

# Trauma-Informed Practice

An Introduction

# What is Trauma?

- Trauma is a response to any event/s encountered as out of control, frightening experiences that disconnect us from all sense of resourcefulness, safety, coping and/or love.

*(Tara Brach, 2011)*

- Trauma is not an event itself, but an emotional response to a painful and shocking event where there was no- one there to help you with what was happening at the time

*(Margot Sunderland)*



A person is seen from behind, standing in a dark, narrow tunnel. They are looking towards a bright, rectangular opening at the end of the tunnel. The tunnel walls are dark and textured, with some lights visible on the sides. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

# Some powerful stats

- **2017**

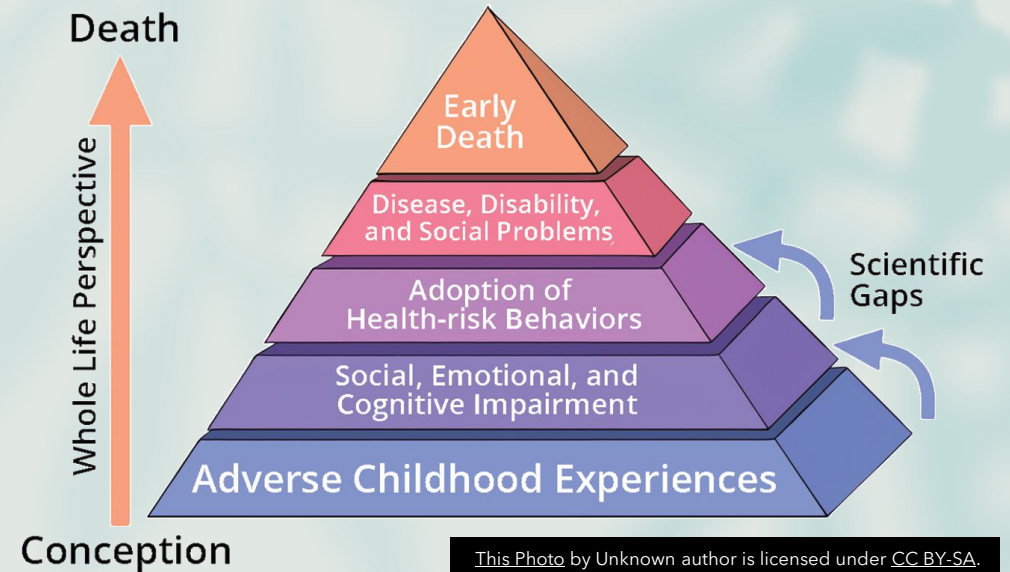
- 1 in 9 children and young people had a probable mental health disorder. 49% increase in emotional disorders since 2004.

- **July 2020**

- 1 in 6 children and young people had a probable mental health disorder.
- Research shows that 97% of children and teenagers with no traumatic life experience have no behaviour problems or learning difficulties....

# Model 1: ACEs

- **THE ACE STUDY (The Adverse Childhood Experiences study)**
- ...is the biggest ever Public Health Study (17000 people in 1998) to show a direct link between adverse child experiences, and poor mental and physical health decades later and in some cases, early death.
- ACEs Study - scored in terms of the number of the following experiences:



# ACEs

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## **Personal:**

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- Emotional abuse (humiliated/sworn at/put down/insulted)
- Emotional neglect (feeling unspecial/not important/ not loved/not supported)
- Physical abuse (push, grab, slap, throw things at you)
- Physical neglect (not enough to eat/ dirty clothes)
- Sexual abuse
- Being bullied
- Multiple moves

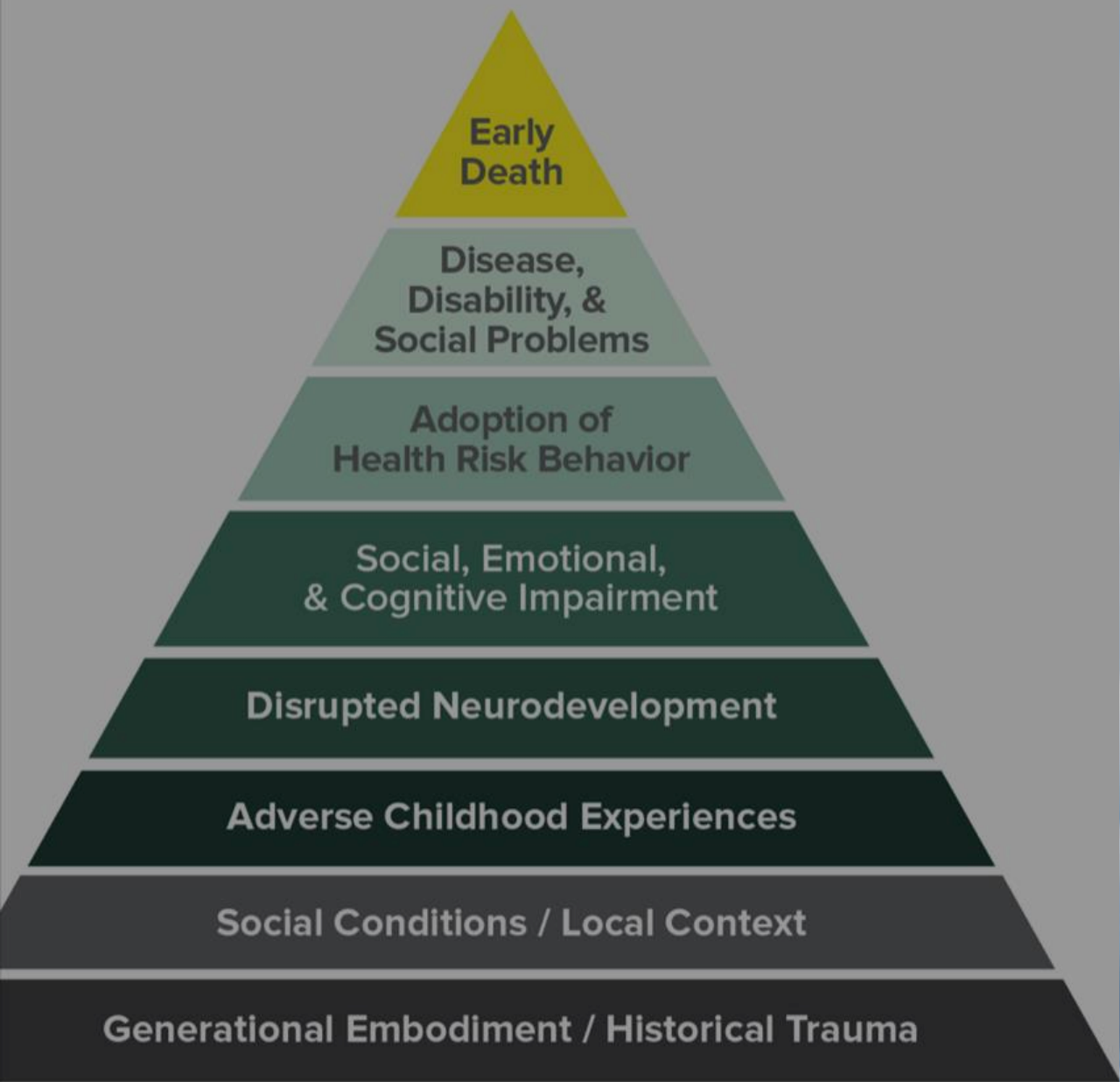
# ACEs

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## **Family members and home environment and neighbourhood:**

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- A family member depressed/ mental illness,
  - Loss of a parent or parent separation/divorce
  - A family member being addicted to drugs or alcohol
  - Witnessing domestic violence,
  - A family member in jail
  - Poverty
  - Violent neighbourhood
-



**Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences  
Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan**

**As the number of ACEs increase so does the risk  
of mental illness and attachment issues:**

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Conduct disorders
- Addictions to drugs/alcohol/smoking
- Learning difficulties
- ADHD diagnosis
- Violent behaviour
- Domestic violence
- Unemployment
- Poor educational attainment
- Teenage pregnancy
- Troubled relationships
- Attempted suicide

A person is lying in a hospital bed, partially covered by a white blanket. Their hands are clasped together. To the right, there is a piece of medical equipment with a control panel featuring a keypad and several buttons. Red wires are connected to the equipment. The background is slightly blurred, showing a hospital room setting.

**As the number of ACEs increases so does the risk of physical illness:**

- Heart attacks/Strokes
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Chronic lung disease
- Autoimmune disease
- Sleep disturbances
- Eating disorders
- Headaches
- Obesity
- Asthma
- Irritable Bowel syndrome
- Early death



# 97% of children with no ACEs have no learning problems

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## **3 ACEs or more**

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3 x times as likely to experience academic failure

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5 x times as likely to have attendance problems

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6 x times as likely to have behavioural problems

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## **4 ACEs or more**

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Over 50 percent had learning problems

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32 x more likely to have behaviour problems

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With each additional ACE is an increased risk of learning difficulties, behaviour

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problems, and becoming serious violent offender by age 35

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**Stress!!!**

**A high ACE score, without the social buffering of an emotionally available adult is likely to damage children's minds, brains and bodies because of toxic stress.**

**POSITIVE** - Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels. Improving attention and concentration.

**TOLERABLE** - Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.

**TOXIC** - Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships.



This Photo by Unknown author is licensed under [CC BY-NC](#).

# Unprocessed Trauma...

- ... can lead to **over-active** stress responses.
- So - minor stresses are experienced as major emergencies.
- Leads to neurochemical damage, self-harm, smoking, drug abuse, bullying, violent behaviour.



# Emotionally Available Adults – Key Message

- The introduction of an Emotionally Available Adult (EAA) to someone under the age of 18 can have a significant impact on the processing of trauma and positive life chances.
- For many people, this will be an adult in school.
- **Mr Pigden and Ian Wright** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6caCqn\\_nD6o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6caCqn_nD6o)
- **Mark Johnson MBE** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRtzgOPNcj8>

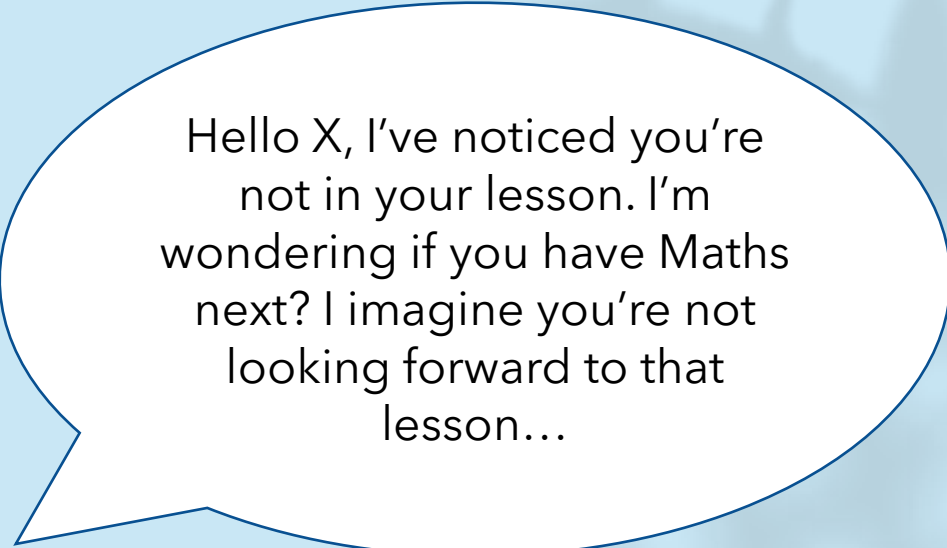
# Q. What do EEAs do?

- Replicate best parenting. But what is this?
- Active listening
- Attunement - 'moments of meeting' (Daniel Stern)
- Genuine empathy
- Containment - 'what is shareable is bearable' (Dan Siegel)
- Soothing

# Strategy 1: WINE

- These are sentence stems you can use in conversational interventions that will:
  - Support an individual to feel understood, bringing stress and anxiety levels down.
  - Help you talk in ways that make children and young people feel psychologically safe enough to want to talk.
  - Support children and young people find 'the words to say it' so they feel connected with and understood.
  - Avoid using more 'traditional' question stems that could be perceived as being judgmental.
    - ***What did you do that for?***
    - ***Why did you feel that way?***

- **W:** *I wonder...*
- **I:** *I imagine...*
- **N:** *I notice...*
- **E: Empathy**



Hello X, I've noticed you're not in your lesson. I'm wondering if you have Maths next? I imagine you're not looking forward to that lesson...

- Empathy is a key relational quality required from EAAs. Empathic responses lets the child know they are not alone and that the adult is able to imagine into their pain. This supports the adult and child to truly connect.
- *Responding with empathy or sympathy are two different things!*

# What is empathy? Brené Brown



# Model 2: Panksepp's Emotional Systems

Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp identified neural networks for seven ingrained emotion systems in the brain:

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## Social Defence

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RAGE

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FEAR

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PANIC/GRIEF

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## Social Engagement

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CARE (attachment)

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SEEKING (capacity for will, drive and energised engagement in life)

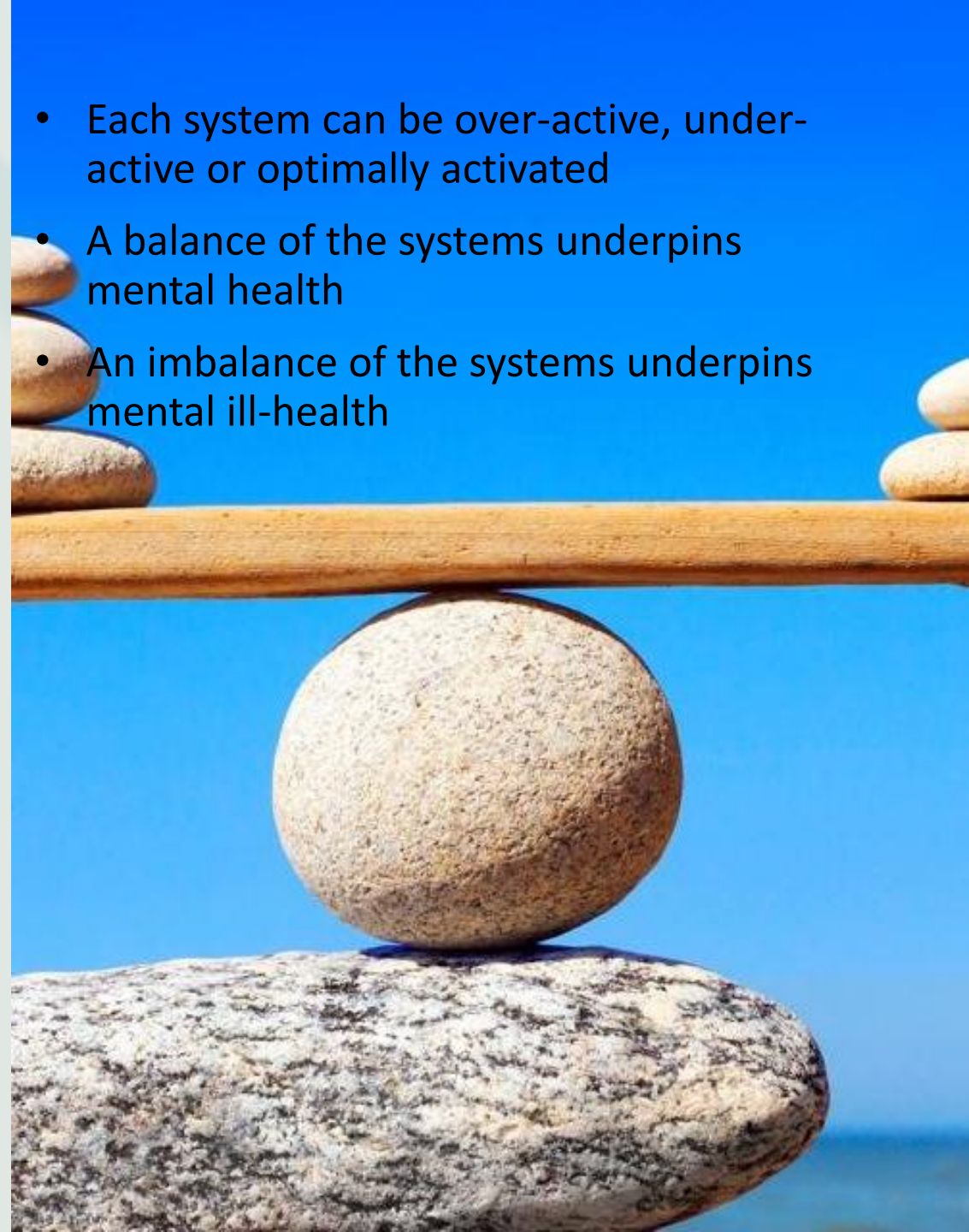
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PLAY (social joy)

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(LUST)

- Each system can be over-active, under-active or optimally activated
- A balance of the systems underpins mental health
- An imbalance of the systems underpins mental ill-health





# CARE, SEEKING, PLAY



Quality of life - 'Nature's gift to us' (Panksepp, 2012)



What do these mean to you?



How would an **under-active** CARE, SEEKING or PLAY system manifest itself in a child?

# RAGE, FEAR, PANIC

Likewise, how would an **over-active** RAGE, FEAR or PANIC system manifest itself?



# Activity

- **Activity: Think of your own childhood. Which feelings were accepted and validated by your parent/s in childhood? Which were denied, squashed or not supported?**
- *Reflect if this makes it difficult today for you to do one or more of the following:*
- Express anger/be assertive (optimally activated RAGE system)
- Cry and grieve well (optimally activated PANIC/GRIEF system)
- Be spontaneous and playful (optimally activated PLAY system)
- Be adventurous and pursue a dream (optimally activated SEEKING system)
- Have warmth and empathy (optimally activated CARE system)
- Get support for assertive action when something frightens you (FEAR system)

# Model 3: Protect, Relate, Regulate, Reflect

- **PROTECT**
- Remove the child/young person from the situation  
- non shaming, protecting dignity, lessening the stress load
- 'somewhere with someone'



A grayscale photograph of two hands, one on the left and one on the right, holding two interlocking puzzle pieces. The puzzle pieces are a dark purple color. The background is a light gray gradient. The text is overlaid on the puzzle pieces.

# Model 3

**RELATE**

'Connection before Correction'

Non-judgemental, accepting, validating, curious, empathic

A collection of colorful toys including dice, a wooden block, and various plastic shapes. The background is blurred, showing more toys in various colors like blue, yellow, and red. The text is overlaid on the image.

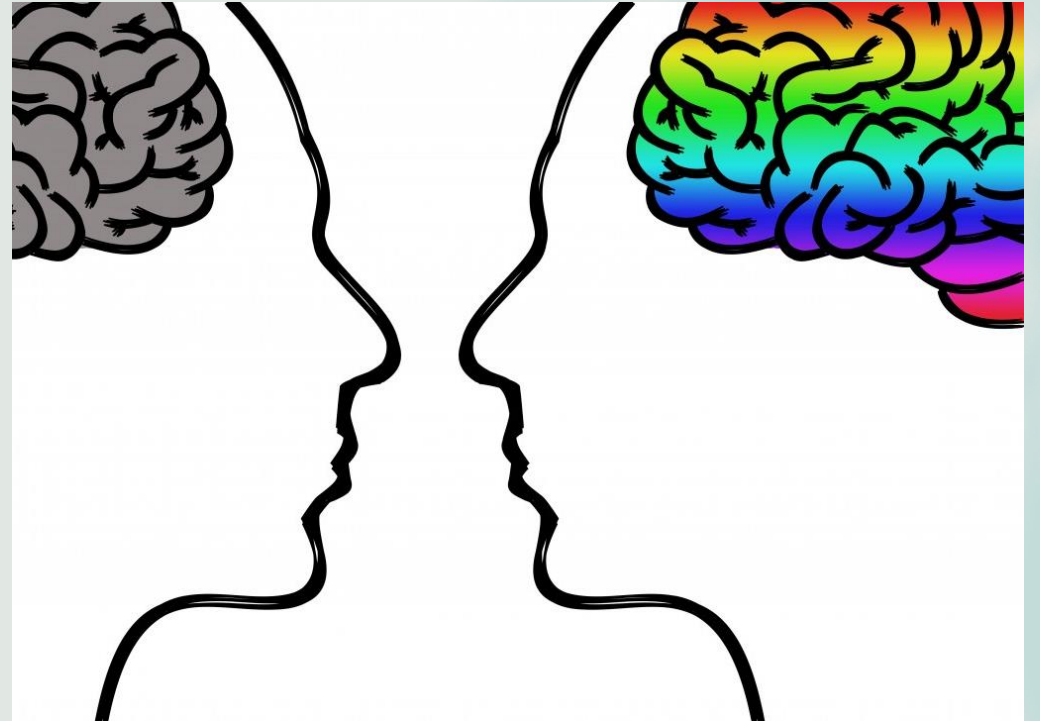
# Model 3

- **REGULATE**

- Activity to bring down stress chemicals - this may be play-based.
  - Emphasis on co-regulation

# Model 3

- **REFLECT**
- Sequencing events, thoughts, feelings, behaviours, mental state talk, maybe show me rather than tell me, exploring ways to handle it differently.
- “Help me understand’



# PRRR: What does this look like?

## 1. Protect

De-escalation techniques.  
Use of PACE (Hughes 2016) when faced with behaviours that challenge.  
'Safety cues' provided for students throughout the day (vocal prosody, facial mobilisation, modelling emotional regulation, and reflecting not reacting under stress.

## 2. Relate

Whole-school awareness of the neuroscience and psychology of attachment.  
Unconditional positive regard supports children to make the shift from blocked trust to trust.  
A range of ways of conveying empathy, directly and indirectly.

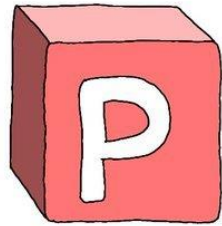
## 3. Regulate

Zones of Regulation.  
Conscious Discipline  
Sensory Circuits/breaks.  
Modeling self-regulation.  
Use of safe spaces  
Interventions  
Support and Intervention Plans

## 4. Reflect

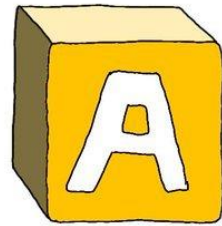
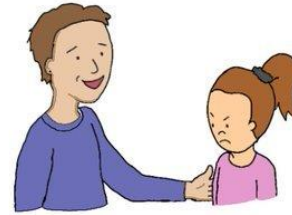
Utilising trusted adults - EAAs!  
Support and Intervention Plans/Risk Benefit Assessments (RBAs) identify triggers for challenging behaviours  
Zones of Regulation - naming emotions.  
Modeling pro-social behaviour and self-regulation.  
Listening to the voice of the child.





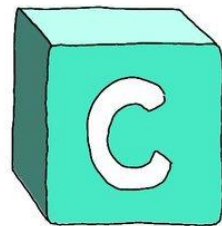
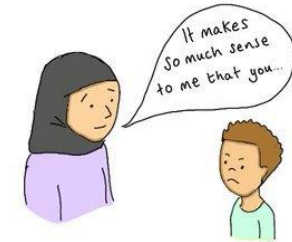
## Playfulness

- Playfulness in interactions can diffuse conflict and promote connection  
e.g. Maintaining a relaxed 'lightness' and can involve making a joke (though this has to be done carefully)



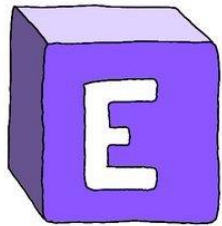
## Acceptance

- Accepting needs and emotions that drive behaviour (not necessarily the behaviour) without judgement



## Curiosity

- Being curious to where a behaviour has come from (in your head or out loud...)



## Empathy

- Really connecting with how they are feeling and showing compassion



P.A.C.E is an approach developed by Dr Dan Hughes aimed at supporting recovery from developmental trauma. However, it can be a useful attitude to adopt with anyone who is emotionally dysregulated



## Motional

Measuring and Improving  
Emotional Health and Well-being

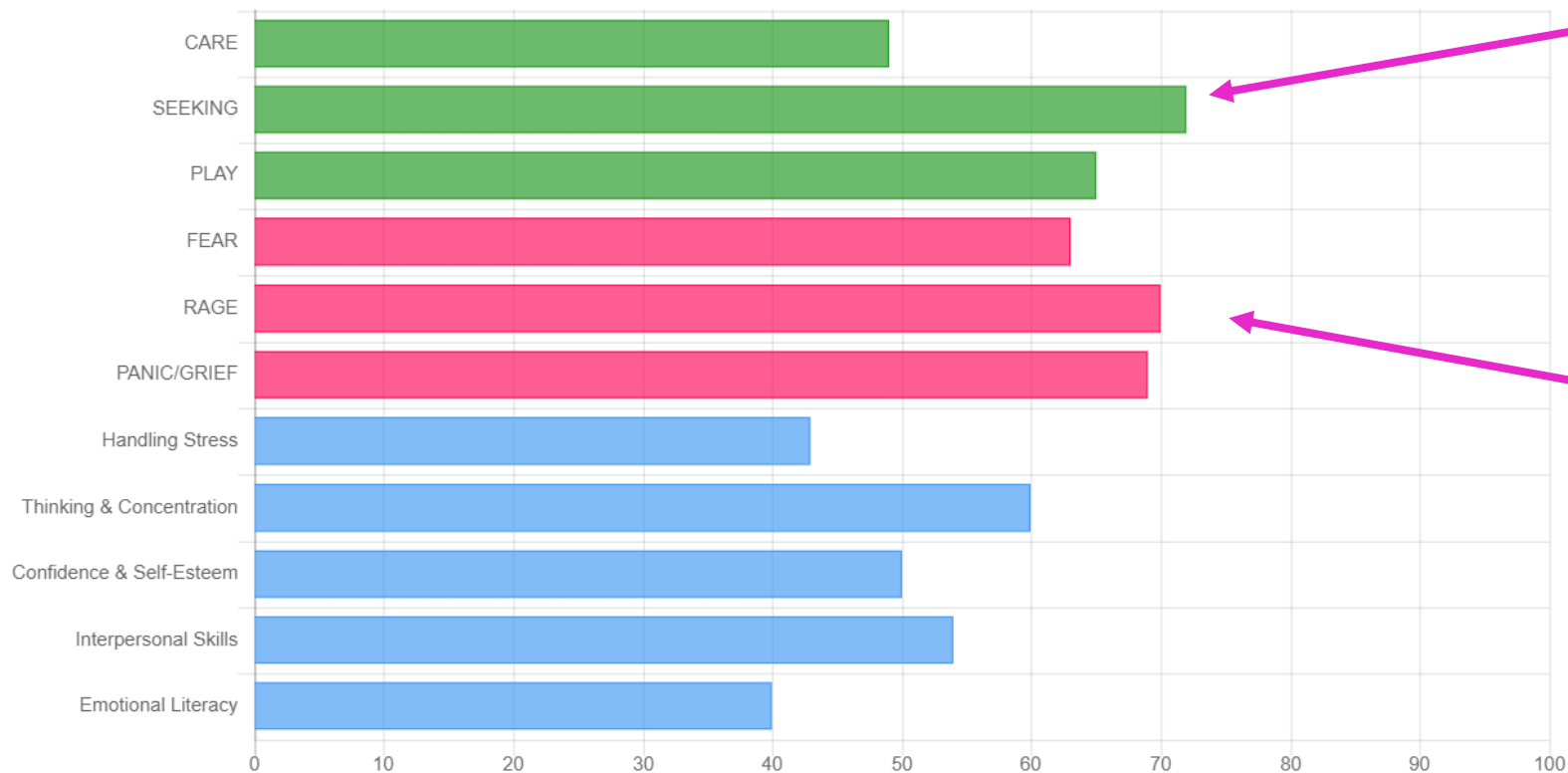
Motional is an online tool for identifying, assessing and improving the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people, based on Professor Jaak Panksepp's research on emotional systems in the brain and extensive research in executive functional skills.

- Motional can be used by all staff across the school.
- It provides a snapshot of how a child or young person is functioning in terms of their mental health and well being
- Allows you to create a program of strategies and practical activities to support emotional development. These strategies and activities link well with PACE.
- You can measure progress, for individuals and groups.
- [The Theory Behind Motional - Motional](#)

# Motional Assessment Snapshot 1



## Comprehensive Snapshot – Participant: Isabel Smith



**Done for:**  
Isabel Smith

**Done by:**  
Hannah Gadie

**Date:**  
2020-02-12 20:52:24

**Level:**  
Comprehensive Snap

Good play and seeking systems, but low in **care**.

High level of **rage** and **panic/grief**.

A photograph of a child's play area. On the left, a light-colored teddy bear is lying on a brown mat. On the right, a white paper plate is on the floor, with several small sticks or sticks of clay placed on it. The background is dark and out of focus.

# Based on snapshot 1, Motional recommended:

- Care
- Transitional objects
- Animal play
- Sand exploration (Sandplay)



# Motional Assessment Snapshot 2

## Comprehensive Snapshot – Participant: Isabel Smith



Care system

UP  
Fear  
Rage  
Panic/grief  
systems  
down

**Done for:**  
Isabel Smith  
**Done by:**  
Hannah Gadie  
**Date:**  
2020-11-26 19:02:54  
**Level:**  
Comprehensive Snapshot

# 3 Key Questions

01

What **one thing** will you do as a result of this training?

02

How has it changed the way you think?

03

What do you want to know more about?