

	Strengths in your current practice	Areas for further development
<p>I understand that a part of the human condition is that how we perceive and interact with the world is underpinned by our physiological state. If we feel safe then we will be able to be open and engaged, however, when we are triggered into a defensive state we will either be mobilized into fight/flight or immobilized into freeze.</p> <p>I know that we need to be in a physiological state of being open and engaged (feeling safe) in order to be able to interact positively with others, use our problem solving abilities, behave flexibly, be curious and have the capacity to learn.</p> <p>For those of us who have experienced trauma, however, we spend much less time in an open and engaged state and instead often oscillate between fight/flight and freeze states with only limited time being able to be open and engaged. Psychiatrist Bruce Perry describes this as children and young people who have experienced trauma developing a sensitised stress response (an overactive alarm system in the brain).</p>		
<p>An important way to communicate safety to children and young people who have experienced trauma is through our non-verbal behaviours, in particular, our facial expressions (smiles rather than flat facial expression) and our tone of voice (prosody rather than monotone).</p>		
<p>Physiological states are contagious and if we are able to stay in our own open and engaged state then we can influence the physiological states of those around us in a positive way.</p>		
<p>In addition, we can support children and young people to return to an open and engaged state when they have been triggered into a defensive state. The two most effective ways of achieving this are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-regulation through time with a trusted adult. We co-regulate through reciprocal interactions with another person i.e. shared moments of being fully with another person. This co-regulation can also be enhanced by physical activity which is best if it is slow and heavy for regulation from a fight/flight state and faster and more energised for regulation from a freeze state. 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using our breathing methods to regulate our physiological state. For example breathing in to the count of 7 and out to the count of 11. Our breathing is the one area of our physiology that we can consciously control. When we take deep, rhythmic breaths with slower, elongated exhalations then the sensors in our lungs send calming messages up the vagal nerve to our brain that we are safe. Making the time for even a couple of minutes of calming breathing has a significant impact on shifting our physiological state. We can, of course, use calming breathing on our own to self-regulate, however, it is even more powerful with a trusted other as a part of co-regulation. <p>It is these experiences of feeling safe in social interactions and co-regulating to return to an open and engaged state that, when experienced repeatedly overtime, support children and young people who have experienced trauma to return to a neurotypical stress response (as opposed to a sensitised stress response).</p>		
<p>Children and young people who have experienced trauma will have a much narrower window of tolerance which, like all of us, will reduce even further when we are in stressful situations.</p> <p>We can support a child or young person to remain within their window of tolerance by creating an environment which feels as safe as possible for them.</p> <p>We can support a child or young person to expand their window of tolerance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing repeated experiences of relational buffering (co-regulation by a trusted adult) in response to situations that the child or young person finds stressful. Providing experiences of joy/play in a safe relationship (safe mobilization) and experiences of comfort in a safe relationships (safe immobilization). 		
<p>Repeated experiences of safety in relationships is the healing process for children and young people who have experienced trauma. As Stephen Porges states very succinctly, “Feeling safe is the treatment for people who have experienced trauma.”</p>		

For more information on the transformative power of feeling safe read an article by Stephen Porges at <https://relationalimplicit.com/zug/transcripts/Porges-2011-11.pdf> or watch a video introduction by googling: *Seth Porges Polyvagal Theory*.