



## **Holding Space Program: Supporting the Emotional Journey of Implementing Trauma-informed Practice in Early Childhood Settings**

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# Acknowledgement of Country

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The Holding Space Program team respectfully acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders past and present.



Image: Charles Sturt University, Albury (Wiradjuri Land)



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# The Holding Space Program Team

<https://arts-ed.csu.edu.au/schools/education/events/holding-space>

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# Holding Space Program

Holding Space =



A community of respect;  
A community of regulation





# Workshop 3:

Stress, Trauma and the Brain: How Stress Impacts the Brain

*Implemented on the CSU Albury-Wodonga  
Campus Tuesday May 13<sup>th</sup> 2025*

# Workshop 3: Key Take Aways

1: Challenging behaviour is unintentional

2: Trauma / Stress / Fear = shutdown

3: Safety = connection and learning

# Take a little moment

## Stations

- Make a circle and hold hands. The leader squeezes the hand of the person next to them on one side. When they feel the squeeze, they squeeze the hand of the person next to them. This continues until it gets back to the leader. Time it with a stop watch. See if you can get faster on more goes.

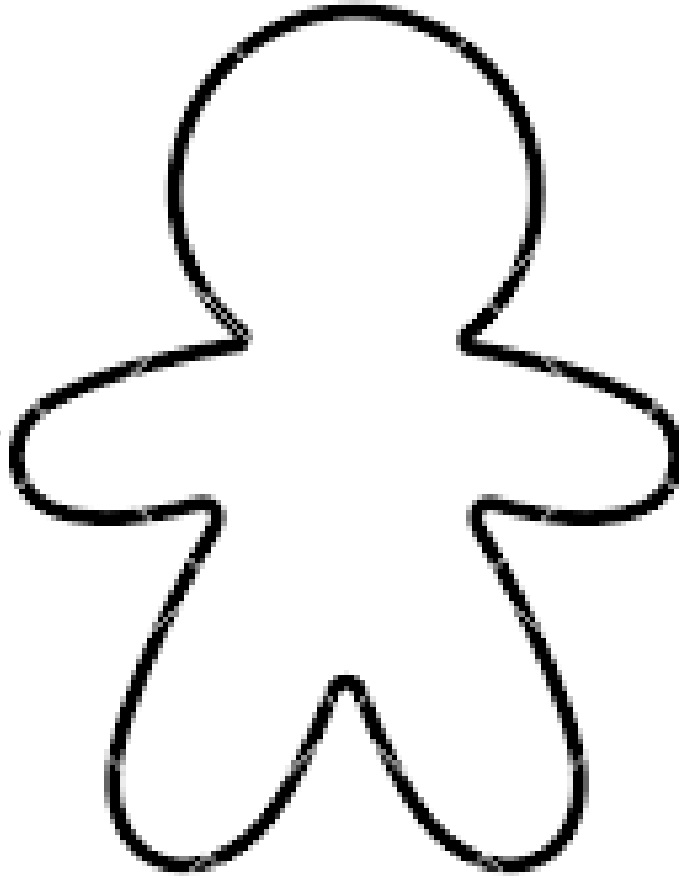
## Energy Wand

- Make a circle and hold hands. One person holds one end of the energy wand while the person next to them holds the other end. Notice how it lights up and makes a noise. Ask someone along the line to let go of hands and the energy wand stops working.

# Survival Response

What do you notice in you body when you feel,  
stressed, anxious or fearful?

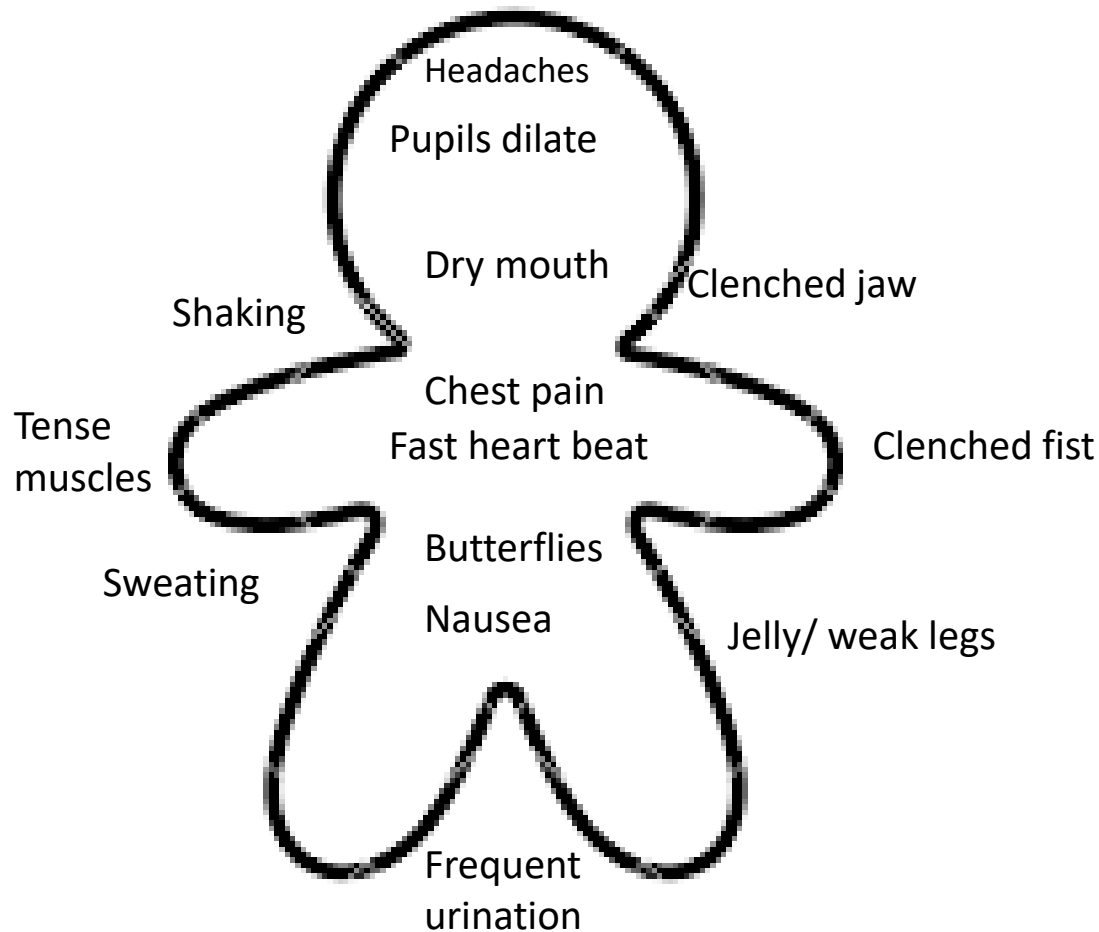
How might  
think? what  
might your  
emotions be?  
How might  
you act or  
behave?



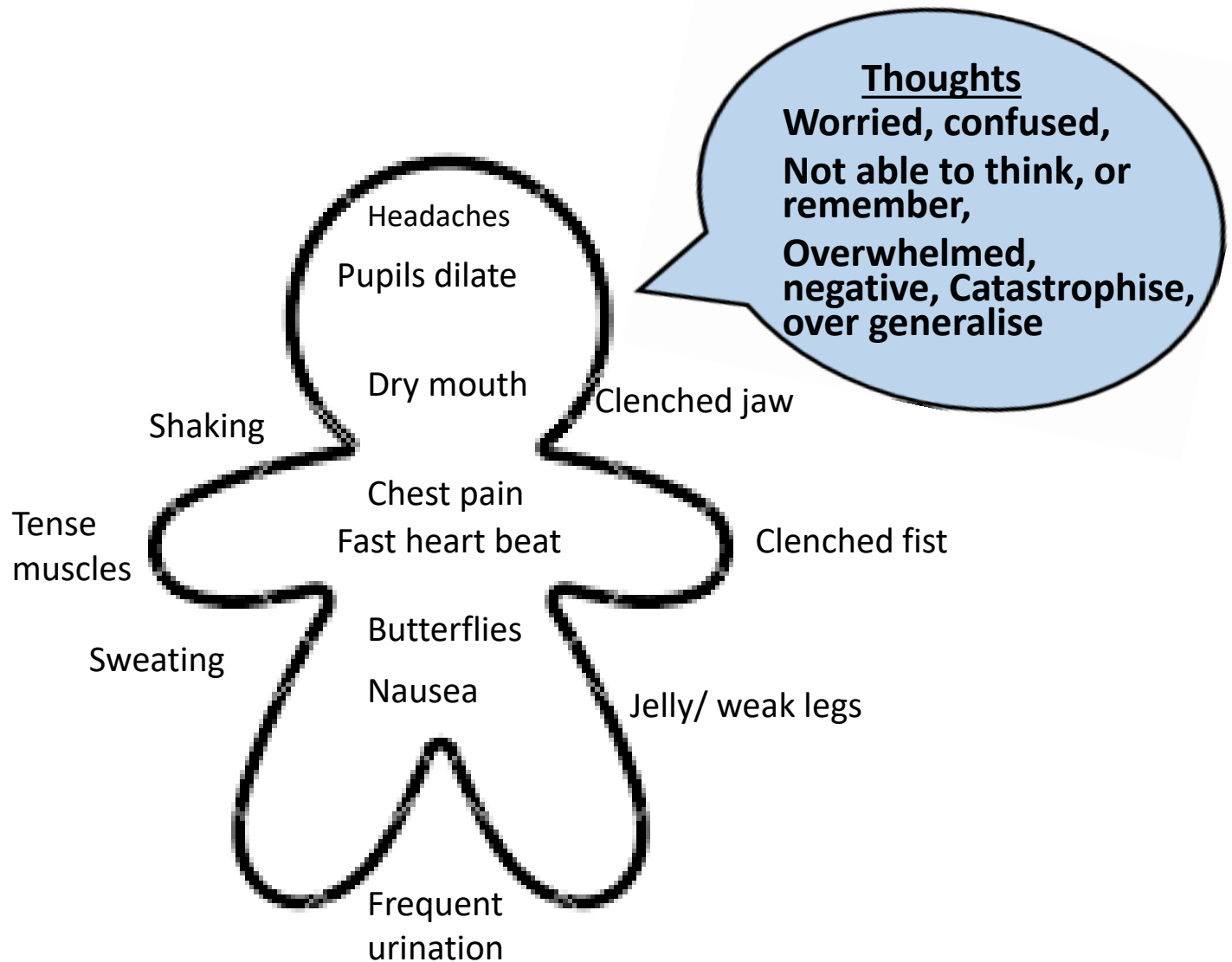


# Survival Response

**What do you notice in you body when you feel, stressed, anxious or fearful?**



# What do you notice in you body when you feel, stressed, anxious or fearful?



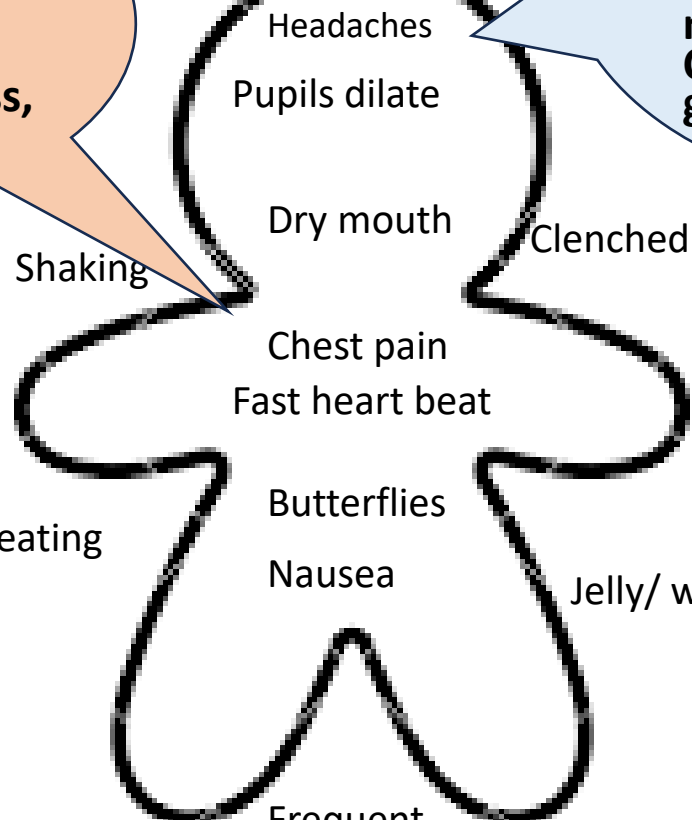
# What do you notice in you body when you feel, stressed, anxious or fearful?

## Emotions

Sad, angry, scared, frustrated, guilt, shame, worthless, Numb

## Thoughts

Worried, confused, Not able to think, or remember, Overwhelmed, negative thinking, Catastrophise, over generalise



Headaches  
Pupils dilate  
Dry mouth  
Clenched jaw  
Shaking  
Chest pain  
Fast heart beat  
Clenched fist  
Tense muscles  
Sweating  
Butterflies  
Nausea  
Jelly/ weak legs  
Frequent urination



# What do you notice in you body when you feel, stressed, anxious or fearful?

## Emotions

Sad, angry, scared, frustrated, guilt, shame, worthless, Numb etc.

## Thoughts

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Jelly/ weak legs

## Behaviours

Run away, scream, bite, kick, hit, throw something, hide, control, disassociate, not sleep, sick etc.

Frequent urination

# What is Trauma?

*“Trauma is the emotional, psychological and physiological residue left over from heightened stress that accompanies experiences of threat, violence and life-challenging events”*

*(Australian Childhood Foundation, 2018, p. 8)*

# What is Trauma?

*“Whether an event is traumatizing depends not upon the actual event itself but the perception the person has of the event and whether or not they have the resources to cope with and integrate it successfully.”*

*“You can not define trauma for somebody else.”*

Gabor Maté (2004)



# Examples of Overwhelming Events

Traumatic event,  
car accident, house  
burning down etc

Abuse

Neglect

Death of a family  
member or close  
friend

Separation/Divorce

Moving house

Disrupted homes

Blended families

Birth of a new baby

Separation from  
parents

Operations/  
hospitalization

Chronic illness/  
Breaking bones

Asthma attack

Increased exposure  
to violence, Both  
real and on screen

Being over  
scheduled

Bullying/ social  
rejection

Birth trauma

Learning difficulties

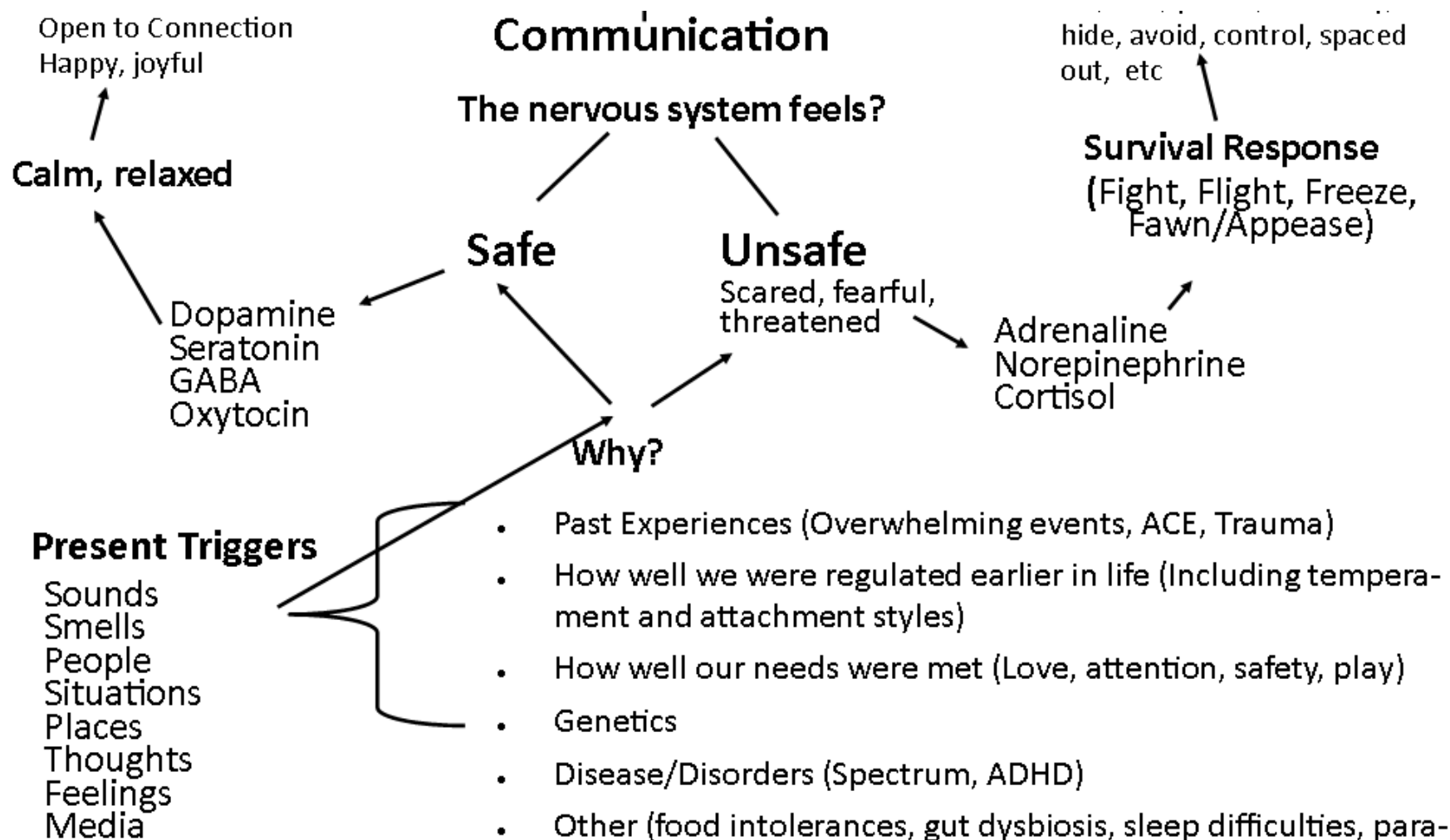
Transitions/ change

Over stimulation

Changing  
caregivers

Needs not being  
met such as love,  
attention, safety,  
play

# Behaviour is Communication



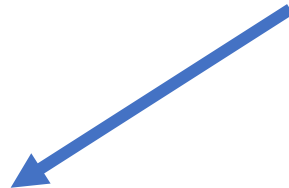
# Behaviour is Communication

**Behaviour**

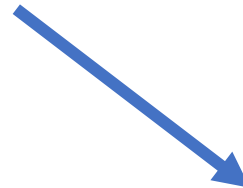


**Communication**

The nervous  
system feels?



Safe



Unsafe



# Behaviour is Communication

**Safe**



Dopamine, Serotonin, GABA, Oxytocin



**Calm, relaxed**



**Regulated**

Open to learn

Open to Connection

Happy, joyful

# Behaviour is Communication

## UnSafe



Adrenaline, norepinephrine, Cortisol



## Survival

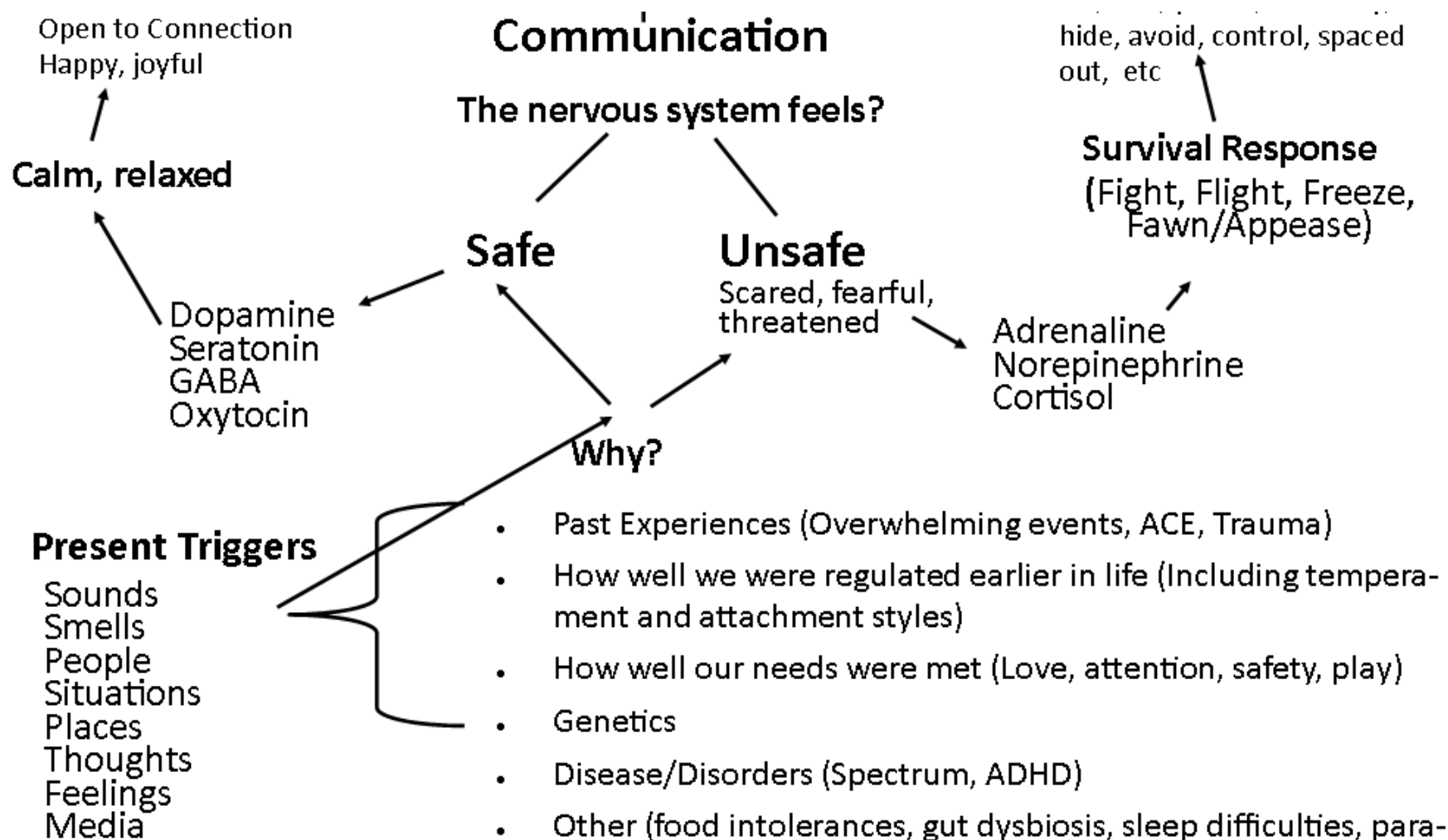
Fight, flight, freeze, fawn/appease



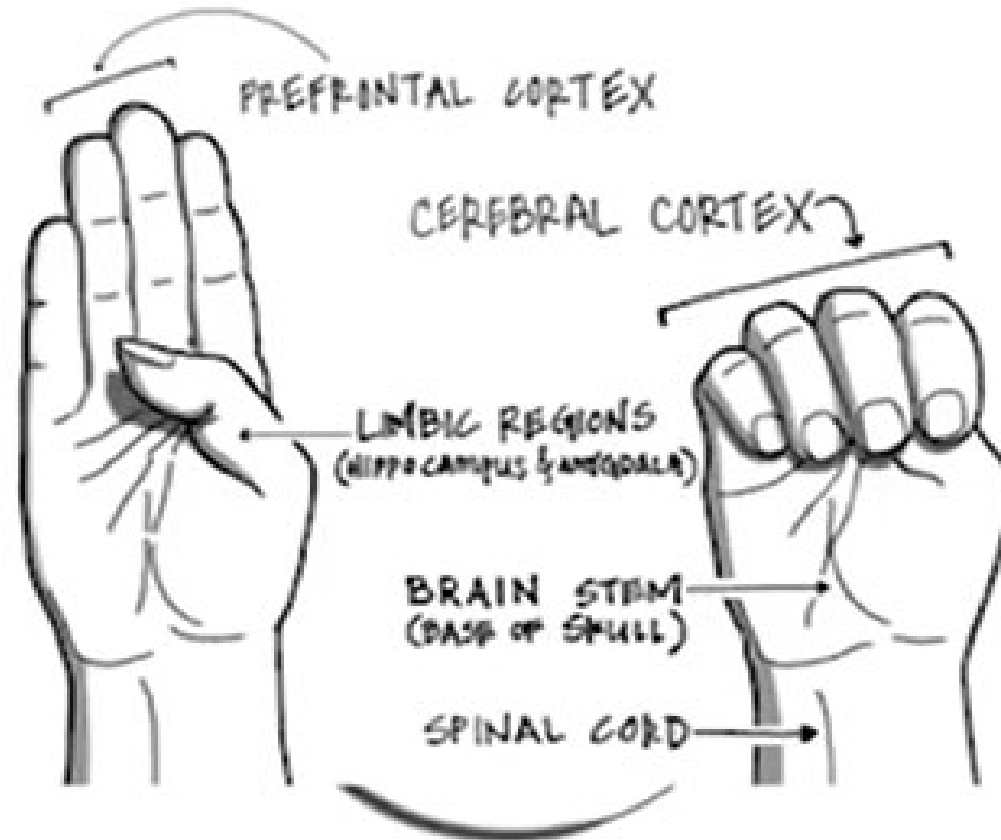
## Dysregulated

Hit, fight, punch, bite, run away, hide, control,  
space out, disconnect, people please etc

# Behaviour is Communication



# Hand Model of the Brain



Dr Dan Siegel

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# How Stress Impacts the Brain

- Watch the video - draw or write something that resonates

*Stress, Trauma, and the Brain: Insights for Educators-*  
with Bruce D. Perry, MD, PhD



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COMwl2akggM>

- (ThinkTVPBS, 2020)

- Take time to discuss

# Our Key Take Aways

1: Challenging behaviour is unintentional

2: Trauma / Stress / Fear = shutdown

3: Safety = Connection and learning

A young child with curly brown hair is shown from the chest up, looking slightly to the right with a gentle smile. The child is holding a small yellow flower in their right hand. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with foliage.

When we see a child differently,  
*we see a different child.*

-Stuart Shanker

Take a little moment





# Sigh Breathing

If you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed either by a child's behaviour or something else, before approaching the child regulate yourself. A quick way is to take two sharp breaths through your nose and exhaling slowly through your mouth.





# Havening

Rubbing areas of the body as shown below, while thinking of a relaxing place, helps produce calming hormones. Repeat these many times until you feel calmer.



FACE SELF-HAVENING



ARM SELF-HAVENING



PALM SELF-HAVENING

**Do you use this practice already, with children  
and/or your colleagues?**



**How could you use this “take a little moment” in  
your work?**





# Additional Resources

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Dr Dan Siegel's Hand Model of the Brain:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>

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Explaining the Hand Model of the Brain to older children and adults:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bKuoH8CkFc>

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Explanation of the Hand Model of the Brain that you can adapt to use with younger children: [https://youtu.be/H\\_dxnYhdyuY?si=t3j7m2s2Rnlm\\_TTt](https://youtu.be/H_dxnYhdyuY?si=t3j7m2s2Rnlm_TTt)

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Karen Young's Books and Products: <https://www.heysigmund.com/shop/>

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Energy wands (often found in science resource stores):

<https://www.haines.com.au/energy-stick.html>



# References

Australian Childhood Foundation (2018). *Making space for learning: Trauma informed practice in schools.*

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/app/uploads/2018/08/ACF325-Making-Space-For-Learning-Book-v4.pdf>

Maté, G. (2004). *When the body says no: The cost of hidden stress.* Random House.

ThinkTVPBS (2020). *Stress, Trauma, and the Brain: Insights for Educators-* with Bruce D. Perry, MD, PhD <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COMwl2akggM>