too. Involving children in decision making is essential for bringing down their cortisol stress responses, and in helping them process the experience.

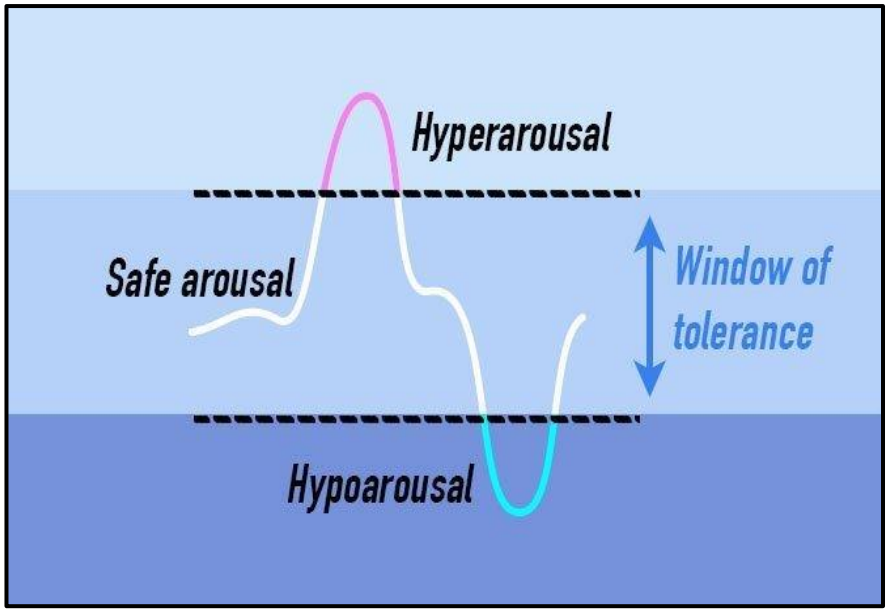
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The Effects of Trauma

Children Exposed to Trauma Spend More Time in Survival Mode

Children exposed to early trauma may remain in survival mode much of the time with limited access to their higher brain – this affects learning, thinking, social functioning and the regulation of emotions and behaviour.

Behaviours resulting from being in survival mode can be explained by the Window of Tolerance model.



The window of tolerance is how well we are able to stay in a regulated state in our nervous system when exposed to stress, rather than moving into flight/fight/freeze stress responses or flop/faint shutdown reactions.

Fight/Flight/Freeze Responses

HYPERAROUSAL

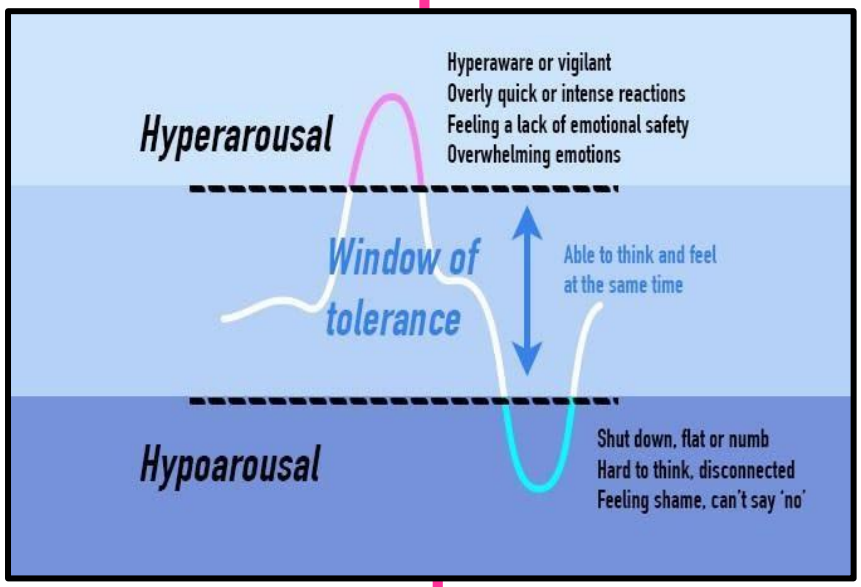
High cortisol (stress chemical) in brain shuts down thinking, learning and regulation.

FLIGHT

- Withdrawing
- Running out of room (**labelled as disruptive or avoidant**)
- Constant movement, can't sit still or focus
- Hiding under furniture
- Day dreaming

FIGHT

- Acting out, having difficulty following rules, struggle for power and control
- Aggressive behaviour, resistance (**labelled as oppositional, defiant, disruptive, hyperactive, difficult**)
- Acting silly/hyperactive, impulsivity, risk taking
- Anxiety before change/in response to changes and predictability of routines
- Screaming/yelling/arguing



FREEZE (FLOP/FAINT)

- Numbness/shut down/withdrawn
- Refusing to answer, blank looks/dissociation (head down, wear hoodie)
- Often overlooked, overly compliant, feels powerless, won't speak up
- Feeling unable to move or act – 'numb out' or "I don't care" (**labelled as unmotivated or disengaged**)
- Flop – yawning, forgetful, struggles with focus and recall

HYPOAROUSAL

Level of stress (or perceived threat level) too high in brain or body, so body starts to shut down (more primitive part of brain system, the reptilian brain).

Trauma Can Result in a Narrow Window of Tolerance

- People with unresolved trauma can more easily be triggered into fight/fright/freeze mode. They have what is called a narrow window of tolerance.

- When faced with a threat (real or perceived), they go into a nervous system stress response because they don't feel safe (the perception of threat comes from their past experiences in life). For example, if as a child, someone was attacked by a dog, just the sight or sound of a dog (however gentle) may lead to a release of adrenaline and feelings of panic.

- In this state, the person becomes disconnected from their cerebral cortex (upstairs brain) and the left brain (which may be underdeveloped), and they will struggle to control their behaviour or calm themselves down.

- Processing of the original trauma and associated responses can reduce the impact of these triggers. It important to not ignore the feelings, but start to 'name them to tame them' and put some supportive resources in place for yourself.

True resilience is the ability to tolerate and sit with all the emotions we experience.

Behaviours Associated with Trauma

Trauma Symptoms By Age (1)

Babies and toddlers	Preschool children	Older children
High distress on separation from parent	New/increased clingy behaviour	Separation issues
Avoidance of eye contact	Shutting down and withdrawing	Difficulties in relationships
Loss of skills (physical, language, eating)	Skill regression (sleeping/eating/toileting)	Regression in skills (speech and toileting)
Fear of going to sleep	Fear of darkness, animals, monsters and strangers	Sleep difficulties
More sensitive to noises	Physical complaints with no cause	Complaints of physical illness (headaches/stomachache)
Constantly on the move	Under or overactivity	Crying/feeling sad
Irritability	Irritability/aggression	Grumpiness/tantrums at school/home
A look of shock, as if frozen	Repeatedly talking about experience	Frequently talking/re-enacting event, or avoiding it

Trauma Affects All Areas of Life

PHYSICAL

- Nervousness
- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Nausea
- Palpitations
- Pain
- Difficulty sleeping
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Detached, out-of-body feeling

EMOTIONAL

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Panic
- Irritability
- Anger
- Withdrawal
- Numbness
- Depression
- Confusion
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Loss of sense of self
- Overwhelm
- Feelings of shame and worthlessness

RELATIONAL

- Distrust
- Feelings of betrayal
- Emotional barriers with caregivers and relationships
- Attachment problems
- Hypervigilance
- Lack of eye contact
- Intimacy problems
- Pseudo maturity
- Self reliance
- Separation anxiety

ACADEMIC

- Inability to concentrate
- Impact on memory
- Missing school
- Behaviour changes
- More withdrawn or aggressive
- Poor academic performance
- Impact on organisational ability

Past Traumas Can Be Triggered By Different Things

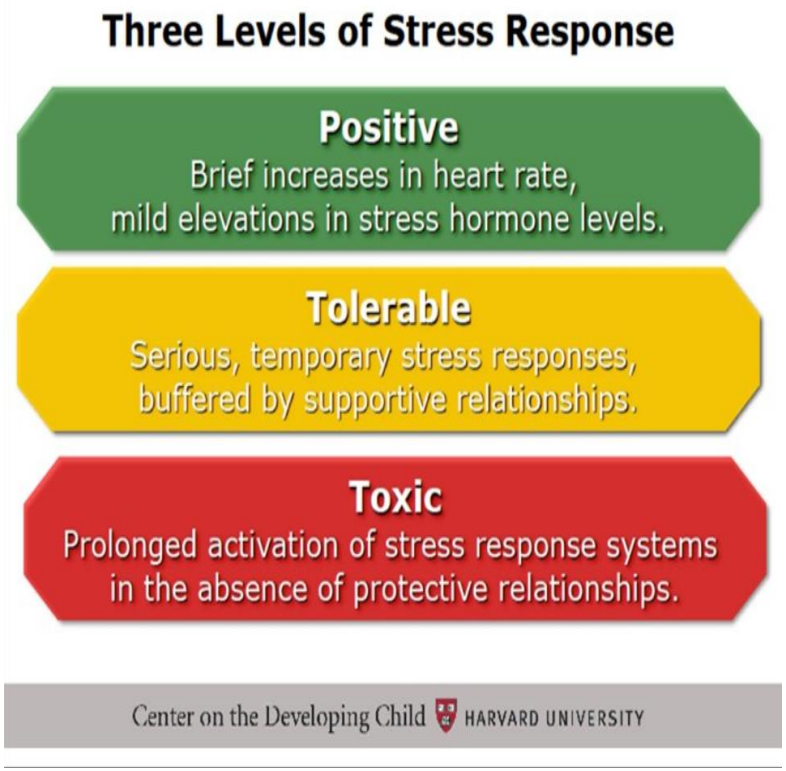
Trauma memories are stored in lower parts of our animal brain (brainstem and limbic system).

Common triggers include:

- Unpredictability
- Transitions and separations
- Loss of control
- Rejection, shame or disapproval
- Loneliness
- Sudden changes or transitions in routine
- Disruptions
- Tasks that are too open ended without enough structure and scaffolding/support
- Lack of clear and consistent expectations (structure)
- Confrontation or raised voices
- Loud or chaotic environments
- Restricted movement/restraint
- Too much time indoors or on screens (can fatigue brain).

Toxic Stress Can Affect The Structure And Function Of The Brain

Toxic Stress Affects Brain Integration (1)



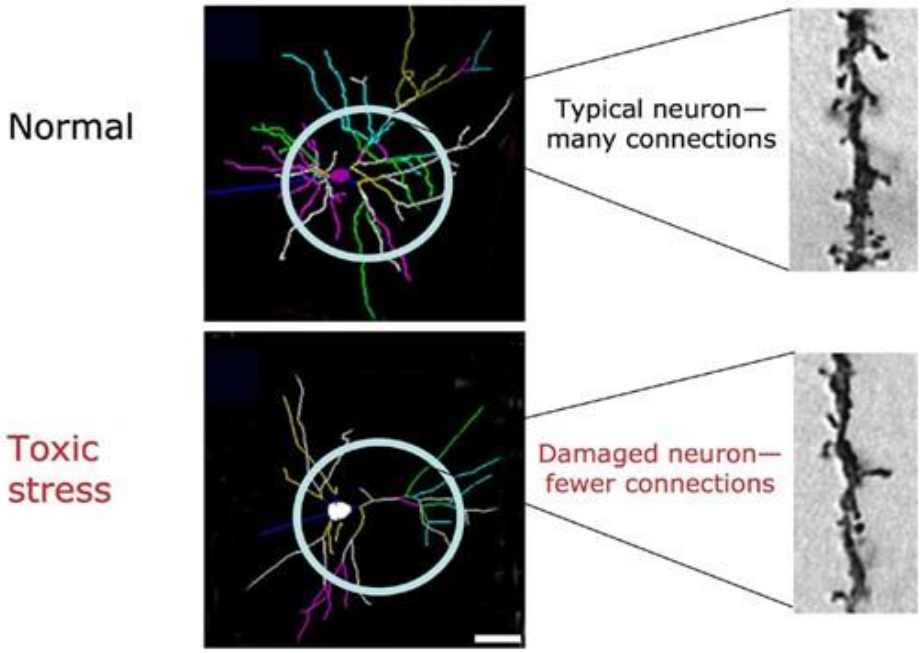
In response to overwhelming stress in early years:

- Brain enters fight/flight/freeze and releases stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline.
- The child has limited capacity to manage overwhelming stress.
- Excessive fear, anxiety and high cortisol can affect regulation, brain wiring, integration and the development of the higher learning brain.
- High stress can impair the pre-frontal cortex. The emotional brain and guard dog become dominant leading to high emotions and hair triggers to stress.
- Significant periods of toxic stress in early life can lead to lifelong problems (emotional, physical and mental health).
- Positive connected relationships are the buffer and cure!

Toxic Stress Effects Brain Integration (2)

Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Persistent Stress Changes Brain Architecture

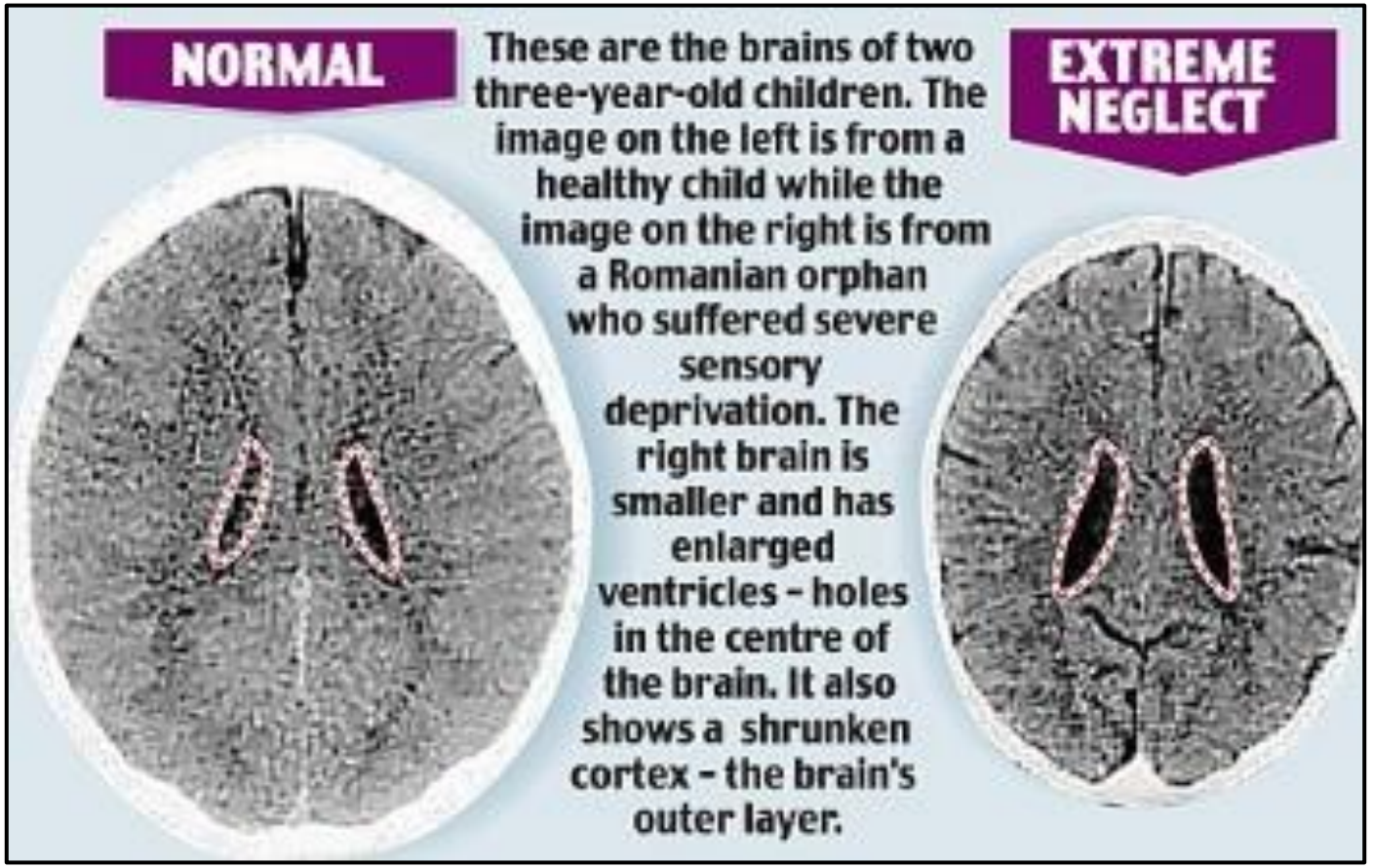


Prefrontal Cortex and
Hippocampus

Sources: Radley et al. (2004)
Bock et al. (2005)

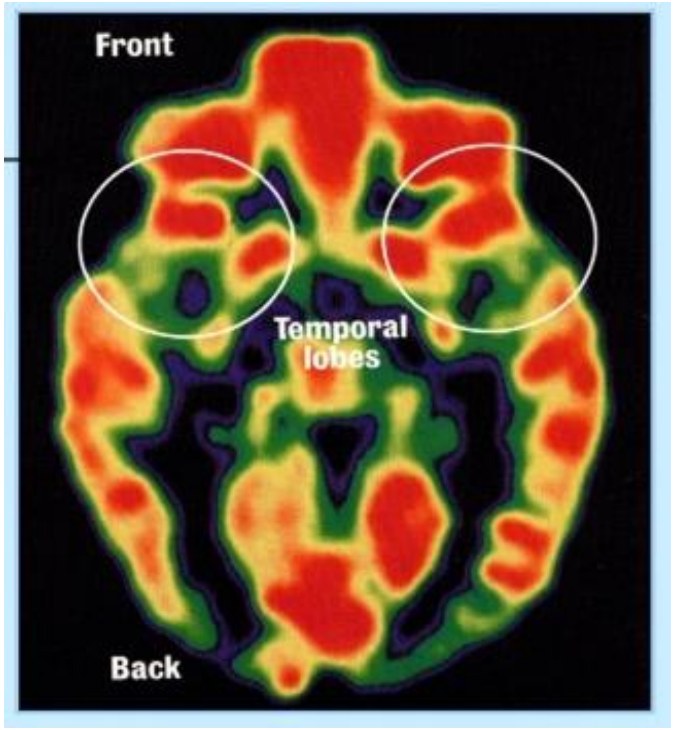
- Toxic stress results in excess cortisol in the brain. This can damage the hippocampus (memory) and prefrontal cortex (higher learning skills).
- This damage results in less neural pathways and a reduced ability to pass messages both within the brain and around the body.

Severe Neglect Can Be "Seen" In The Brain

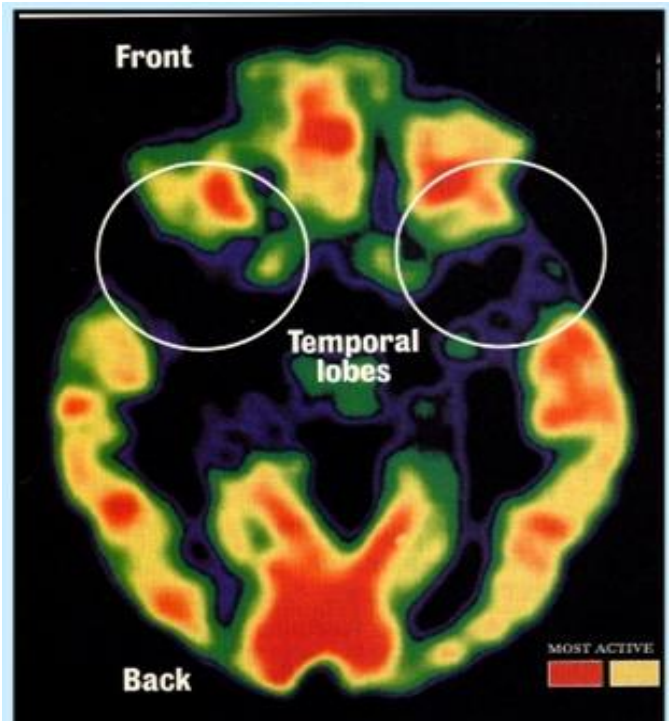


Neglect Reduces Brain Activity and Growth

Pet scan of typical 2 year old



Pet scan of a 2 year old with severe neglect



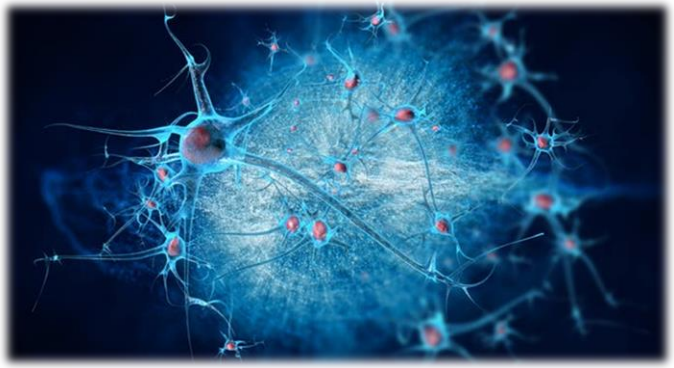
Global neglect causes atrophy of the disused/unstimulated temporal lobe areas involving the limbic/emotional system, the senses, hearing, learning and memory.

However, We Can Train Our Brain To Behave Differently!

Brain plasticity means that the brain is able to create new pathways (neural connections) through repetitive learning and experiences. In this way, we can help our children to physically grow their brains by providing ways to process their experiences and learn to regulate their nervous systems.

The changes we make in their brains drive their behaviour, thoughts and emotions today and in the future.

Remember - practice builds new roads!



“It is important for (us) to understand that kids want to do well if they can. They are highly motivated to do well and sometimes trauma symptoms interfere.”

Source: www.education.cu-portland.edu/blog

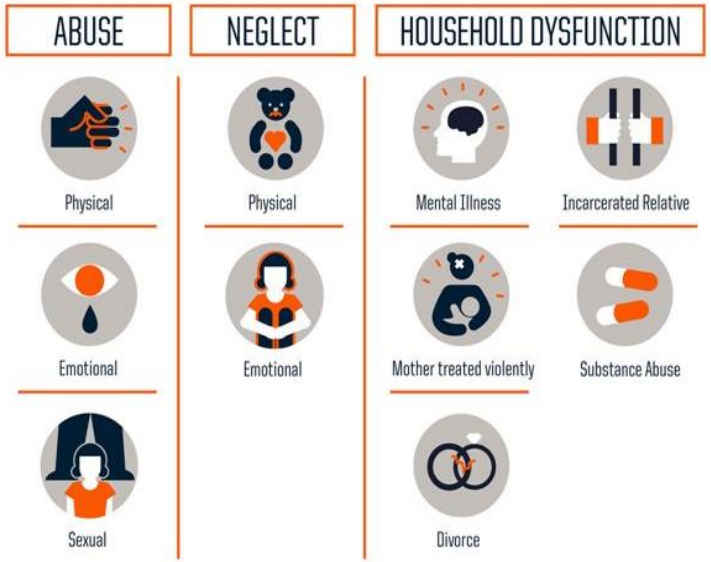
How Does Trauma Affect Our Health?

The ACES Study

The ACES Study – The Body Keeps Score

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

- Selected from literature regarding childhood trauma and patient-reported experiences
- In the original study 17,421 adults who were seen for initial evaluation at Kaiser responded to a survey self-reporting their childhood experiences
- What they found has now been replicated in numerous studies around the world



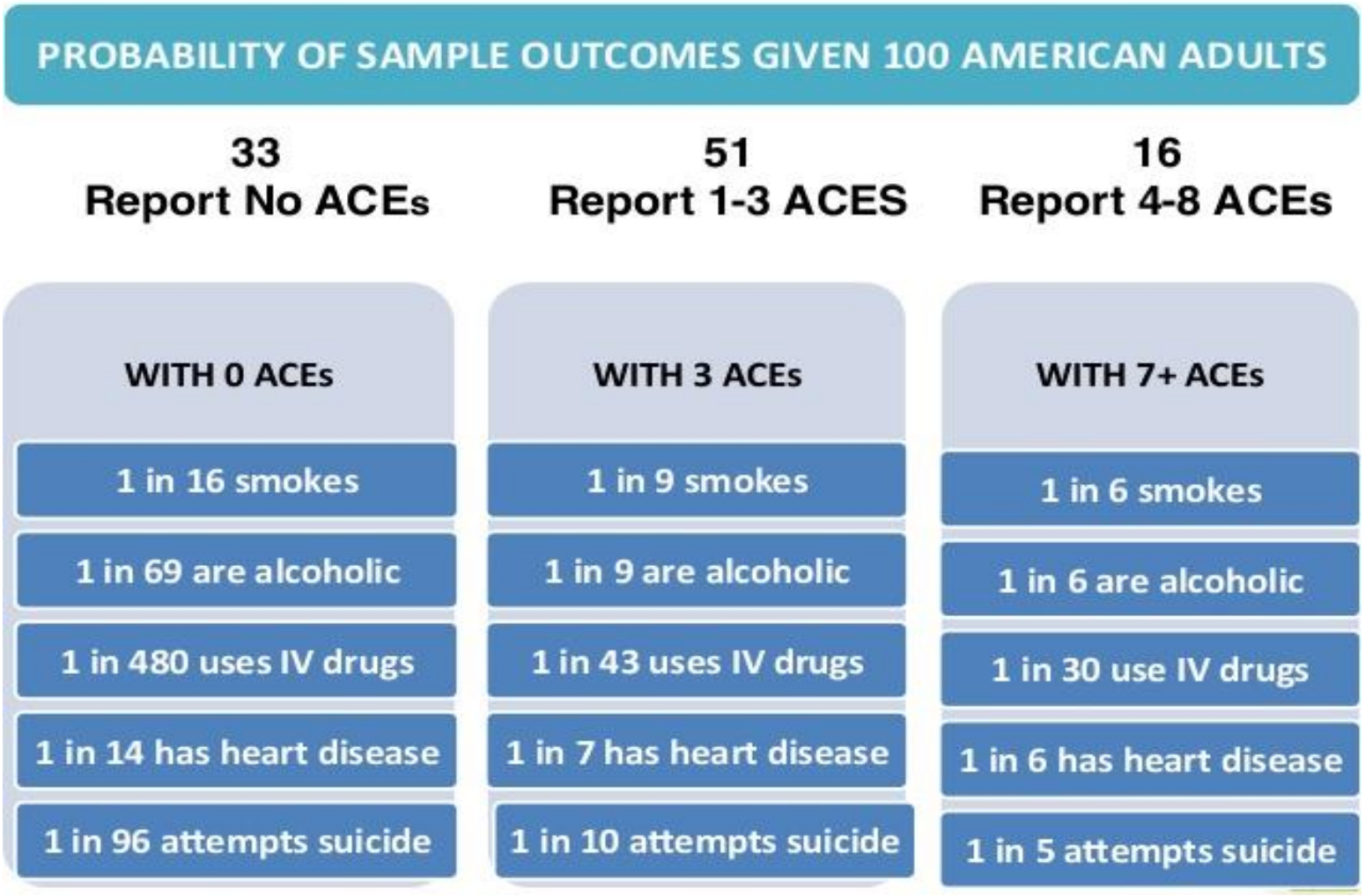
Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2013

Find out your own ACES score here:

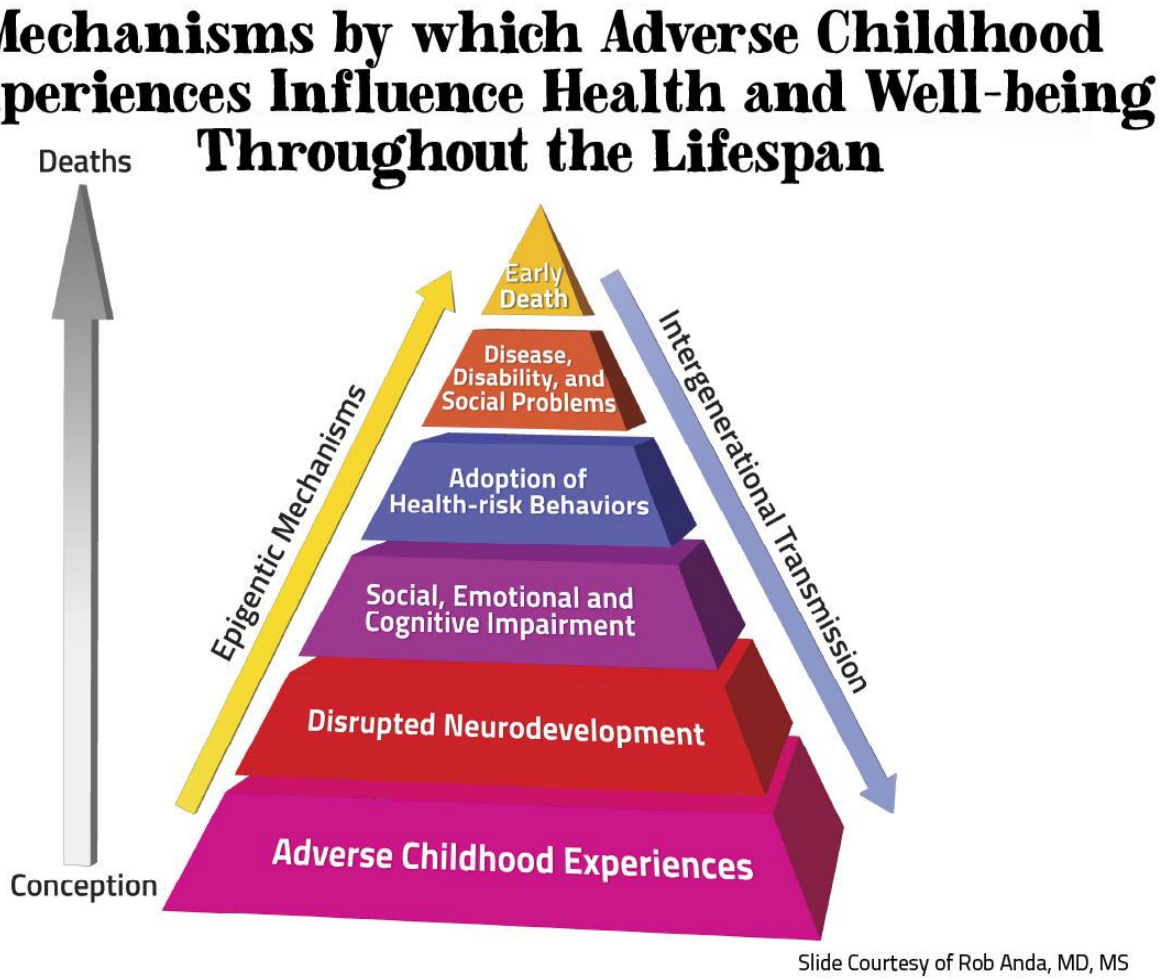
https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/

What do you carry into your parenting everyday?

The ACES Study-Results (1)



The ACES Study-Results (2)



A Global Pandemic is a Traumatic Event

- We have been undergoing a period of trauma and toxic stress resulting from our nervous system receiving threat responses, lots of changes to routines, finances, working arrangements, home learning, pressures…life as we knew it.
- Stress chemicals - cortisol shut down the thinking and learning parts of the brain and leave us with the fear and big emotions parts of the brain.
- Our body pumps adrenalin which gives it signals to move (fight or flight to get out of danger) so we need to provide LOTS of opportunity for physical activity to reduce these responses.
- Ongoing high levels of stress = difficult to learn, remember and regulate ourselves.
- Human brains do not finish developing until they are 30 years old.
- Most dominant regions, particularly when younger, are all about feeling safe (regulation) and connected to caregivers.

Providing daily experiences of safety and connection through play, exercise, creative expression and family time act as a buffer to stress and trauma responses in the brain, support resiliency and positive mental health.

Supportive De-escalation Scripts

1. Acknowledge the feeling

"*I can see/hear you are feeling so sad/mad/worried right now* (calm tone, mirror emotion on face).

2. Connection and safety – *"You are safe. I am here to help. We can get through this together."*

3. Switch on upper brain – *" What do we need to do to fix this?"*

Behaviour and de-escalation language, building emotional intelligence, choice giving techniques plus therapeutic limit setting are explored in detail in our Brain and Behaviour online course and Filial Therapy training.

Resourcing, Grounding and Supportive Techniques

Priorities for Trauma Processing

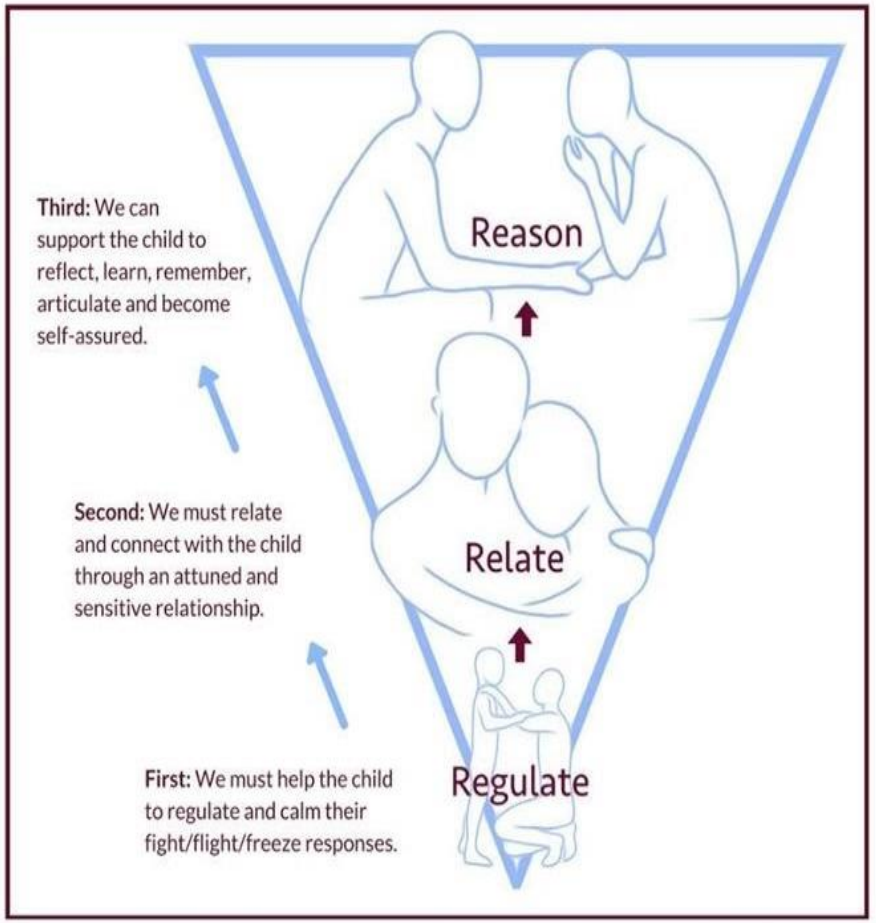
1. Reconnection to self – rebuild internal sense of safety and regulation, reduce cortisol and stress through movement, sensory supports, mindfulness, self expression and creative arts therapy integration.

2. Reconnection to others – especially close relationships through presence, playfulness, social supports, creative connections.

3. Processing of the experience and creating a personal narrative/story.

The Three R's: Reaching The Thinking Brain

Dr Bruce Perry, a pioneering neuroscientist in the field of trauma, has shown us that to help a vulnerable brain to learn, think and reflect, we need to intervene in a simple sequence.



Heading straight for the 'reasoning' part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.

The First R - Regulate

Biologically and physically as humans we need rhythm! Our nervous systems are wired to rhythm. We often engage in rhythmic activities for our children e.g. rocking them to sleep, bouncing them up and down on our knee. However, when we grow older, we stop engaging in rhythmic activities for ourselves.

The best kind of rhythmic activities are those that are also repetitive, and that are relational. These activities help us to reduce our cortisol levels, and provide a structured outlet for the adrenaline that might be rushing around our bodies.

The First R - Regulate

Here are some examples of rhythmic activities you can do at home!

- Bouncing on a fitball whilst watching TV
- Dancing – there are loads of online dance classes, and Youtube videos you can use to dance from home. Try doing this with your kids too!
- Drumming – if you don't have drum then just use pots and pans!
- Yoga
- Figure 8 exercise – you can use our template!
- If you are experiencing panic symptoms you can use hot and/or cold compresses or splash cold water on your face. This improves vagal tone (our bodies ability to work together and get messages around our body) and this settles our nervous system.
- Turn taking games with someone (even on Zoom!):
    1) Throwing a ball back and forth
    2) Bouncing ball back and forth
    3) Feather blowing with a partner
- Mindfulness
- Kinaesthetic play (messy play) – You can use anything for this such as shaving foam, sand, rice, pasta or even custard. See what you have in your house and be creative! Stick your hand in and be present in your body. Ask yourself, what can I notice? Is it hot, cold, rough, smooth, sticky?

Sensory Regulation Techniques to Help Reduce Stress

VISUAL

Visual timer, calm down jars, breathing charts, yoga cards, emotions books, calming photos of animals, sea *etc*, nature materials, glitter wands, battery candles/soft lighting, visual poster with words and symbols of how we can calm our bodies when we are feeling different emotions e.g. *When I feel sad I can…When I feel angry I can… When I feel anxious/worried I can…*

TACTILE

Hand cream and self massage, sensory inputs – weighted products like heat packs, feathers, sponges, massage rollers, balance boards, sensory pads, nature materials, fiddle toys, slime, theraputty, playdough, sandtray, squishy toys/stress balls, blanket, beanbag or large pillows.

AUDITORY

Singing bowl, calm music, guided meditation with headphones.

BREATHING

Hoberman sphere, feather, bubbles, cotton wool and straws, pinwheels, charts, scented products, breathing charts on wall, trace the figure 8.

MINDFULNESS

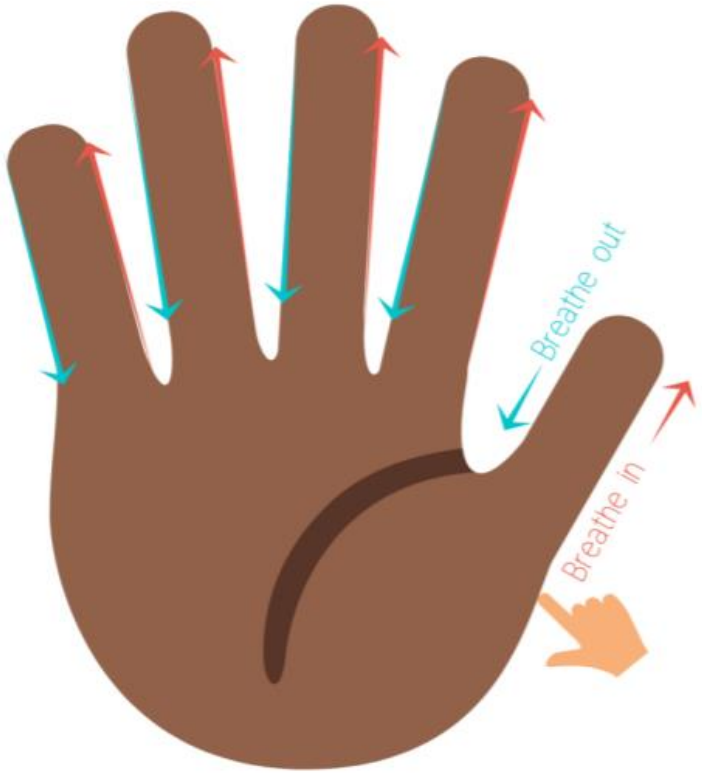
5 things exercise to ground, progressive muscle relaxation, use mediation apps or Youtube guided meditations.

GROUNDING

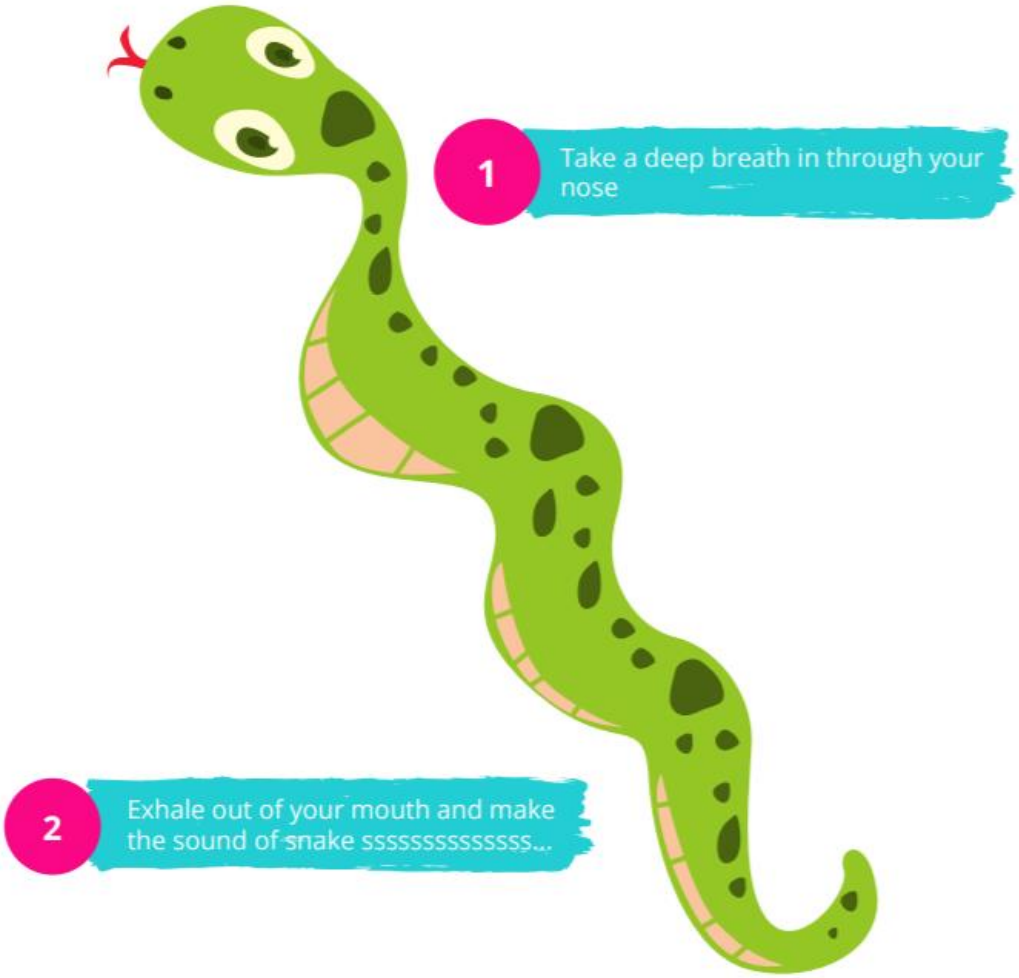
Use techniques to reconnect into body. 5 things mindfulness, trauma holds, movement techniques, singing, humming, music, relaxation.

Exercise - 5 Finger Breath

Trace around your fingers with one finger on your other hand. When you trace up your finger, breathe in, and when you trace down, breathe out. Remember to take a pause in between each finger too!



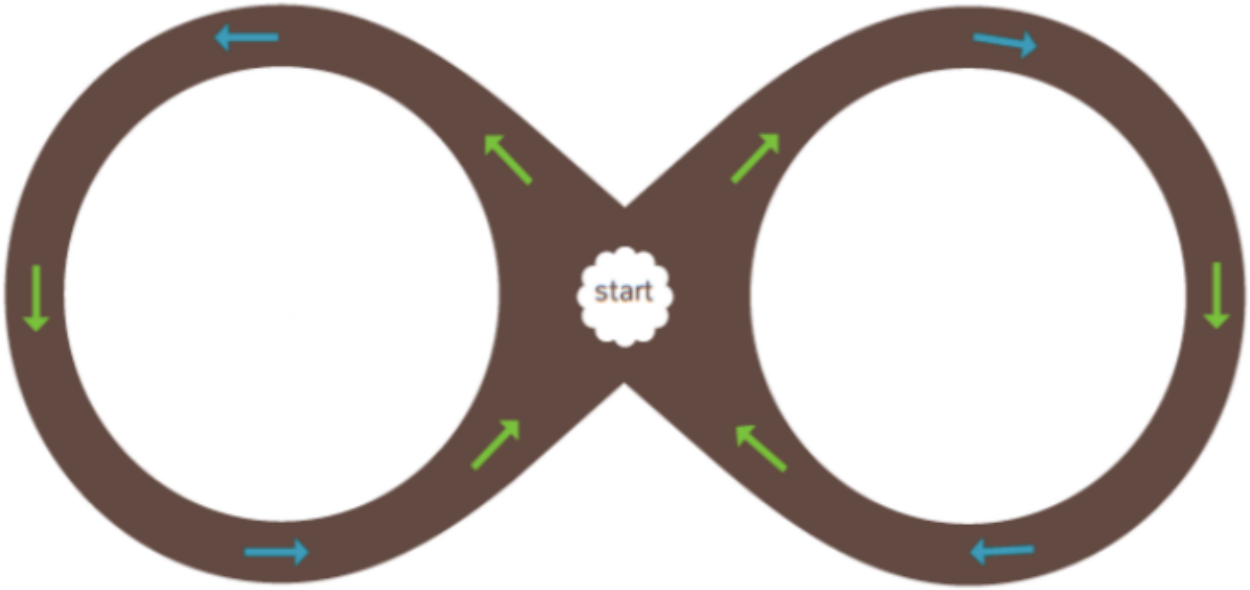
Exercise - Snake Breath



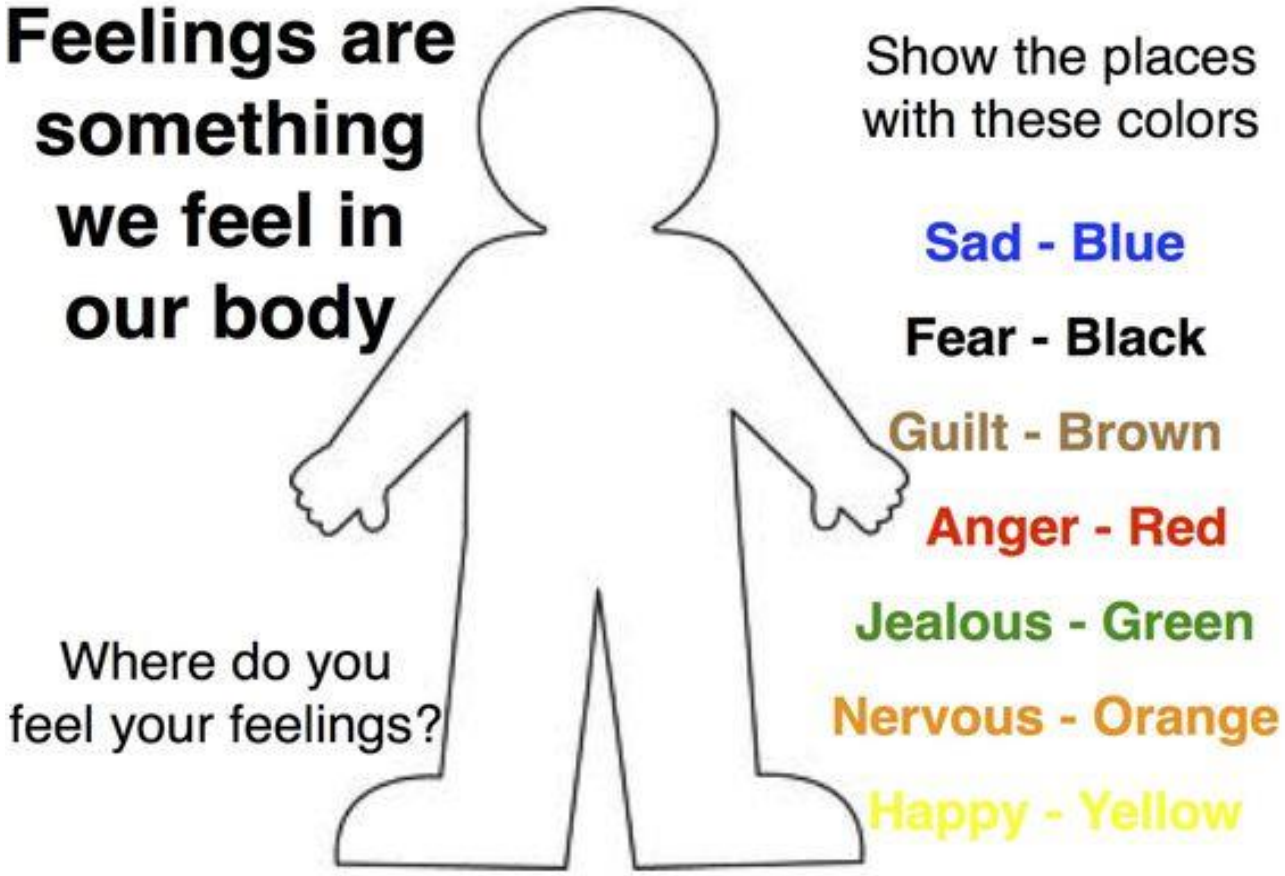
Exercise - Figure of 8

Starting in the middle, go up to the left and trace the left part of the 8 with your finger whilst you breathe in.

When you get to the middle of the 8 again, breathe out whilst you trace the right part of the 8 with your finger.



Where Are Your Feelings In Your Body?

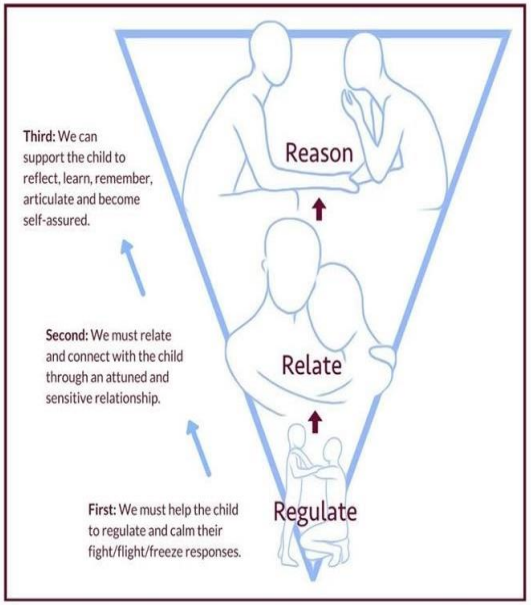


The Second R - Relate

Limbic system resourcing – connection to others:

Try and incorporate more of the following into your daily and weekly routine with your family to support their need for safety and connection:

- Family board games and card games
- Family dance parties, singalongs and musical jams
- Family cooking
- Prioritise nurture and connection in bedtime routines
- Debrief about day with feet or hand massages
- Theraplay nurture games and activities (see ideas following)
- Lots of physical affection and hugs after separations
- Family mindfulness, nature relaxation music and guided meditations
- Family walks and exercise, bike rides, scavenger hunts, nerf wars, water fights, family trampoline bounce, hide and seek
- Sports and ball games as family
- Family meal times – sharing high points and low points of day – supporting each other to problem solve low points and challenges
- Family meetings
- Lots of slow breathing practice – activates relaxation response – parasympathetic nervous system.



Heading straight for the 'reasoning' part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.

Nurture Activities For Young Children

- Lullaby: Parent cradles child in arms in such a way that eye contact is fully maintained. Parent sings lullaby to child, inserting, wherever possible, child's name and descriptions of his or her features. Example: "Twinkle, twinkle little star, what a lovely boy you are. Nice brown hair and soft, soft cheeks. Big brown eyes from which you peek. Twinkle, twinkle little star. What a lovely boy you are."
- Peek-a-boo with hands, feet, towel, blanket, hood of coat, behind pillow or door.
- This little piggy went to market.
- Patty-cake: can be played with feet too!

- Blanket swing: place child in blanket and give a gentle swing, can be done while singing to child. Lyrics might be: "My (name) lies over the ocean..."
- Any song or rhyme paired with movement, such as dancing, bouncing, rocking, moving limbs, finger plays. Personalized wording, as in Twinkle above, is preferred. Examples: Rock a bye baby, Patty cake, Itsy bitsy spider, Ride a horsie, The wheels on the bus, Rub a dub dub, I'm gonna get you.

Source: Originally published in the The Theraplay® Institute Newsletter of Spring, 1994

School Kids and Young Teens

Thumb Wrestling

Parent requires the child to wait for the signal to start, but makes the waiting fun. He also makes sure that the child starts off winning and only gradually is frustrated by losing intermittently. Here is the play-by-play:
"*We are going to do some Thumb Wrestling. Let's sit with our knees touching. You put your other hand on my wrist and I'll put my other hand on your other wrist.*" "*I am going to count, and when I get to 3, we will start. We will move our thumbs with each count. Whoever pins the other guy's thumb wins. But wait until I say '3,' because it may not come when you think'.* The child has to listen and wait. Making sure that the child wins the first two or three rounds keeps him engaged (learning how to throw a match believably is an important Theraplay skill!)

Donut or Pretzel Challenge

This activity adds Nurture. Parent and child sit cross-legged, knees touching. Adult holds donut on index finger. Instructions: "*I am going to tell you to take a small, medium, or tiny bite. Your job is to see if you can get to the last part of the donut before it falls off.*" The child is not allowed to touch the donut, but the adult rotates it as necessary to facilitate success. For a child who is very easily frustrated, it pays to have a second, backup donut in case the first one happens to fall off too quickly.

M & M Hockey

This activity can have an important Nurturing component, in addition to providing Structure and Challenge. The setup: Child and Parent stand at opposite ends of a small table with straws. Parent places two M&Ms in the centre of the table. The instructions:
"*We are going to play M&M hockey. When I say 'Go!' you try to blow one of the M&Ms off my side of the table and I will try to blow one off your side.*" "*If you blow it off my side, I have to feed it to you and if I get a goal, you have to feed it to me.*" *We are allowed to touch the M&Ms only with our breath.*

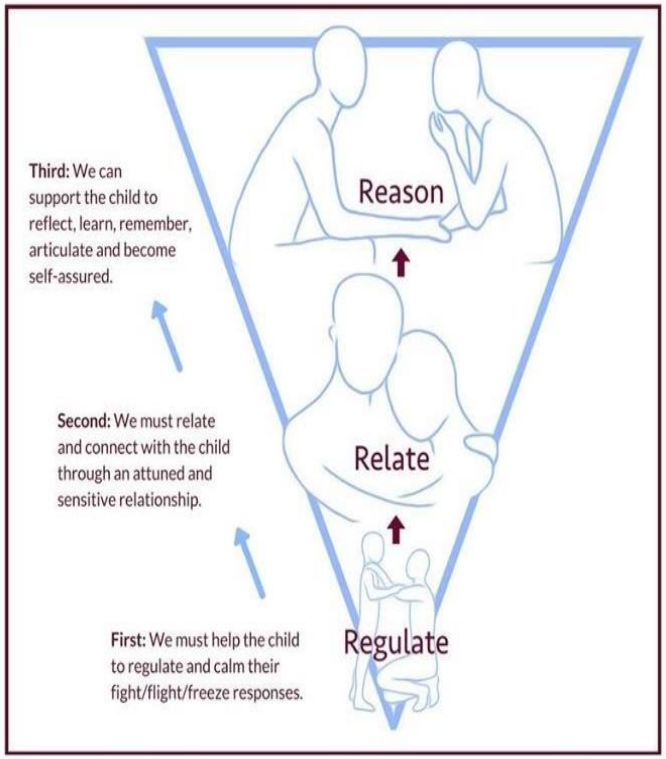
Serve and return interactions to aid connection

Voice pitch matching, throwing/bouncing ball back and forth, put balloon between tummies and try and walk, thumb wrestles, card games, foam sword fights, partner yoga challenges *etc*.

The Third R - Reason

Cerebral cortex thinking supports:

- Help explore and create a personal story around what happened and link past, present and future.
- Can be written or art creation and words combined for whole brain connections.
- Reflect, learn, remember, communicate thoughts and feelings.

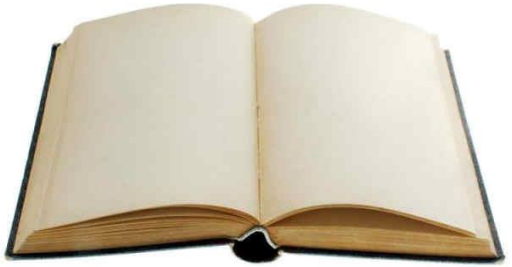


Heading straight for the 'reasoning' part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.

Creative Activities for Trauma Processing

Create a storybook of the child's experience

The child can collage or draw pictures or write story if older (left/brain up/down brain processing, making sense of trauma experience, resourcing, reconnecting to sense of control, meaning and power over events).



Here is……

He/she is very ……

One day ……felt …… and ……because ……

But then……came and ……

And now ……

Creative Activities for Trauma Processing

Ask Your Child the following (they can draw or write responses):

What worries you the most now?

What upsets you the most now?

What is the worst part, the hardest part for you now?

What helps you feel a little better?

What helps you feel a little safer?

Do you have any questions about what has happened or anything anyone has said?

Is there anything else I can do to help right now?

Reconnection After Trauma Parenting Action Plan (1)

1. Prioritise safety and connection for brainstem

- Tone of voice
- Be aware of non verbals
- Empathic reflection when you notice stress responses starting e.g *'I can see you are feeling tired/mad/sad/worried about .....I am here to help, you are safe. What do you need to do right now?'*
- Create calm, consistent and predictable environment, and routines at home
- Regular rhythmic, movement, and creative regulation activities help calm nervous system, reduce stress and build safety in primitive brain
- Sensory supports – weighted products, squishies, visual timers, egg chair/hammock, trampoline, body socks, sandtray, art materials, playdough, fitball *etc.*

Reconnection After Trauma Parenting Action Plan (2)

2. Model healthy relationships and connection for the limbic system

- Connection before correction **–** you can be kind and provide structure.
- Stay calm to calm – Lighthouse in the storm. Model your own regulation skills - be here now.
- Give lots of opportunities for Voice and Choice**–** "*Would you like to do x or y? Which do you choose?*"
- Family fun night at least once a week. Brainstorm ideas as a family and vote e.g. family meal times, walks, bike rides, card games, outings, board games, sports, nerf wars *etc*.
- Play and creativity are essential tools for helping the brain, nervous system feel safe and connected.
- Singing/music together or playing calm relaxation music (helps lower heart rate and cortisol).
- Regular family attachment games and activities for connection, positive social engagement and nurture (examples in this workshop).
- Physical affection and play (particularly to prepare for separations) produces oxytocin, reduces cortisol, calms NS, promotes sense of safety and belonging.

Reconnection After Trauma Parenting Action Plan (3)

3. Trauma processing and whole brain supports

- Practice calming strategies – check in with feelings (body template), breathing techniques, regular mindfulness practice, movement, sensory supports.
- Prepare children for transitions. Beware of the triggers!
- Support children to process their traumatic experiences using integrative techniques.
- Creative self expression activities – art, journalling, dance and movement, music, songwriting, drama.

4. Support yourself

- Model kindness, self regulation and self care (to be explored further in the mindful parents workshop).
- Reflect on how you manage and support yourself– your own trauma history, ACES score, parenting experience. Do you need extra supports for yourself?

One-off Trauma Integration and Processing Activities

Trauma Processing Resources*

- Supportive techniques to aid trauma processing following a one-off incident (e.g. death, abuse, violence, natural disasters, accident etc, COVID-19).

- Focused on integrative processing – reintegrate whole brain systems which have been affected using trauma processing strategies.

- Help brain and body recreate internal safety, connections and make sense of personal story and narrative.

** If child/parent has a history of early trauma these techniques provide a good start but the brainstem/limbic system may also require further supports over a longer period of time.*

Creative Activities for Trauma Processing (1)

Journal emotions

Encourage your child to journal or draw about the following situations. Include what the child or animal in the story or picture does to feel better (draw pictures or cut out from magazines). What would your child do to make the animal or child feel better?

- A lonely, lost kitten that is wet, cold and hungry
- Draw your family in a storm
- A strong lion that is chased away from the family he grew up in
- A magical band-aid that could heal any hurt it was used for – how and where might your child use it?
- An imaginary suitcase where a child could pack away all hurting memories or problems. What would be placed there?

Putting them on paper allows the child to begin to control or manage the memory, rather than the sensations and memory controlling the child.

The child decides what he or she would like to do with the drawings or writings.

Creative Activities for Trauma Processing (2)

Children heal through using their natural language of play and expression – organise special play and connection times with your child using a range of toys.

Use a range of puppets for child to act out their story, or write a show about what happened. *"Can you show me what happened when ....."*

Processing COVID-19

Help your child and your family reflect on your experiences during this time.

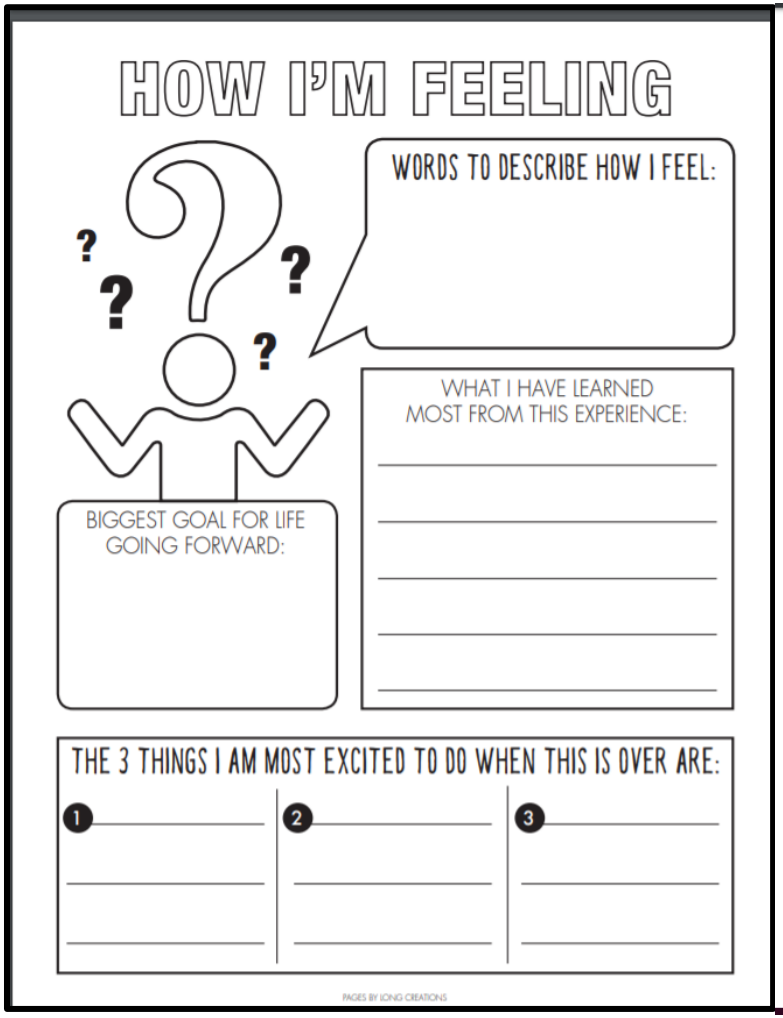
The activities below offer great activities to aid this trauma reflection and processing:

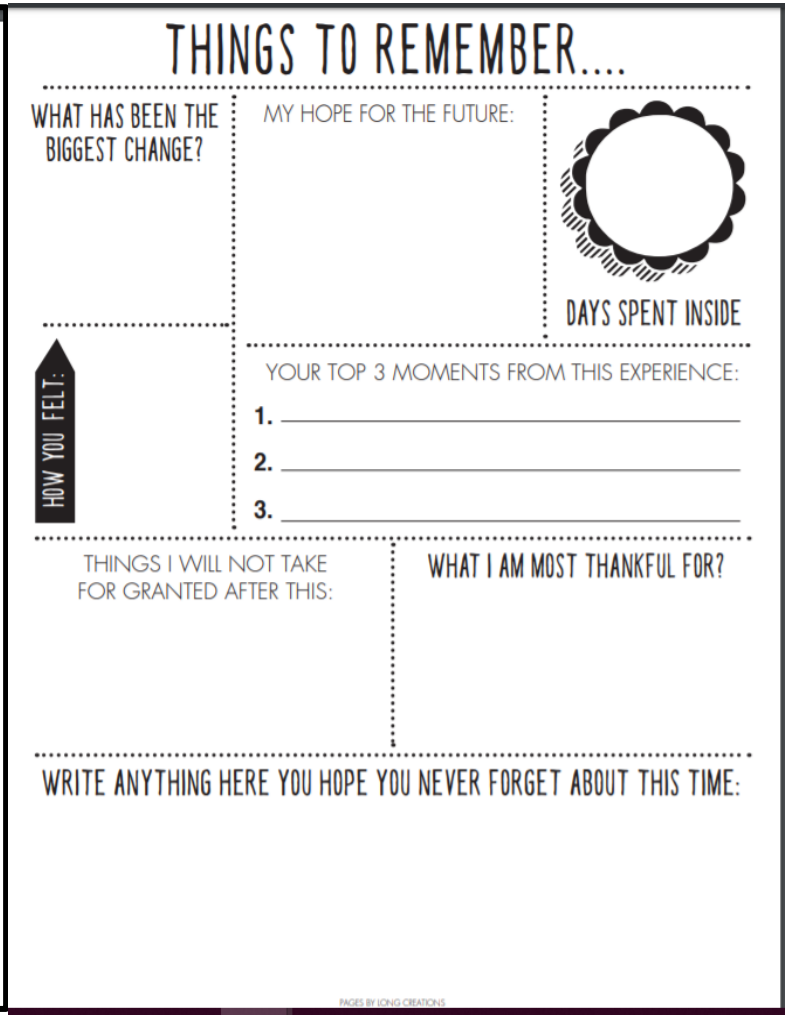
Child time capsules
https://s3.letsembark.ca/long-creations/2020-COVID-19-Time-Capsule-EN-US.pdf

Adult time capsules
https://s3.letsembark.ca/long-creations/2020-COVID-19-Time-Capsule-For-Adults-EN-US.pdf

Kids activity sheet
http://media.news.com.au/multimedia/2020/NED-1648/Corona-Kids-Activity-Sheet.pdf

Creative Activities for Processing COVID-19





BBBA Resources for Parents Group Resources

You can download your FREE copy of the kid's calm brains activity book here: https://buildingbetterbrains.com.au/kids-calm-brains-exercise-book/

In the exercise book, there are colouring sheets, worksheets, and step-by-step guides on how to do the calm brain practices with your children.

The FREE downloadable Self Care resource manual for parents is here: https://buildingbetterbrains.com.au/self-care-resource-book-download/

In the resource book, there are worksheets and step by step guides on how to do the self care practices.

Join our support group for parents and educators with the full video series and more resources here:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/buildingbetterbrainsaustralia/

Reflection Activity (1)

What does Trauma look like in your home?

Reflect on what trauma symptoms you can identify in your children or yourselves (if any) during this time.

What support strategies can you put in place?

FIGHT//FLIGHT/FREEZE/FLOP	WHO?	SUPPORT STRATEGIES TO TRY

Reflection Activity (2)

1. What situations during the day trigger your nervous system/stress response?

2. What situations set off the nervous system/stress response in your children?

3. What does the “fight, flight, freeze” response look like for you in the moment (e.g., sweating, heart racing, yelling, tantrums, aggression, running away, shutting down)?

4. What does the “fight, flight, freeze” response look like for your children?

5. What does the “fight, flight, freeze” response look like for your partner or another family member?

6. How might this information about the stress response change your family life?

7. What tools can you use to help yourself, your partner and/or children when they are in “fight, flight, freeze” mode?

Thriving after trauma and repairing the brain after early trauma is possible, but it does take conscious work (rewiring our own brains!)

The power is in our hands – to create future leaders, artists, creators, inventors and problem solvers who can thrive to their full potential, not just survive in the world.

Sian Chambers-Vallance
Artistic Revolutions

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www.ahaparenting.com

www.beaconhouse.co.uk

www.starr.org/training/tlc/resources/parents/activities - Trauma and Toxic Stress in the Pediatric Patient (Regina Henderson)

www.marvelousmummy.com

www. my.vanderbilt.edu/developmentalpsychologyblog

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The mission of Building Better Brains Australia is to help make the world a better place through training, consultancy, education, connection and empowerment.

We work to grow capacity and understanding in the systems around the next generation of children in our care – parents, educators and mental health professionals.

Building Better Brains Australia is the love child of husband and wife team – Sian Chambers-Vallance and Tony Vallance.

Just as Building Better Brains Australia is the bridge between the work Sian and Tony do to grow capacity and care in the systems they work with (parenting, mental health and education), it is also the bridge between the 20+ years of neuroscience and trauma research that needs to form the basis of best practice in the systems around our children (and all human beings).

We hope you will work alongside us to help build a better world and healthy brains and relationships for the next generation in our care.

www.buildingbetterbrains.com.au