



School Management ideas for children affected by (developmental) Trauma /Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

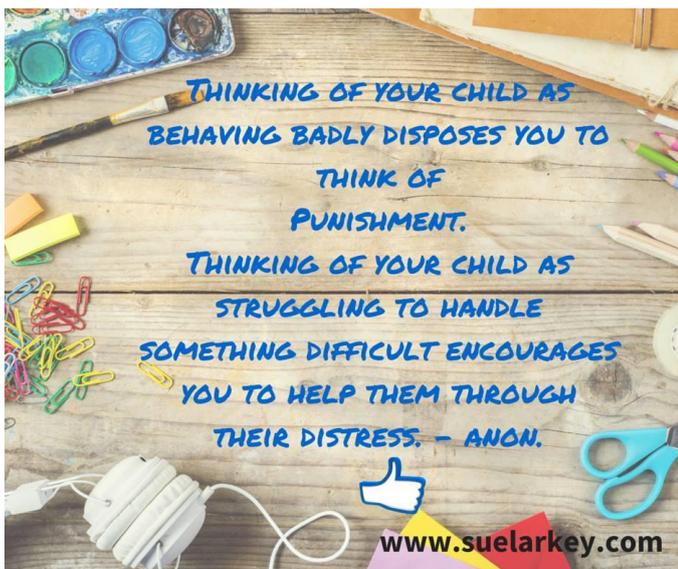
Children, who experience adversity in their life, present with developmental differences. Research into brain function and brain activity has shown that various areas of the brain are affected. Consequently children present differently in 4 major areas.

The following 4 areas are identified:

1. Diminished social reward
2. Threat Bias
3. Emotional dysregulation
4. Difficulty with executive functioning

More information can be found in the booklets (4) from:

Developmental Differences in children who have experienced adversity. These can be found here:
<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/developmental-differences>



For more information and examples of children affected by Trauma/adverse childhood experiences (ACE) please see link below:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adverse_Childhood_Experiences_Study

In Aboriginal culture there is a lot of unresolved grieve and loss. Colonisation has caused trauma and disruption of cultural ways.

Children enrolled in Little Possums all have adverse childhood experiences and their various behaviours can be understood from a trauma and attachment perspective. In order to learn, children need to experience safety. Children, who experience trauma, have a diminished sense of safety, have big overwhelming feelings that they can't

regulate and control. These emotions are often triggered by various causes, eg a loud voice, bumping into someone, a certain look, something someone says, feeling unworthy or not capable, just to name a few. Children are not able to explain what is happening, their survival brain takes over and they react.

Children react with the best coping mechanism they know in order to create safety. Although these behaviours are not helpful in the classroom, they fulfil a purpose. It is about survival.

Example behaviour: Children being distracted by a noise or a movement, children who can't sit still, children who want to be close to an adult, children acting out, running away, climbing on roofs etc. These behaviours are all coping behaviours, behaviours that help them feel safer, more regulated. Some children get very angry and lose themselves in their anger which is very scary. The anger is an involuntary fight reaction and is a very scary state to be in as the child feels overwhelmed by feelings and unable to manage what is happening. These children need support in being understood in these big emotions, finding ways to keep them and others safe with boundaries set within a safe and secure setting.

When kids react this way, Dan Siegel (Trauma expert) calls this "flipping the lid". He explains this in the following youtube clip:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=youtube+flipping+the+lid+dan+siegel&view=detail&mid=F7A61AF2D8235151E315F7A61AF2D8235151E315&FORM=VIRE>

Their life experience could have been that they couldn't trust an adult to look after them, adults who felt threatening in their behaviour or language such as domestic violence, their carer might have depression and hasn't been able to look after their child's needs, both physical and emotionally. Families of children at Little Possums have often experienced generational difficulties, meaning that parents often as children didn't get the safety they needed and as a result are not yet able to support their children. Parents need support too.

When children feel overwhelmed, behaviours are driven by the autonomous nervous system that kicks in when we need to survive. These kids experience something in their body that triggers an unsafe bodily memory. Trauma disconnects the thinking brain and sits in the body. The reaction to this perceived treat is automatic and not calculated.

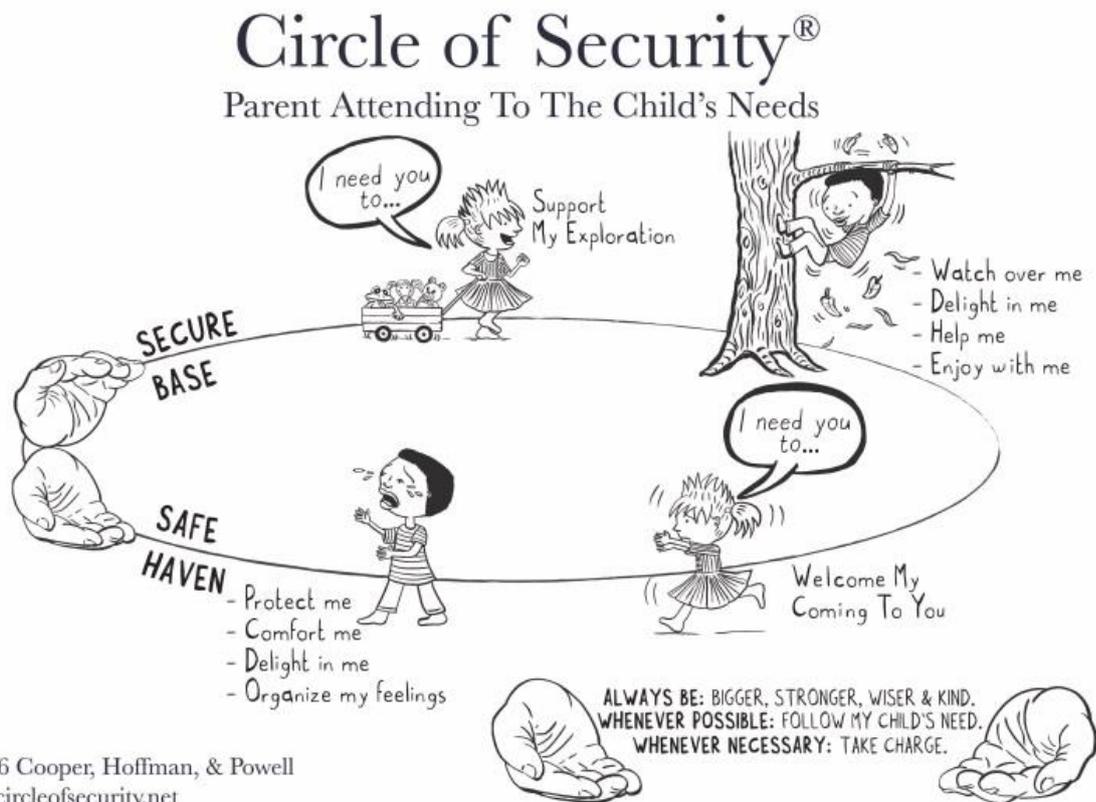
To punish those children, who show angry behaviour, increases their shame. To deny them their safe person without an alternative means they feel rejected (in their eyes) and their attachment seeking behaviour (being clingy) will increase, letting children walk around on their own, and be on their own, reinforces their idea that they are not worthy of being cared for, being supported and being held in their distress. This brings them further into the feeling that the world is an unsafe place, "nobody cares and I need to look after myself". Thus a negative cycle can be created.

When we look at trauma informed strategies, we don't condone these behaviours but we see them for what they are and try to support the child with healthier alternatives and positive, supportive experiences in relation with a trusted, caring adult.

Connection is a key word for healing and building alternative pathways, creating a more positive and trusting belief about the world and the people in it. Children depend on safe adults who understand their emotional needs and who can intervene before they get overwhelmed.

We can help these children by building classrooms that feel safe to them. The circle of security can give us some information around this as well as trauma informed classrooms.

Circle of security: <https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/resources>



Strategies teachers and the school as a whole can put into place:

1. A safe and predictable environment. This includes:

- Routines and rituals in classroom. Starting each day with a positive relational activity. Set the tone for learning and engagement. (Berry Street Education Model)
- Stability. When these kids know that a casual teachers comes in and RFF takes place, their alarm bells go off and coping mechanisms are activated. Knowing that this will happen, prepare them for it and offer a safe alternative to them. Can these kids do a task for the teacher, can they go to a safe room where they can do some work with an adult, eg Aboriginal Liaison Officer, support teacher. Each child will be different and teachers can explore what best works.
- Support with emotion regulation. Co-regulate by using an empathic voice. Offer a regulating activity:
 - Walking. Ask them to walk to reception to deliver a note that request the children to take something back to the teacher.
 - Closeness to teacher. Hand on shoulder standing next to them
 - An in class brain break either for all children or for the one child brain breaks can be found on internet (<https://minds-in-bloom.com/20-three-minute-brain-breaks/>)
 - Some examples for individual kids: wash hands, sit on pillow on floor with fiddly toy, play doh, lego, sand in small tray, bubbles
 - **Set limits and boundaries using ACT: Acknowledge the Feeling, Communicate the limit, Target an alternative.**
A: I can see you are angry,
C: but you can't hurt your classmate

T: but you can go kick a ball and we talk about it after

Take charge when kids get overwhelmed by their feelings. Limits and boundaries the therapeutic way teaches children to self-regulate and take responsibility for their actions. Watch it on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPBtDh6l6b4>

2. Close proximity to teacher and a reassuring gesture

Teacher can move to child or can invite child to come sit with them. Use of friendly, calming inviting voice.

3. Support with fulfilling a task

Go through steps of activity with child. Creating success experiences for these kids however small.

4. Lots of positive regard for these kids, however difficult.

These children experience a lot of failure and rejection and subsequently feel that way about themselves, causing a downward spiral. Help them see themselves differently and start with noticing the small things about them that make them unique. Let them know they are worth having in your class.

5. Instead of 'whats' wrong with you?' ask 'what happened'

Kids who experience adversity go through way too much often before they get to school, or the night before. They often don't sleep. Imagine what sleep deprivation does to children. Remember that school is often their safe space.

6. Agree on a gesture or greeting that will be used to indicate that emotions are starting to flow over

Allow for strategy to be used. Notice when children 'get wobbly' and offering things that can keep them safe.

7. Find out what makes them laugh and feel good

Offer lots of small doses of these interactions or activities.

8. Recess time is especially tricky for these kids

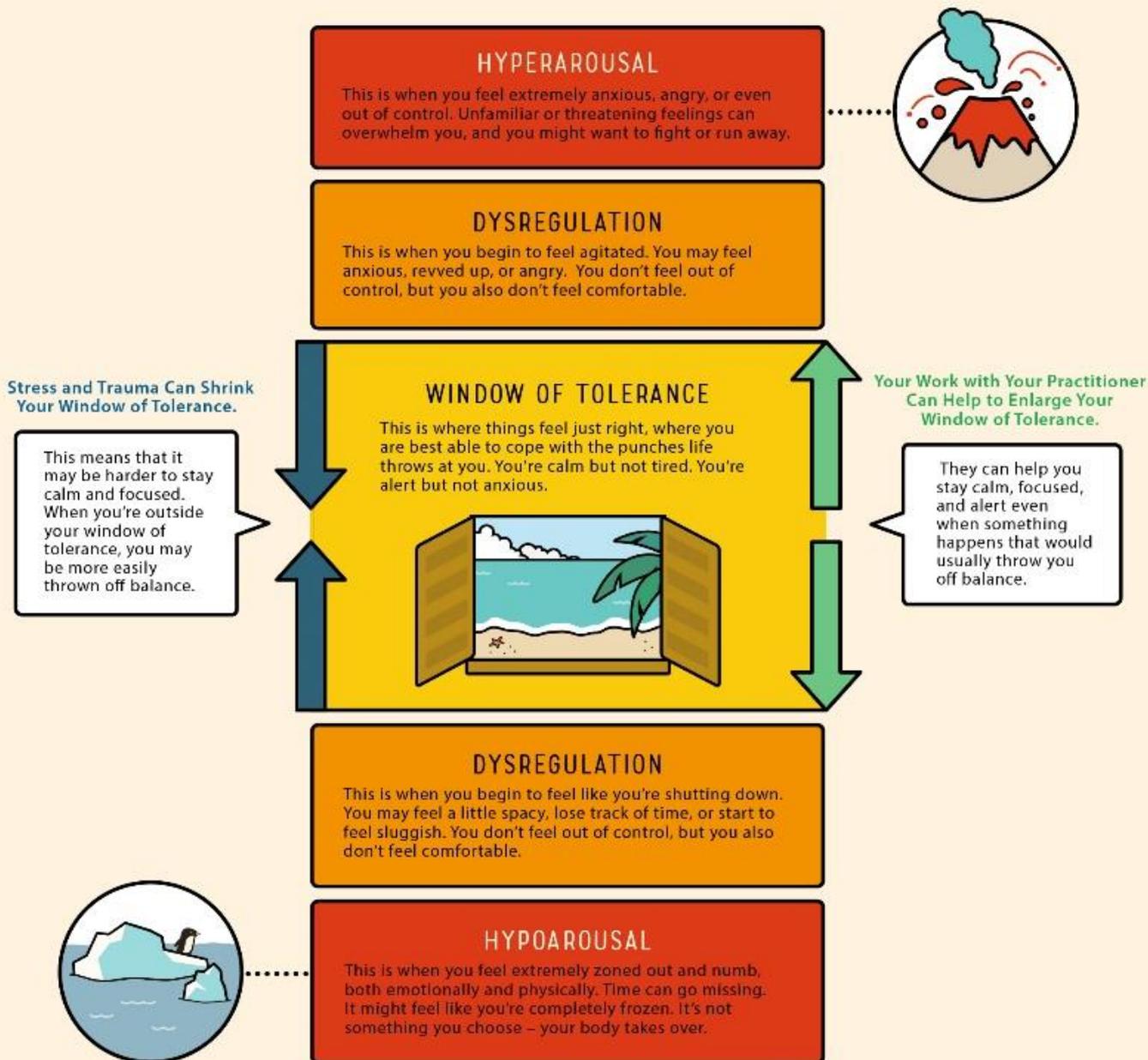
It is a much unstructured time and a lot of things are happening that need to be managed by these kids to keep themselves safe. They are often not up to it and get into trouble. It has proven to be helpful to offer a space with structured activities for where these children can go. This can be a classroom or an area outside with play activities such as

- building/construction,
- sensory materials such as play doh, bubbles, sand
- Social interaction games
- Fiddly toys
- Imaginative play, eg cars, doll house, animals, people, puppets, etc.

Children connect and learn best when connected to a safe adult so they can operate within the window of tolerance.

Children who have experienced adversity show hyper arousal (hyper activity) or hypo arousal (lethargic). This is often their default level of arousal and prevents learning to take place as the children are in coping/survival mode.

How Trauma Can Affect Your Window of Tolerance

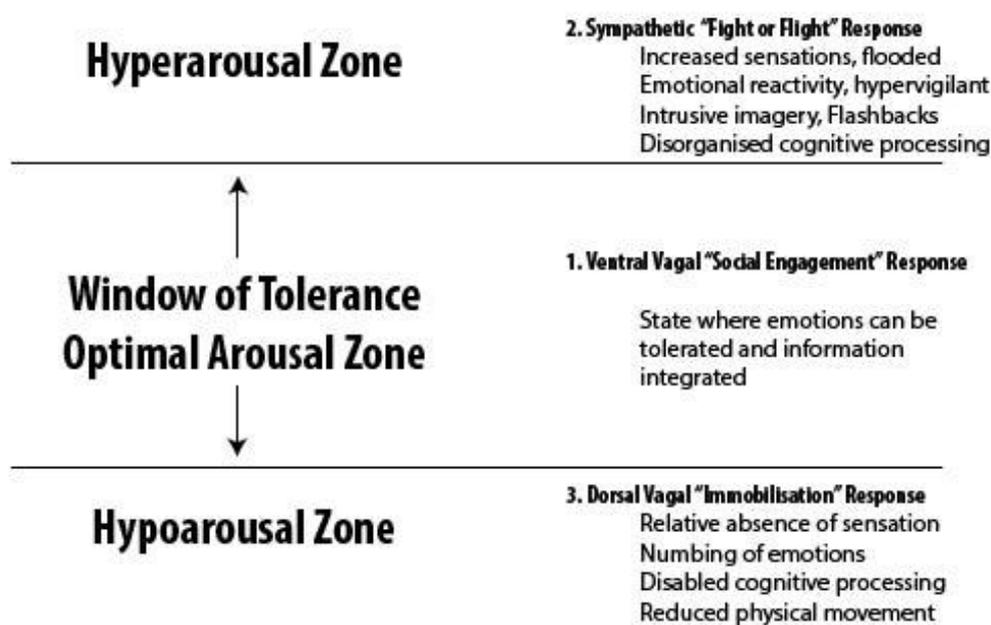


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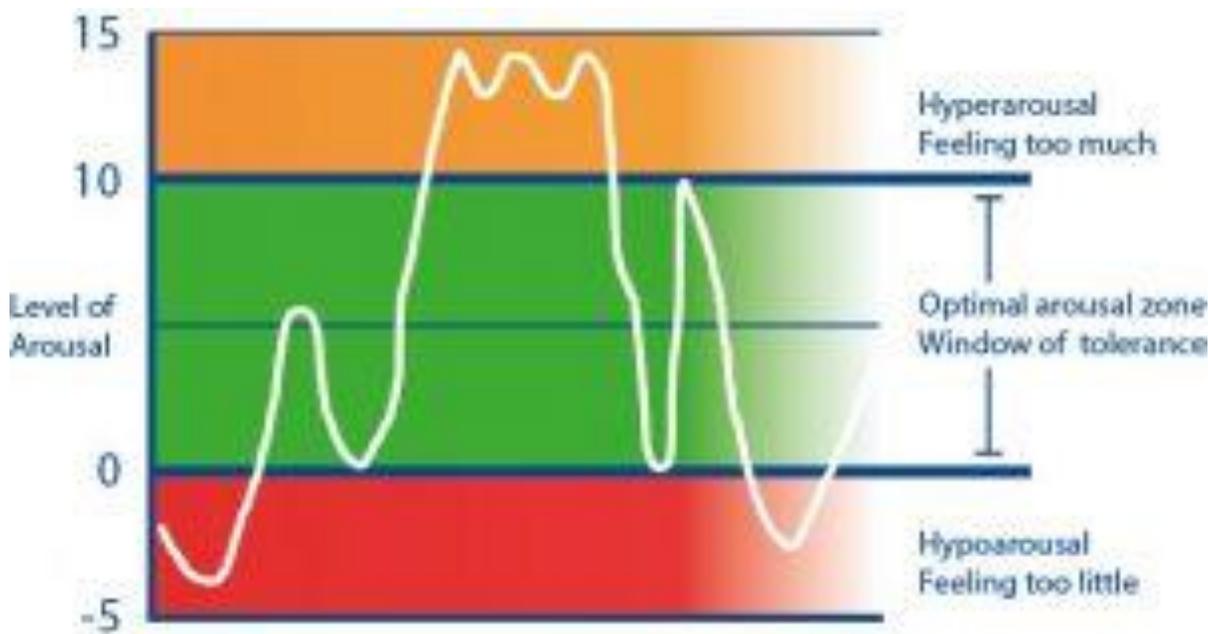
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Window of Tolerance



Adapted from Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006, p. 27, 32; Corrigan, Fisher, & Nutt, 2010, p. 2



Window of Tolerance, adapted from Ogden et al., 2006; Siegel, 1999; and Van der Hart et al., 2006.