

Catalyst Connects: Belonging Matters



Session 6: Mental Health

**Presented by:
Dr Paula Muir
Educational Psychologist**



**Funded by
UK Government**

**Catalyst
Psychology**



Outline of this session

Brief recap of previous sessions

Main aims:

- Understanding the impact of trauma on memory and how this affects behaviour and learning.
- Using the flip your lid model to help children understand big emotions and strategies that can help them
- Identifying behaviour that may indicate hyper and hypo arousal
- Using the model regulate, relate, reason, support adults with co-regulating children.



Trauma versus stress

- Stress is present in trauma; however not every stressful situation is traumatic.
- In addition, trauma is also different from an adverse life experience. The key in differentiating stress from trauma is evaluating how it was experienced and what symptoms resulted from that experience.
- Trauma = the interaction between the person and the event. It is personal and individual.



What next?

- Not all refugees will experience trauma
- Watchful waiting and trauma informed approaches support all children
- Children who are still struggling after 6 – 8 weeks



Trauma and memory

Trauma impacts on a number of different types of memory.

Memory plays an important role in learning, play and social interactions.

There are huge implications around assessing children who have experienced significant trauma too soon.



Explicit memory		Implicit memory	
Semantic memory	Episodic memory	Emotional memory	Procedural memory
<p><u>What is it?</u></p> <p>The memory of general knowledge and fact</p>	<p><u>What is it?</u></p> <p>The autobiographical memory of an event or experience – including the who, what and where</p>	<p><u>What is it?</u></p> <p>The memory of the emotions you felt during an experience</p>	<p><u>What is it?</u></p> <p>The memory of how to perform a task without actively thinking</p>
<p><u>How trauma can affect it</u></p> <p>Trauma can prevent information from different parts of the brain, e.g. words, images, sounds etc, from joining and making sense.</p> <p>Learning and concentration difficulties</p> <p>Regression in learning</p> <p>Difficulties retaining new information/ new learning</p>	<p><u>How trauma can affect it</u></p> <p>Children may not clearly recall events, or their recall comes from hearing adults talking about their experiences.</p> <p>Memories may be jumbled and confusing</p> <p>How every day experiences are remembered – negative memories become more prominent than positive ones</p> <p>Children need to be able to draw on past experiences to help them deal with new situations. This can lead to difficulties with play and relationships, and fear and mistrust of others.</p>	<p><u>How trauma can affect it</u></p> <p>After a traumatic experience, very big painful memories can suddenly be triggered, often by sensory input, like a smell or a sound. For children they come out of nowhere and have no context.</p> <p>Children often don't know or understand what triggered the feeling, and the feeling can be the same intensity as the time when they were unsafe.</p> <p>These feelings can't be 'reasoned away'</p> <p>Thoughts about the traumatic event that won't go away</p> <p>Talking about traumatic events as though they are happening now</p> <p>Avoiding talking about certain topics</p>	<p><u>How trauma can affect it</u></p> <p>Trauma can change patterns of procedural memory, which might mean children's bodies are tense or they hold themselves differently during activities. This can lead to pain and numbness. Something that children previously enjoyed or completed easily, might now result in pain, discomfort or fatigue.</p> <p>Ongoing physical health complaints with not apparent cause.</p>



Childhood Trauma, War and Conflict - UKTC



[https://youtu.be/ YSA7-xCz4k](https://youtu.be/YSA7-xCz4k)



Feeling or emotions?

1. Feelings are triggered by memories
2. Emotions are triggered by sensory input (and linked to the brain's safety response)



Behaviour as a form of communication

- Children's behaviour will communicate when they are experiencing big feelings or emotions.
- Assessing mental health is a job for a trained mental health practitioner, but we can all observe and understand behaviour to inform support
- We can use co-regulation with children and teach them some self-regulation strategies



Assessment: Using the Window of Tolerance (nicabm.com)

**Stress and Trauma
Can Shrink Your
Window of Tolerance.**

This means that it may be harder to stay calm and focused. When you're outside your window of tolerance, you may be more easily thrown off balance.



HYPERAROUSAL

This is when you feel extremely anxious, angry, or even out of control. Unfamiliar or threatening feelings can overwhelm you, and you might want to fight or run away.

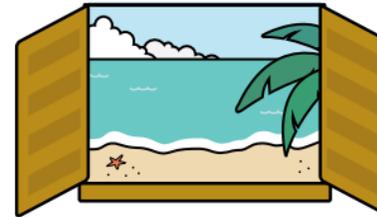


DYSREGULATION

This is when you begin to feel agitated. You may feel anxious, revved up, or angry. You don't feel out of control, but you also don't feel comfortable.

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

This is where things feel just right, where you are best able to cope with the punches life throws at you. You're calm but not tired. You're alert but not anxious.



**Your Work with
Your Practitioner Can
Help to Enlarge Your
Window of Tolerance.**

They can help you stay calm, focused, and alert even when something happens that would usually throw you off balance.

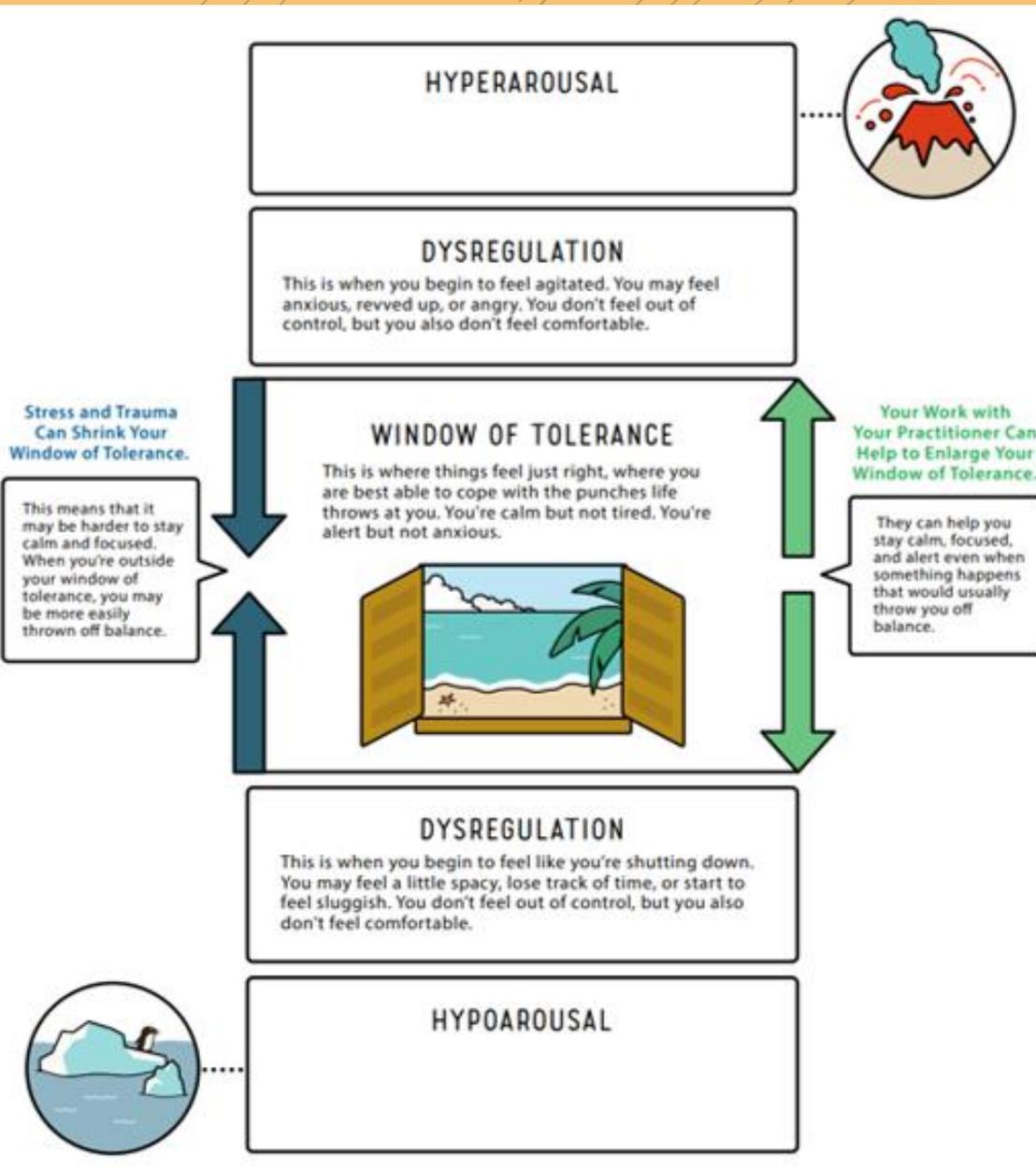
DYSREGULATION

This is when you begin to feel like you're shutting down. You may feel a little spacy, lose track of time, or start to feel sluggish. You don't feel out of control, but you also don't feel comfortable.

HYPOAROUSAL

This is when you feel extremely zoned out and numb, both emotionally and physically. Time can go missing. It might feel like you're completely frozen. It's not something you choose – your body takes over.

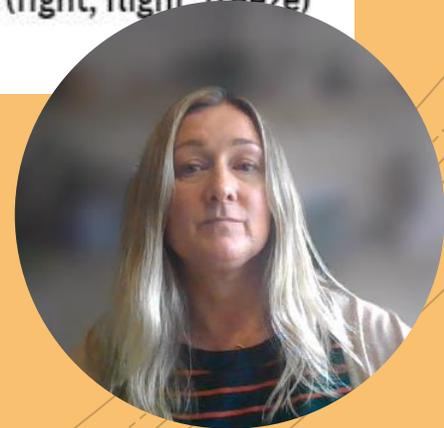
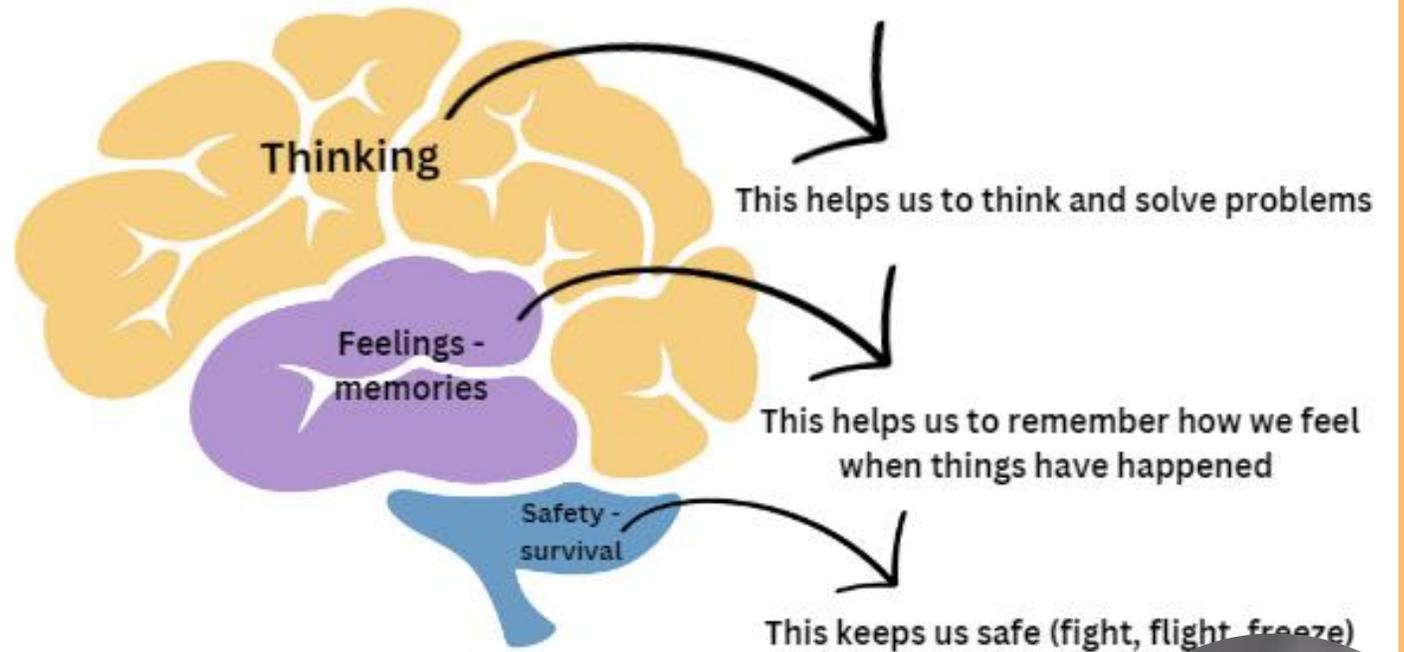




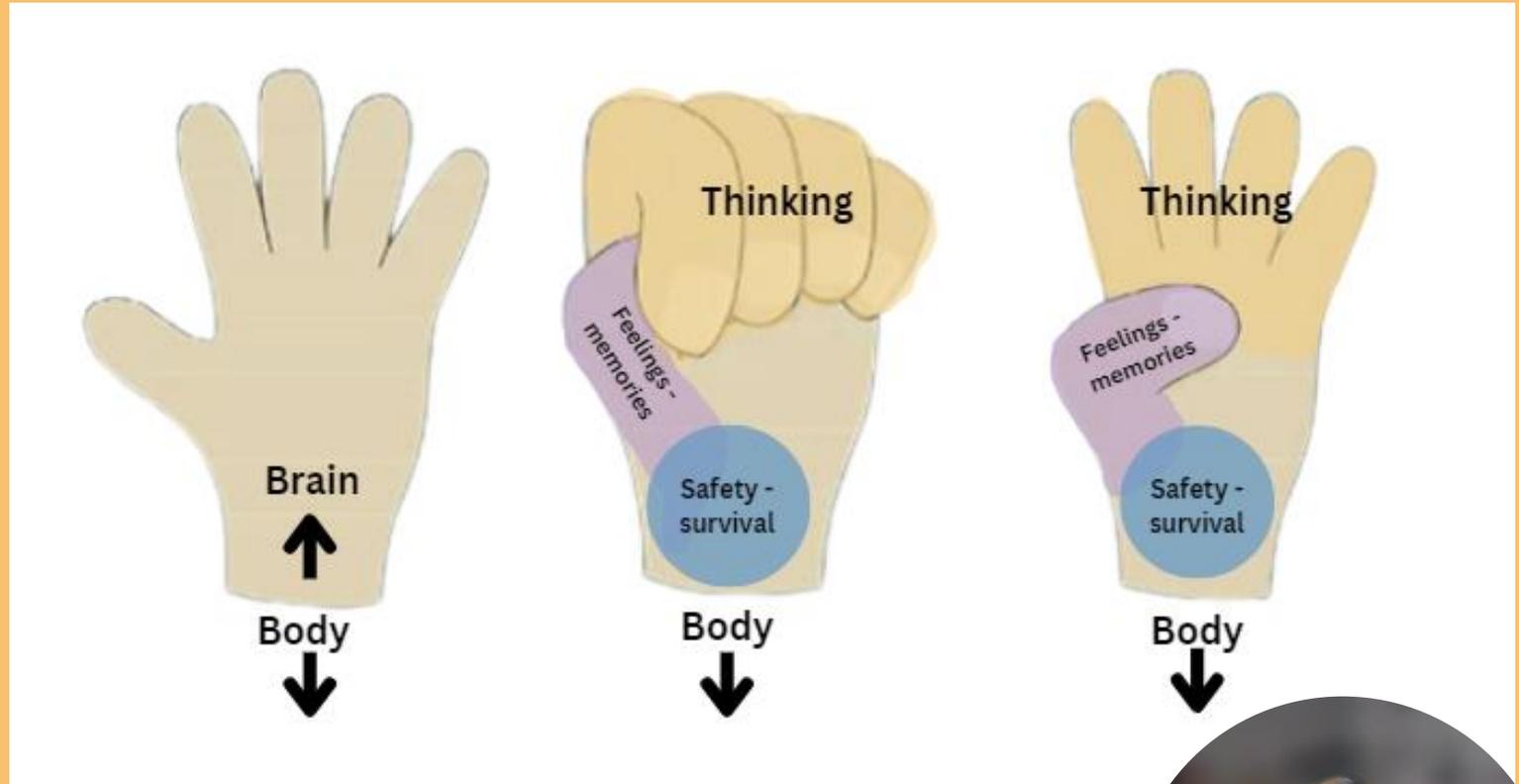
- Not wanting to play with others, difficulties in their relationships
- High energy, restlessness, quick movements
- Zoning out
- Hypervigilance
- Passive
- Panic, easily scared or startled
- Angry outbursts or irritability
- Self-destructive behaviour
- Numb
- Difficulty concentrating
- Tired
- Frozen
- Excessive crying
- Depression



Strategy: Teaching children how the body and brain work together



Flipping your lid model (Dan Seigel)



How can we help
children in crisis?
(Bruce Perry)

1. **Regulate**
2. **Relate**
3. **Reason**
4. **Repair**



Regulate

(Bruce Perry, Tina Rae)

Back into the window of tolerance

- Breathwork and breathing exercises
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Slow repetitive rhythmic activities
 - Rocking back and forth on your feet
 - Walking and talking
 - Using fiddle/fidget toys
- Weighted blanket (not for sleeping)
- Star jumps
- Sensory trays
- Chewy crunchy food
- Sensory rainsticks of bottles
- Handwashing or massage
- Stress balls and slime
- Dancing and music
- Feeling the soles of their feet on the floor
- Bouncing a ball
- Mindful colouring
- Access to a safe space



Progressive Muscle Relaxation example (Tina Rae)

(5 – 10 minute)

1 – Find a space where you can relax and allow yourself at least 10 minutes for this exercise. Get into a comfortable position and focus on your breathing, taking deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth

2 – Starting at your feet, tense all the muscles from your toes to the arches of your feet and your ankles, and hold for 10 seconds then release and relax for 20 seconds.

3- Work up your body from your feet all the way up to your head, isolating areas of the body tensing, holding and then releasing. Do this with your feet, lower legs, upper legs, bottom, abdomen, chest, hands, arms, shoulders and neck and finally your head.

4- Take the time to notice the difference between tensed muscles and the soft relaxed muscles elsewhere in your body.

5- At the end take a moment to focus on the breath and notice how heavy and relaxed your body feels. You can continue with your day or drifting off into a peaceful sleep.



Setting up a safe
space
(Tina Rae)

Location

Furniture

Meaningful visuals

Calm down tools

Teach children about
safe space



Relate

- Focus on connecting with the child; connection helps to calm the nervous system
- Show that you care even after a difficult behaviour
- Use active listening skills
- Notice and validate children's **feelings (not the behaviour)** with words and tone of voice, e.g.

“I’m wondering if it feels hard to concentrate on your work right now”

“I’m wondering if you are still feeling overwhelmed and might want a movement break”



Reason

- Once calm learners can learn new ways to manage their behaviour when they experience big emotions.
- We can only teach these when they are calm (because the thinking brain is online)
- It's important to normalise the child's experience so that they know understand it as an adaptive response – they are not bad or broken.
- Support children to develop means of expressing their emotions that do not harm themselves or others – language and strategies
- Helping children to understand what is happening in their body can help them to feel less afraid, e.g. the lid model



Repair (Education Scotland)

- To repair relationships, rebuild trust, and/or open lines of communication again
- Avoids all or nothing thinking
- Helps children to take responsibility for their own behaviour and increases autonomy
- Questions:
 - What happened (including thoughts and feelings)
 - How have others been affected?
 - What needs to happen now to fix things?
 - How can we help repair them situation?
- Helps children to get back into their routines



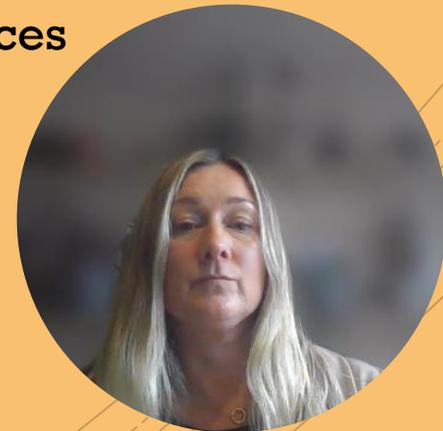
Cultural differences and mental health

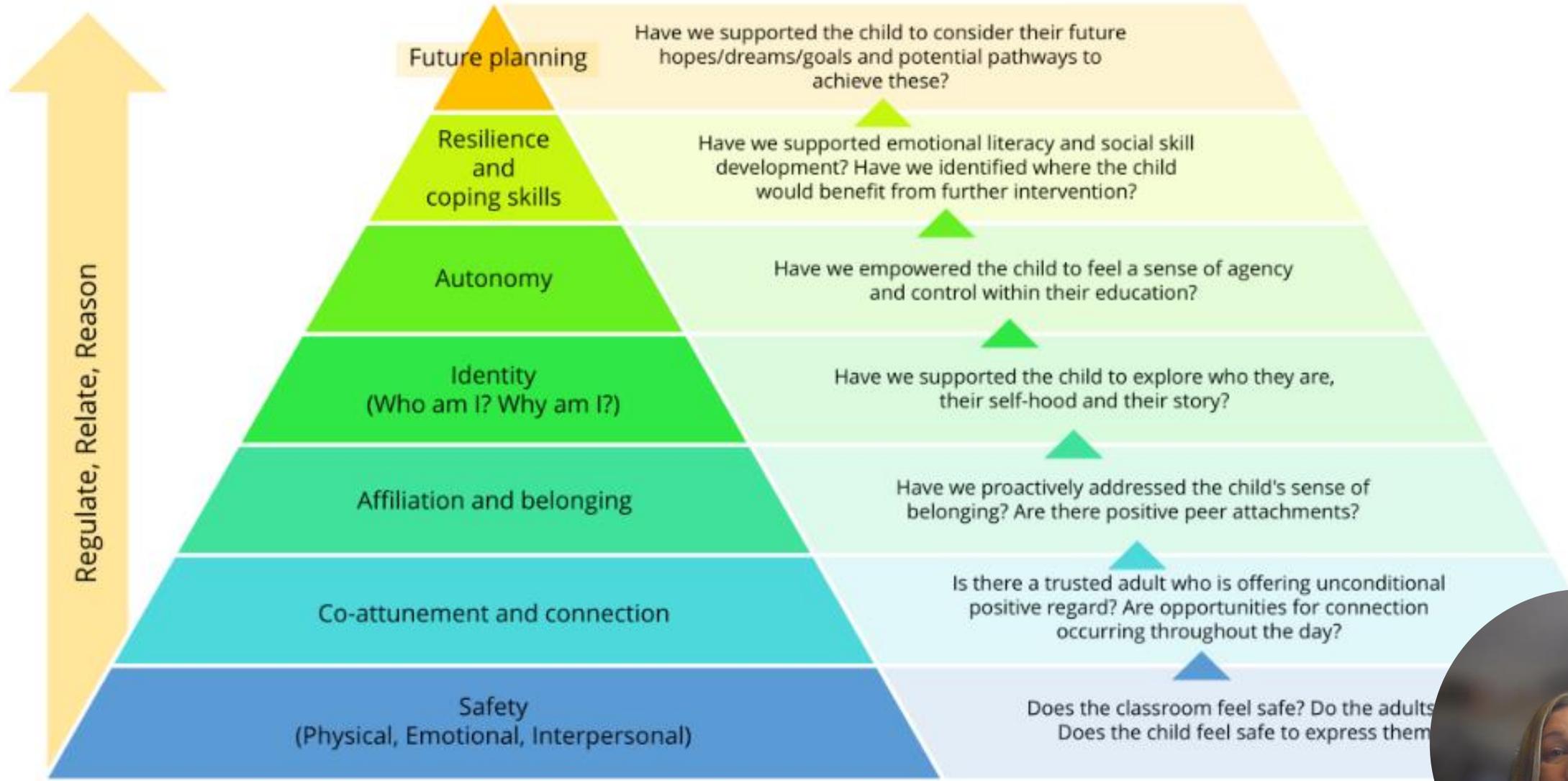
- Normalise responses to trauma as brain adaptations to help children stay safe in an unsafe environment.
- Be aware of cultural narrative around mental health
- Be aware of cultural differences around wellbeing



Useful links and resources

- Educational films for mental well-being | Mental Health Foundation
- https://www.yarannorthwest.com/?page_id=895
- Therapeutic support | Barnardo's Helplines (barnardos.org.uk)
- Virtual Youth Space | Barnardo's Helplines (barnardos.org.uk)
- HongKongwell.co.uk
- Winstons Wish for any bereavement resources





Creative Commons License: CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 (Original: Dr Jemma Carter, January 2023)



Outline of this session

Brief recap of previous sessions

Main aims:

- Understanding the impact of trauma on memory and how this affects behaviour and learning.
- Using the flip your lid model to help children understand big emotions and strategies that can help them
- Identifying behaviour that may indicate hyper and hypo arousal
- Using the model regulate, relate, reason, support adults with co-regulating children.

