

# Becoming a Trauma- informed School

Christina Enright  
Child & Family Psychotherapist  
Trauma & Attachment  
Specialist



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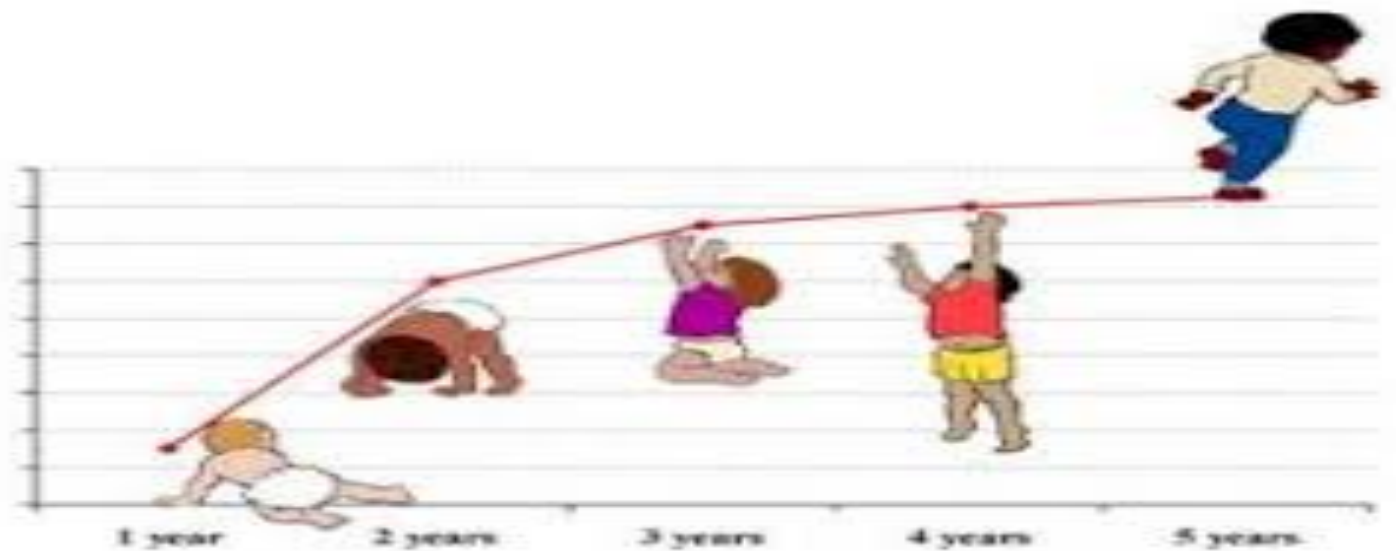
# Early Trauma Impacts on a Child's Brain Development, Functioning and Behaviour







# Brain Science



**"Thinking about Thinking"**

**Higher Reasoning**

**Executive Function**

## **Prefrontal Cortex**

**9 Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex**

1. Empathy
2. Insight
3. Response Flexibility
4. Emotion Regulation
5. Body Regulation
6. Morality
7. Intuition
8. Attuned Communication
9. Fear Modulation



## **Limbic Brain**

1. Fight, flight, freeze stress response
2. Thinks, "Am I safe? Do people want me?"
3. Emotions live here



# Developmental Trauma Disorder (Van Der Kolk, 2003)

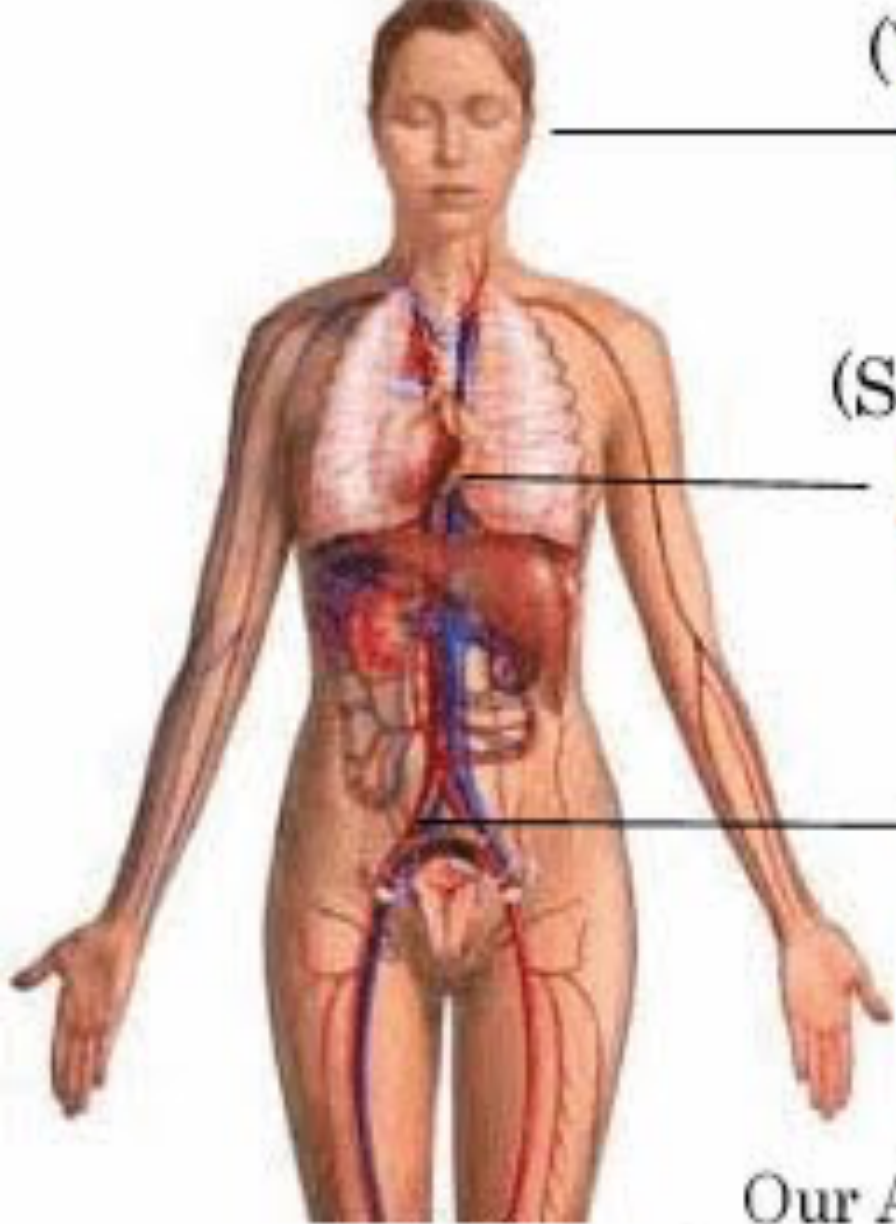
Multiple or chronic exposure to one or more forms of developmentally adverse interpersonal trauma (eg. Neglect, abandonment, betrayal, physical assaults, sexual assaults, threats to bodily integrity, coercive practices, emotional abuse, witnessing violence and death.





Fear Shuts Down Curiosity and Exploration: Fearful and Anxious Children Cannot Learn as they are in Survival Mode





(VVC) Ventral Vagal Complex: Signaling System  
for motion, emotion & communication.  
(Our Social Engagement System)

(SNS) Sympathetic Nervous System: Mobilization  
System for Flight or Fight Behaviors.  
(Our Aggressive Defense System)

(DVC) Dorsal Vagal Complex: Immobilization  
System for Conservation Withdrawal.  
(Our Passive Defense System)

Our Autonomic Nervous System fires muscular tensions triggered by feedback signals from the external & internal world at millisecond speeds below conscious awareness. These muscles tensions fire our Thoughts?

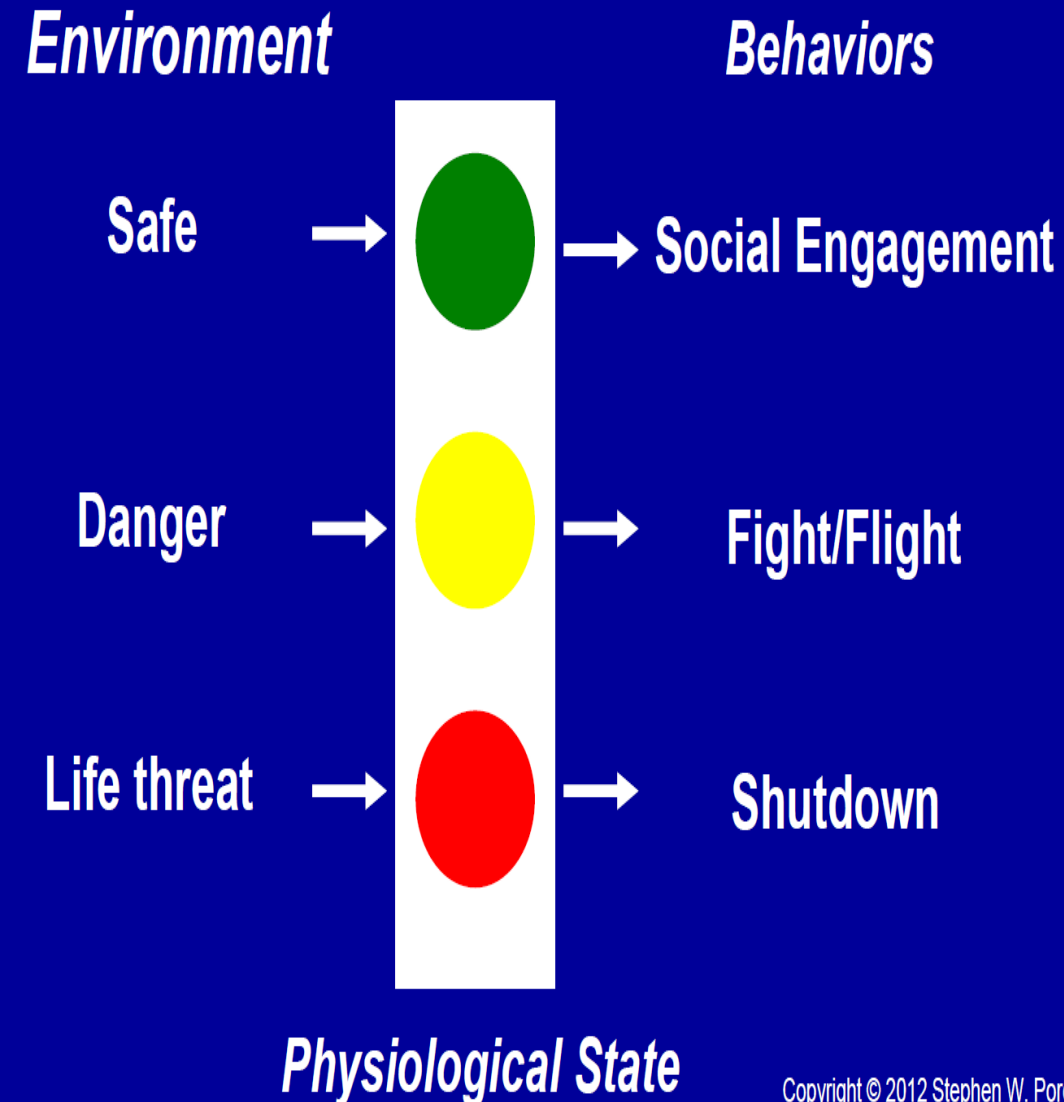
# Polyvagal Theory-

## Porges 2011

- Neurophysiological and neuroanatomical foundations of emotions, attachment, communication and self-regulation
- Challenges two dimension model of fight flight & freeze
- When no environmental demands or challenges ANS in balance- open, flexible, non-defensive
- 3 distinct subsystems of ANS behaviorally linked to threat/danger:
  - mobilisation- negotiate threat ~ escape possible
  - social engagement- seek protection- slows heart rate, calms body and mind through safety cues
  - Overwhelming threat: Immobilisation- shutdown/dissociation



# Neuroception



## Expectations Of Threat/Attack!

Neuroception and Interoception  
Influence Perception

“our state of mind can turn even  
neutral comments into fighting words,  
distorting what we hear to fit what we  
fear.”

(Siegel, 2011)

- Children growing up in unsafe/ dangerous environments with no escape become disorganised and struggle to detect/judge threat accurately- perceive **all** people are threatening-lack of basic trust.
- Tendency for fight/flight or shut down in freeze.
- Read neutral faces as aggressive and fearful faces as angry
- Dissociate as experiencing “**fear without resolution**”
- Primitive defenses constantly mobilised- implicit memory from sensory cues
- Healthy care seeking shut down





# Manifestations Of Trauma

## Impairments- Physiological, Cognitive and Psychological



Interpersonal Trauma shapes and cements the internal working model and affect scripts into patterns of behaviour

- It devastates basic trust, can fracture the mind and quash the spirit
- Flashbacks, nightmares, intrusions, triggers, seizures, absences (dissociation)
- Affect tolerance and regulation
- Somatic experiencing
- Cognitive/information processing
- Self-concept
- Relationships with self/other

# Failures in Attunement and State Regulation

## Impairments in:

- Self-regulation- calming down, warming up, stress management
- Processing of information- subject to distortions
- Social functioning – ability to engage in relationships/social skills







# Supporting Children Towards Recovery

# People Need People



- Trauma as a brain injury rather than a pathology residing within a person.
- Understanding how trauma impacts and how humans develop strategies to survive, compensate and self-protect- helps us to recognise how we can help
- The importance of affect attunement for safety/sociostatic regulation & healthy development and functioning in humans through life
- The transformative power of an attuned therapeutic relationship
- The healing power of empathy

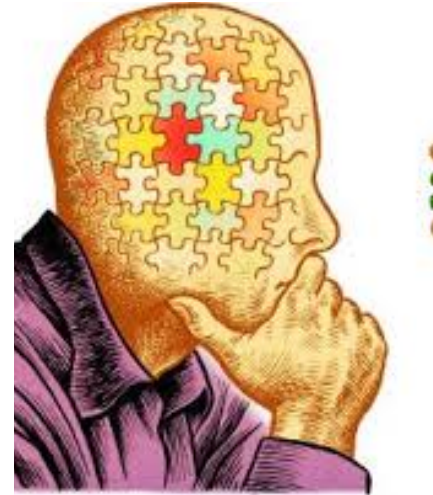




# What Does The Research Say?



- Adults who take time to get to know and understand the child
- Adults who help the child to feel safe- physically and emotionally- linked to trust and predictability
- Adults who are able to understand and empathise with the child's subjective experience
- Adults who recognise behaviour as communication
- Adults who regulate themselves well
- Adults who repair disconnections
- Adults who are able to equip the child with the learning and skills to cope with challenge
- Adults who are able to recognise and reflect back the child's strengths (rather than focusing on failures or pathology).
- In organisations there needs to be a whole organizational commitment to this and a broad philosophy of care towards staff as well as children.



- Responding in Relationship
- Responding to Behaviour





Thank you for  
Receiving  
my Presentation