

# Trauma-informed approach

Sources: FJC, Vertrouwenscentrum Kindermishandeling, Lise (Vagga),  
Martine (PANGG 0-18) en SAMHSA (USA)  
Mieke Gielen (ECDF), Karen Decoster (Circusplaneet)



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# WHO WE ARE, WHO ARE YOU? WHY THIS WORKSHOP?



Karen Decoster (Circusplaneet, Ghent)



Mieke Gielen (ECDF, Antwerp)

# TRAUMA-INFORMED, HUH?

To work trauma-informed means that you always take into account:

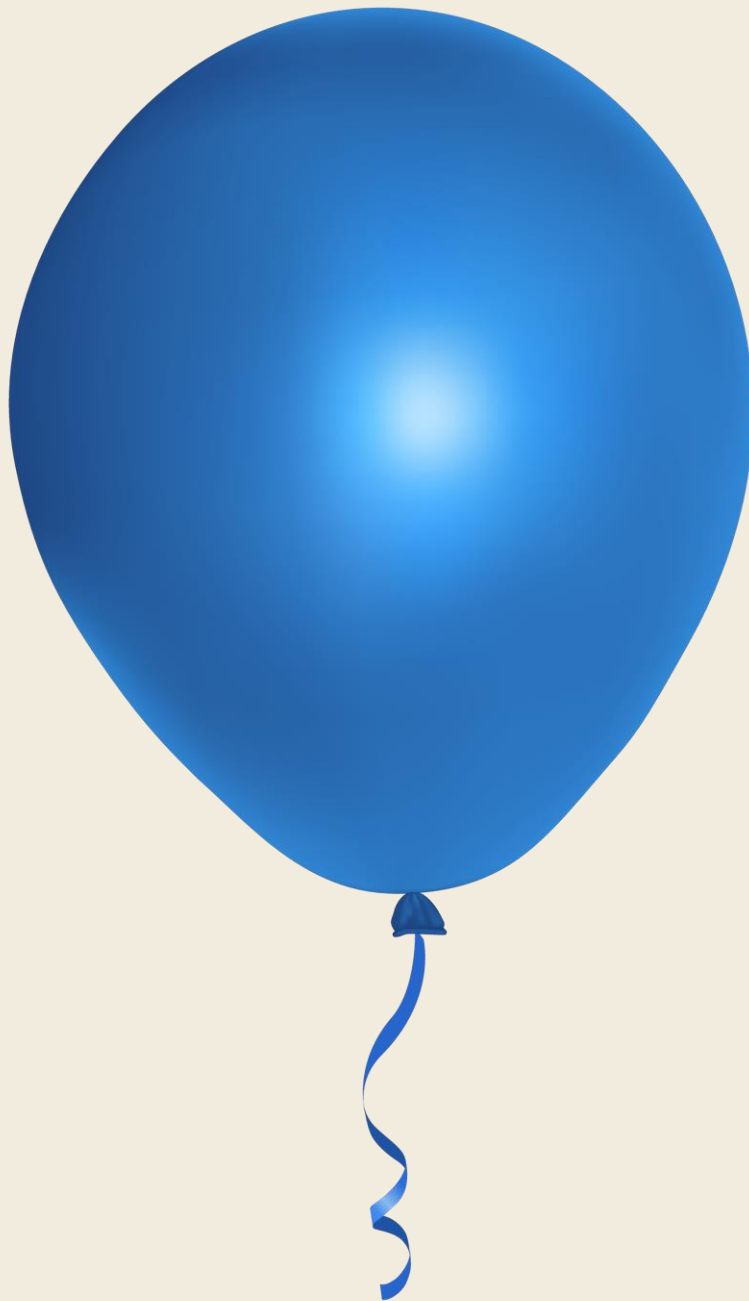
***Everyone can have profound experiences,  
which can cause their stress system to be confused.***

This starts with a switch in attitude:

***From “what’s wrong with you?” to “what happened to you?”.***

# TRAUMA-INFORMED, HUH?

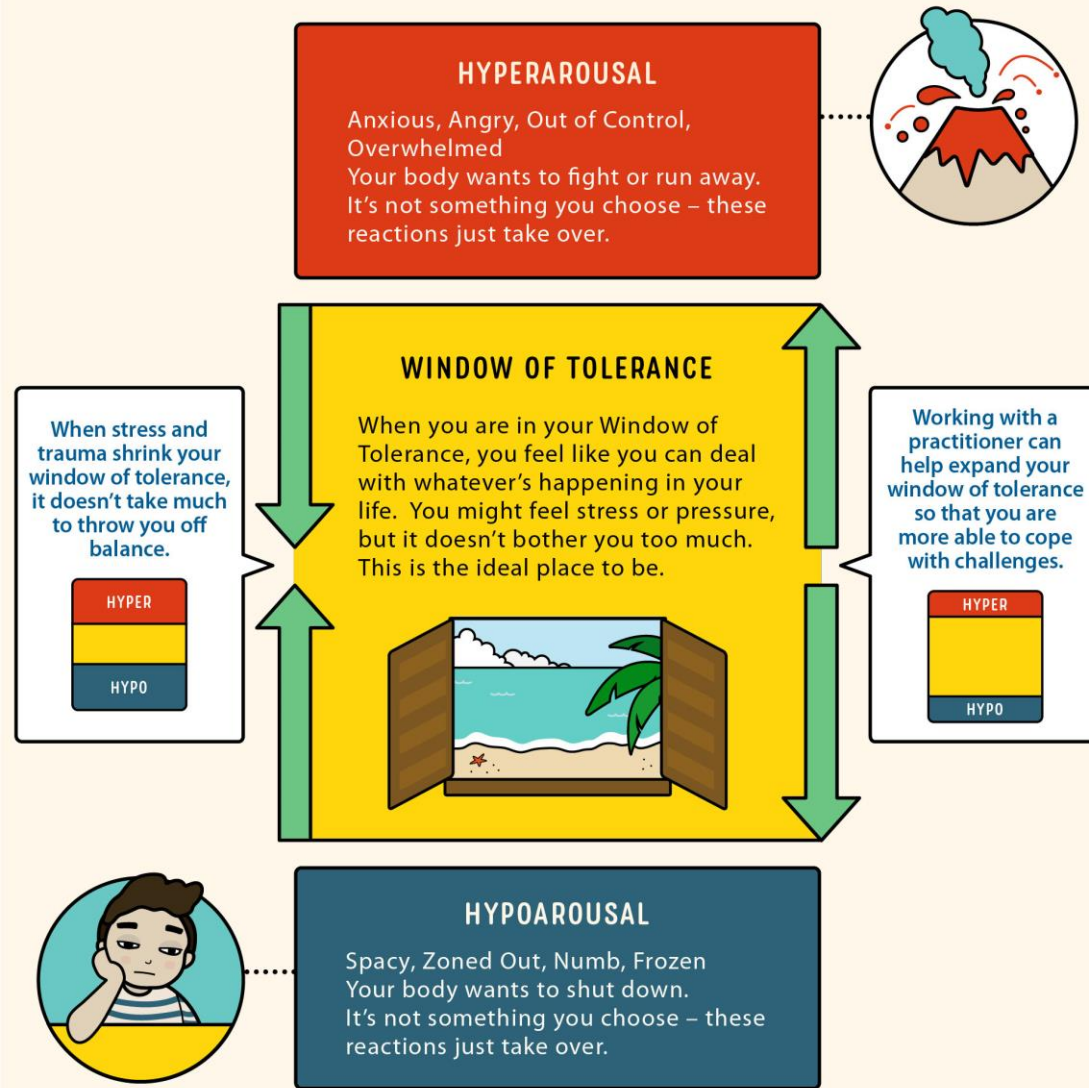
1. Understand: What is **trauma and complex trauma**?
2. How to **react**.
3. Realise you can have a big **impact**.
4. How to **take care of yourself**.



# EFFECTS OF STRESS

## Window of tolerance

### How Trauma Can Affect Your Window Of Tolerance



nicabm



# EFFECTS OF STRESS

## Acute stress:

Stress hormones -> Alarm

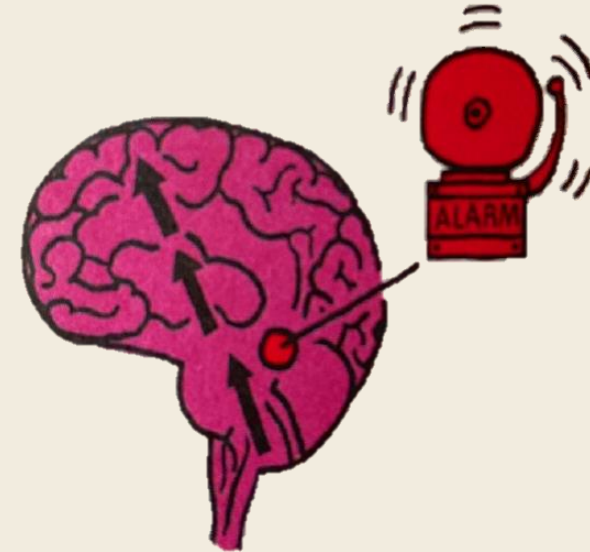
Instincts > thinking

FFF, survival

I feel so I do > I think so I do

Event is stored in the body

=> crucial is who was there for you when the traumatic event happened





# EFFECTS OF STRESS

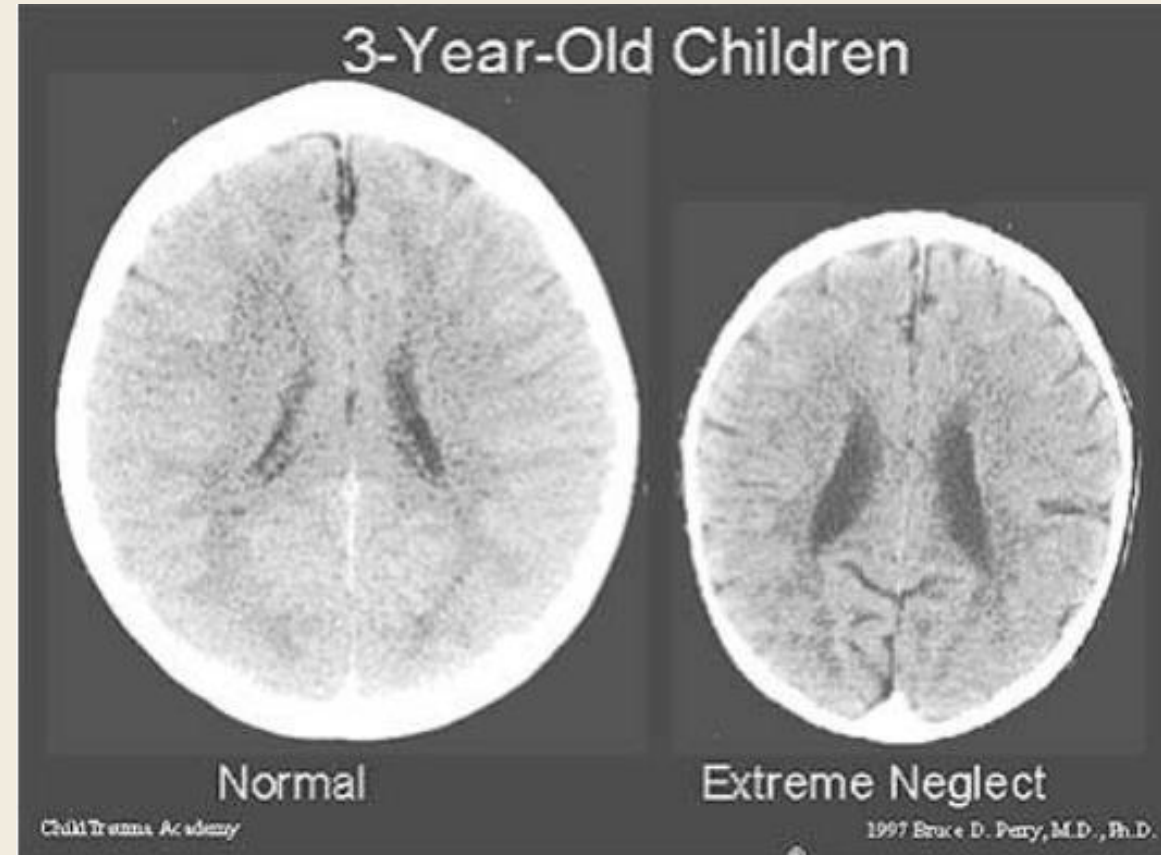
## Intense long-term stress:

No distinction real vs imaginary danger

Confused stress system.

If stress system confused for too long:  
brain damaged

=> new connections are possible  
through loving relationships



# THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE

Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma, Bessel van der Kolk

## **Difference between stress and trauma**

body continues to relive the acute or long-term stress even though the traumatic event has stopped

## **Trauma triggers**

=> set off alarms and provoke reactions

## **Trauma:**

*“Trauma is not what happens to you,  
it’s what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you.”*

Gabor Maté, The Wisdom of Trauma



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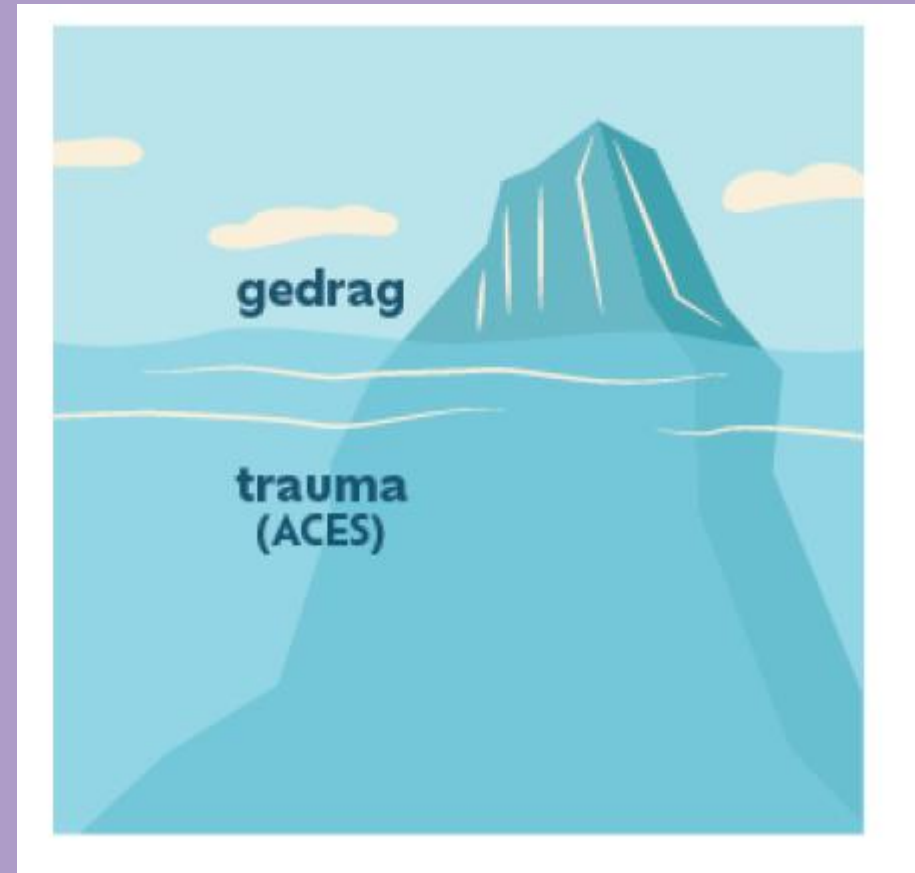
## Look beneath the surface

The behavior we see is just the tip of the iceberg.

We often miss the underlying causes, hidden in the subconscious due to profound experiences in childhood.

(Adversed Childhood Experiences)

“As the ACE study has shown, child abuse and neglect is the single most preventable cause of mental illness, the single most common cause of drug and alcohol abuse, and a significant contributor to leading causes of death such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, stroke, and suicide.”



# THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE

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“Being frightened means that you live in a body that is always on guard.

Angry people live in angry bodies.

The bodies of child-abuse victims are tense and defensive until they find a way to relax and feel safe.

In order to change, people need to **become aware of their sensations** and the way that their bodies interact with the world around them. **Physical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past.”**



### 3. THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE

Circus often offers opportunities to help healing trauma and break the circle.

=> Of the **6 ways researched** to heal trauma without medication, we already integrate two of them (Yoga, theater and movement) (Therapy, EMDR, neural feedback, psychedelics are the others)

=> physical activity involved: movement, balance, breathing, relaxation, ...

**helps to regulate stress.**

=> in 'safe(er)' space, together with peers and care-givers, possibility for new and **positive relational experiences**

=> **positive emotions:** play, fun, belonging, ...

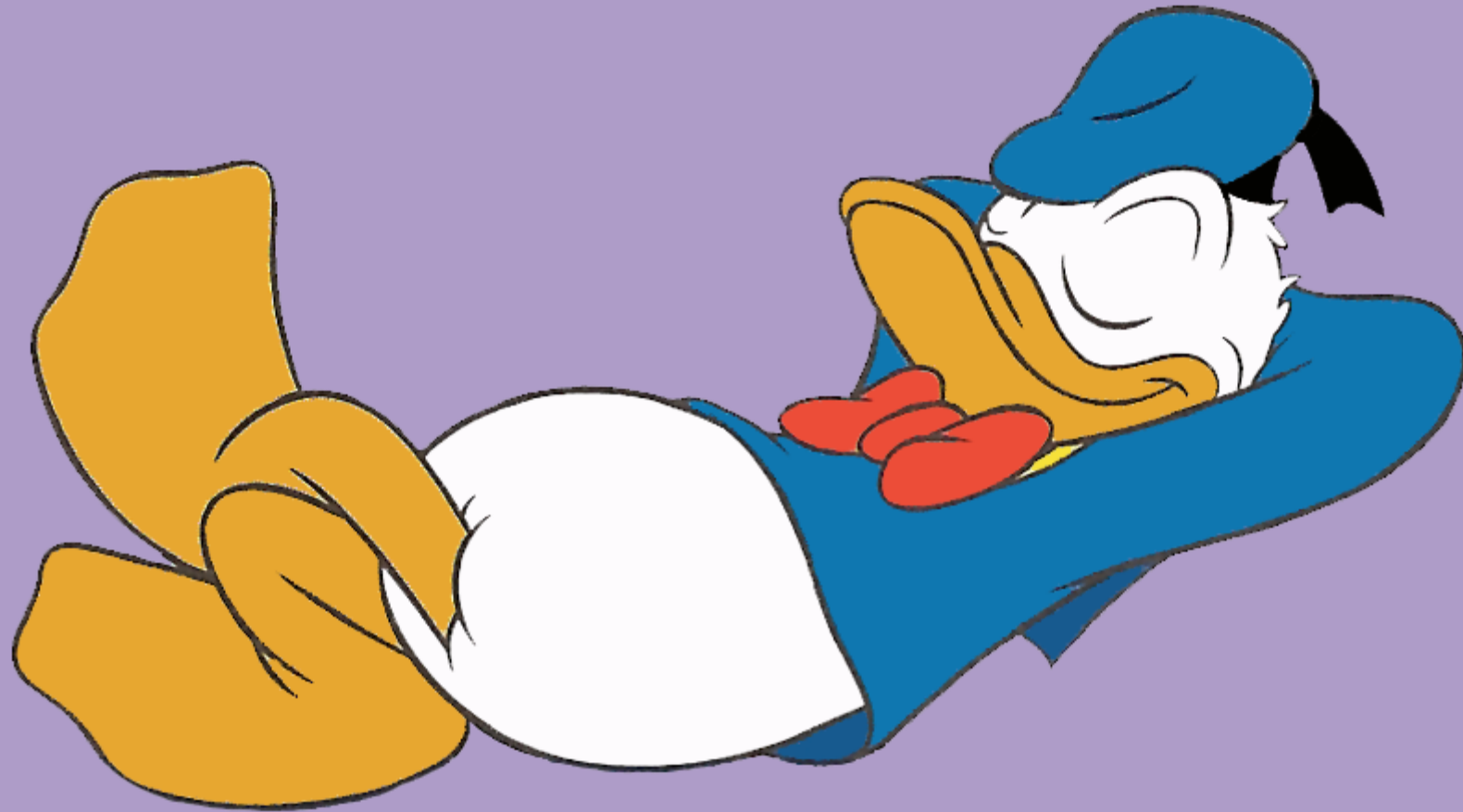
=> **experiences of success:** building a sense of competence

=> **hope:** the belief that your future will be better than the present and that you have the ability to make it happen.





### 3. THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE



# RRR

## WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE 'BREAKS OUT THEIR WINDOW'

### 1. REGULATE

Help calming down

=> understand this behavior is not a choice.

### 2. RELATE

Start to make contact, little by little

=> understand a safe relationship needs time

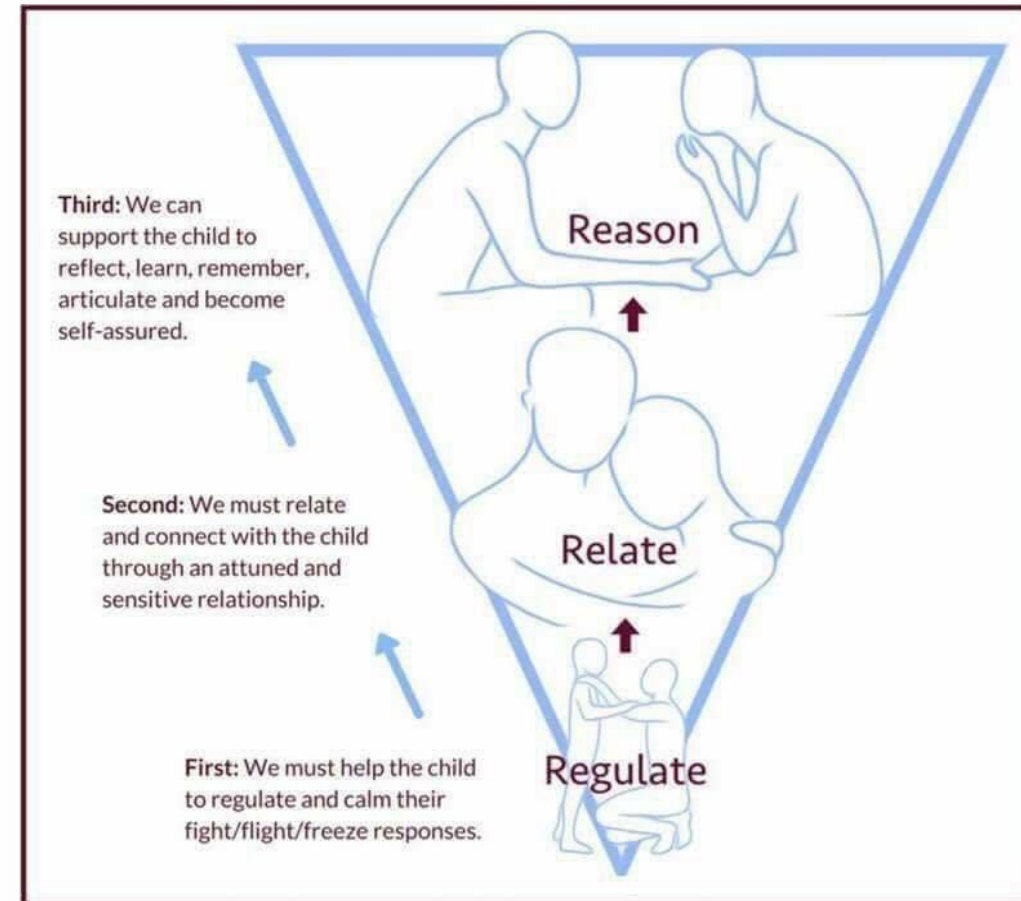
### 3. REASON

Support reflection and learning

=> understand little first steps will be big

## The Three R's: Reaching The Learning Brain

Dr Bruce Perry, a pioneering neuroscientist in the field of trauma, has shown us that to help a vulnerable child to learn, think and reflect, we need to intervene in a simple sequence.



Heading straight for the 'reasoning' part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.

# Understanding dysregulation: How to Support a Highly Emotional Child



Dysregulation occurs when the brain responds to sensory input in a manner that triggers the alarm state.



When a child is dysregulated, it is harder to listen, comprehend, and cope.

## Remember the Three "R"s

### Regulate

focus on soothing your child. Make them feel calm, safe, and loved.



### Relate

Validate their feelings with your words and tone of voice. "I know you're upset right now." "This is very hard". Focus on connecting with your child.

### Reason

Once your child is calm, now it is time to talk about alternatives to behaviors while reinforcing limits you set before. You can reassure them you love them but that the behavior they're exhibiting is not ok.



Until a child is regulated, they are unlikely to be related to you (feel connected & comfortable). And until a child is related, they are unlikely to have the mental capacity to reason with you.

# RRR

I think they should include a 4th R:

## **Remember Self-care!**

Eat well

Get enough sleep

Allow humour

Provide enjoyable activities

Provide supportive connections

## **What if (child) trauma triggers own trauma?**

Be honest with yourself

Distinguish between your own story and that of the child

Seek help in time



# TARMAK

With TaRMak's circus programs,  
El Circo D'ell Fuego aims to empower children who encounter intrafamily violence.

Circus  
Science of hope  
Experiential learning  
Trauma-informed approach

Shortdoc in English:

<https://youtu.be/jHc58J24Jes>





(Small) group discussion:

What do you take with?

Do you want to share something?

THANK YOU and

Keep your circus state of mind and enjoy all madness!



