

LEE MAITZ OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

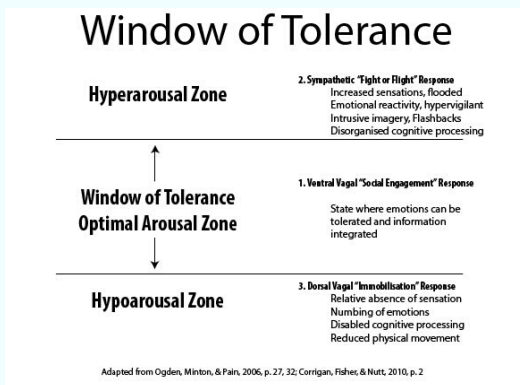


TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN
THROUGH A TRAUMA-INFORMED LENSE

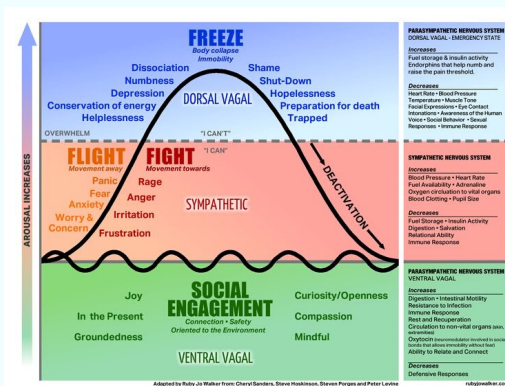
What is trauma?

Each individual experiences stress as it is the state of learning and growth. We all have a range, or "window", of tolerance to stress- some people's windows are very narrow, others are wider. When our ability to cope with stress moves out of that window of tolerance, whether that stress is in response to a single, or multiple, distressing or disturbing events, we move from a state of thriving to a state of survival which is known as fight and flight, and freeze. When the perception of threat continues beyond the event and our mind and body remain in this state of survival- this is trauma.



When we experience trauma, our central nervous system (CNS) activates "survival mode". This changes our perception of our environment and our body, directly impacting our behavioural responses. Our body continues to hold the tension and our mind remains alert to further potential threat, significantly impacting our ability to attend, learn and engage.

The following diagram outlines Polyvagal Theory, the leading theory in understanding how the brain and nervous system respond to trauma, and shows, in detail, the behavioural, physiological and emotional symptoms of these responses.



Principles of trauma-informed care

- Trauma-informed care starts with the understanding that all behaviour is a response and developing the curiosity for why people behave the way they do is vital.
- Understanding that the stress response is designed to ensure we survive and is autonomic not a voluntary, conscious decision therefore cognitive processes such as reflection, reasoning and problem solving are not “switched on” .
- Gaining knowledge of the prevalence, signs and symptoms of trauma and understanding the importance of knowing what triggers an individual with trauma is important.
- Promoting the importance of relationship in supporting children with trauma.
- Facilitating ongoing learning opportunities to promote compassion and understanding.
- Understanding the connection between the body, mind and spirit- how we think, feel, move and perceive are all inter-related.
- What one person perceives as a trauma is not necessarily the same for another as trauma is influenced by experience and perception, genetics and neurology.

How can you help?

The following is a list of general strategies that can be supportive for kids in "survival mode", however, are not a substitute for individualised trauma-informed therapy.

1. Provide safety through relationship and co-regulation.
2. Hold space, with genuine empathy and compassion, for the child to feel, express and regulate their emotions without judgement or comment.
3. Encourage diaphragmatic breathing.
4. Rhythmical Movement followed by breathing exercises.
5. Facilitate time in nature to calm the nervous system.
6. Provide opportunities for the child to nurture- taking care of a plant or animal is a wonderful way to facilitate nurturing.
7. Provide opportunities for appropriate touch sensation such as nestling in bean bags, holding a gym ball, craft activities.
8. Balance games to activate inner core muscles to support diaphragmatic breathing
9. Provide opportunities for creative expression including dance, drama, singing, painting, drawing, journaling, poetry
10. Provide opportunities for mindfulness- craft projects are a great option to bring the eyes, hands and attention to the here and now.
11. Spark joy and laughter through playfulness- experiencing joy, particularly in the context of relationship is a powerful antidote to stress.
12. Use of rhythm- listen to music, make music, move to music, create to music, swing, bounce, rock or simply throw a ball back and forth.
13. Provide opportunities for the child to share their wisdom and knowledge.

Final word- When kids are moving out of "freeze" there will be a period of chaos before the calm- this is when they'll need strong support.