



# *"Ace's Too High"*

## *Aboriginal Children - Trauma - Healing*

VAEAI Koorie Early Years Conference  
Professor Emeritus Judy Atkinson PhD. OAM



Healing People  
Sharing Culture  
Regenerating Community





**Acknowledging the Ancestors, Elders, Peoples, and  
Country of the Wurundieri of the great Kulin Nation  
With greetings from Bundjalung Peoples and Country.**





## Listening and Learning Together Hearing through different Ears

Ngangikurungkurr - *dadirri* - listening in  
contemplative - reciprocal relationships

Bundjalung - *gan'na* - hearing, listening,  
learning, feeling, thinking, understanding,  
knowing from the heart.

Pitjantjatjara - *kulini* (listening),  
*Kulila* (an old woman's growl - you listen now!)  
And *pulgkara kulin tjugku* (really - deep -  
listening, and wanting to listen).



**Watch YouTube: Dadirri**









# Healthy Country Healthy People

## body mind heart spirit



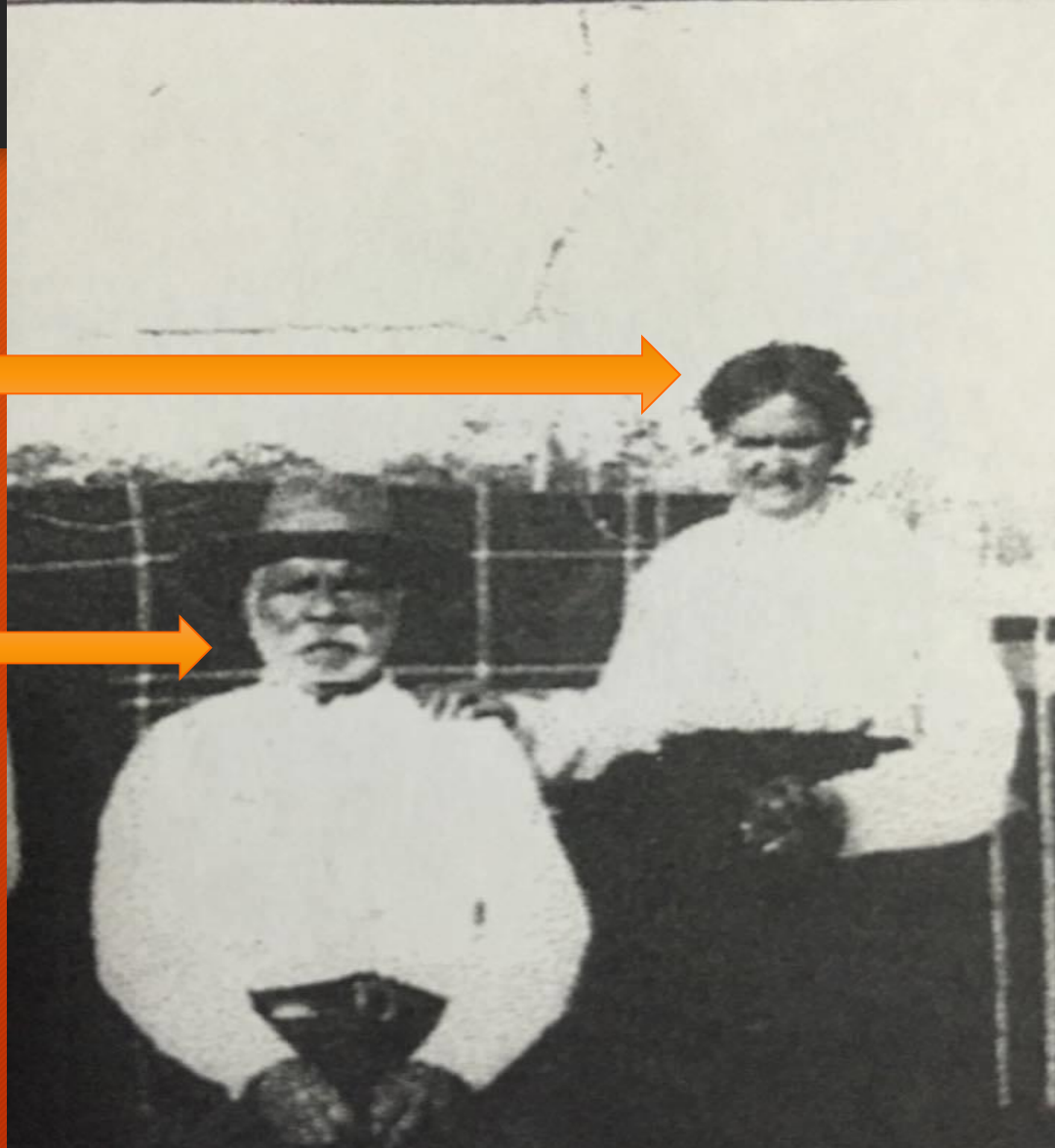


# Midwives of a Nation

- **Grandmothers as midwives:** In the early light an older woman leaves the camp with a young woman, who has commenced labour. They come to a secluded spot and a small fire is lit. The midwife adds herbs from her string bag to the fire. The young woman straddles the smoldering fire, allowing the aromatic smoke to engulf her body. The older woman sings and massages her spine, while the young woman presses her back against the trunk of a nearby tree to brace herself when she pushes. The tree imparts an energetic alignment to the mother's spine, a birth giving empowerment from the earth.
- At birth the placenta is buried in the depression of the birth spot and this place of birth will shape his or her identity and ritual obligations for the rest of life. The new born is smoked in the remains of the fire, and then rubbed with ashes.
- Before she returns the new born to the birthing mother the midwife walks out of sight and holds the baby close to her face, breathes into his/her nostrils sacred relationship (totemic) names that establish the basis knowledge of indebtedness to, and respect for all relations - kin - country - all living creatures.

# Who am I? What is my inheritance

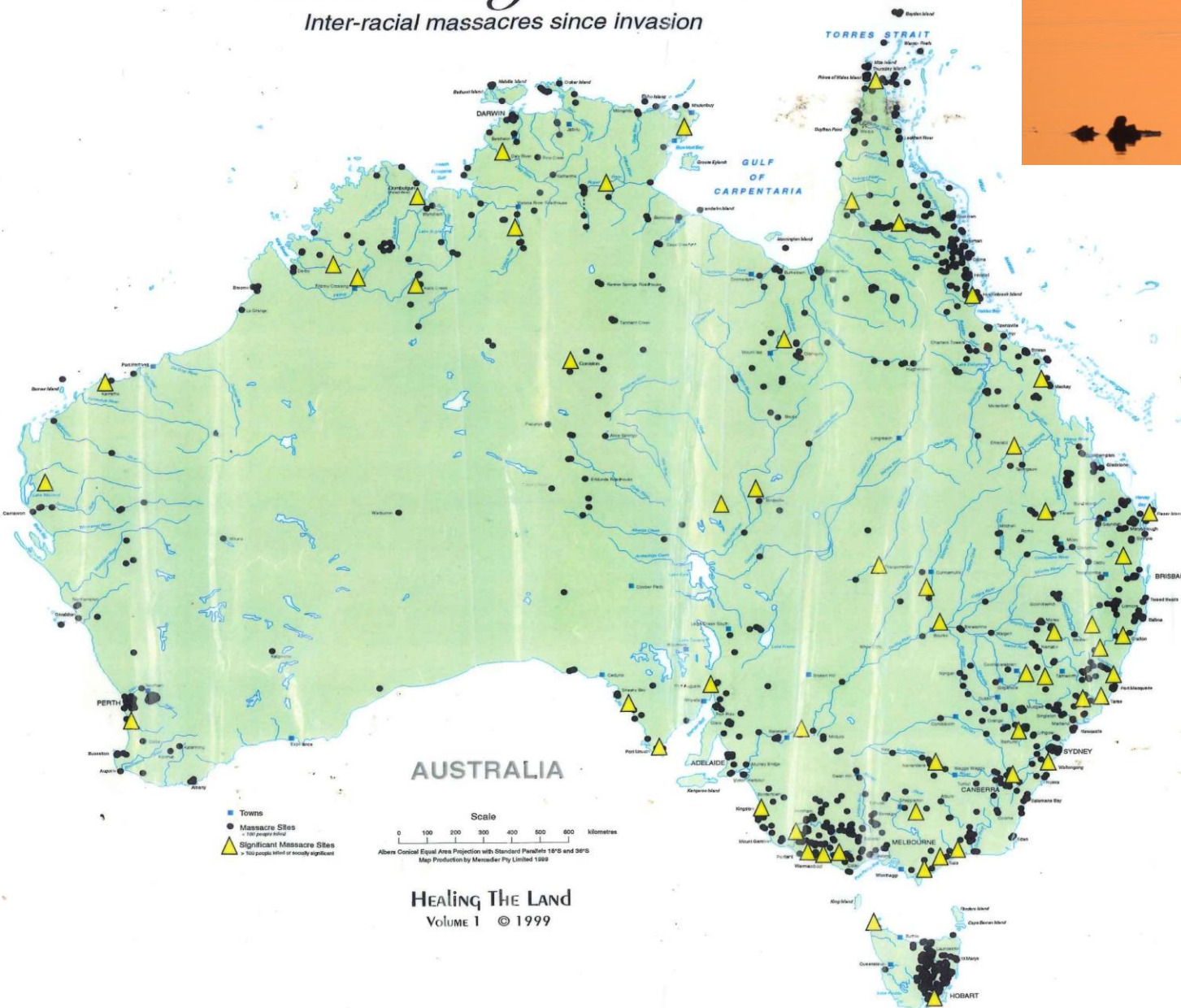
- Jiman
  - Eliza Shields
- Bundjalung
  - Henry Williams
- I am who they were ... and are.





# *Where is thy brother?*

Inter-racial massacres since invasion



Healing The Land  
Volume 1 © 1999





# World Wide Colonisations

## “Symptom as History”

18<sup>th</sup>  
September  
1987



- Children with Disrupted Destinies
- Subjugation of Indigenous peoples:
- Physical Violence - Structural Violence - Psycho-Social dominance
- The creation of culturally unsafe learning and living environments.
- Understanding the trauma story:
- Historic, Social, Cultural, Collective, Complex, Developmental Trauma.



# Colonisation as Traumatisation

## Do we understand 'Symptom as History'.

Figure 1

A six-generation genogram

### History

1860-1930

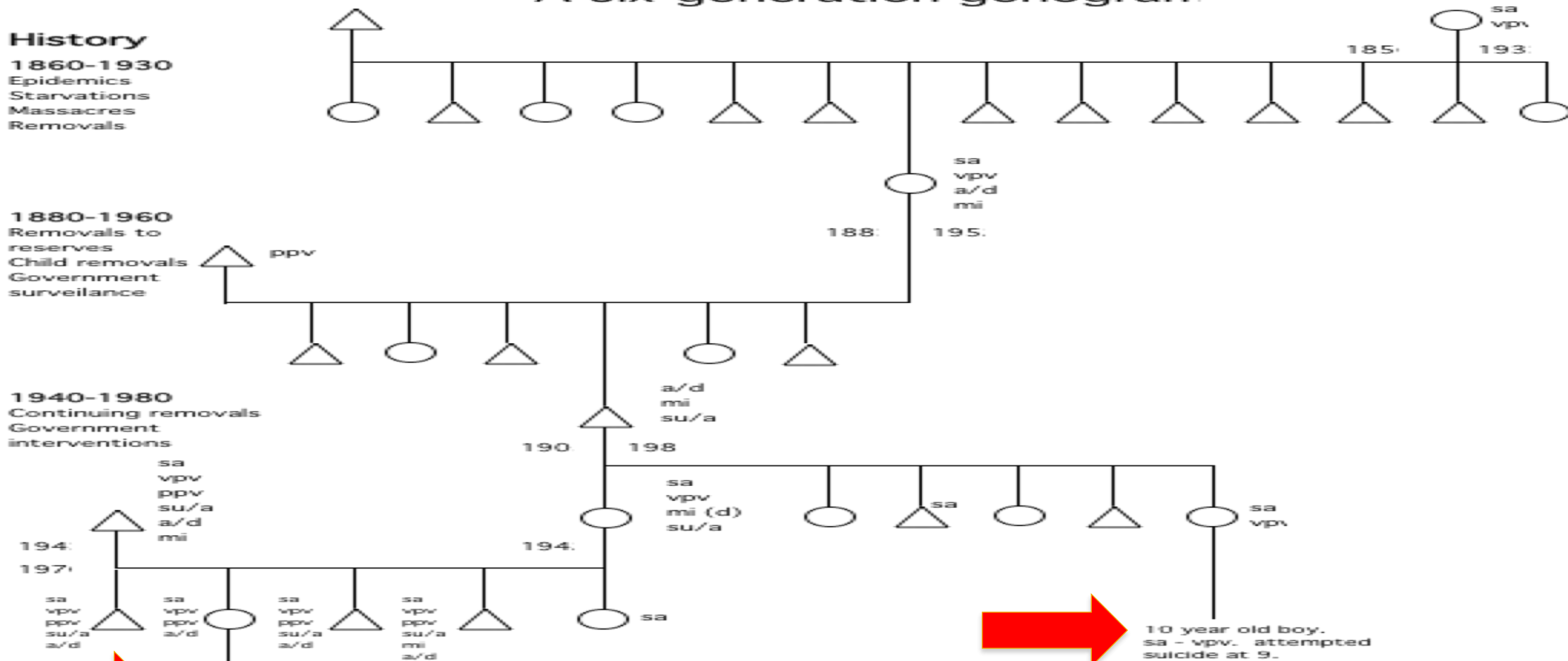
Epidemics  
Starvations  
Massacres  
Removals

1880-1960

Removals to  
reserves  
Child removals  
Government  
surveillance

1940-1980

Continuing removals  
Government  
interventions



### Legend

(a/d) alcohol/drug misuse  
(mi) mental illness  
(sa) sexual assault  
(su/a) suicide attempts  
(ppv) perpetrator of physical violence  
(vpv) victim or witness of physical violence



# Violence -Trauma can become generational, unless healed



- Collective trauma is the “*psychological blow to the basic tissues of social life that damage the bonds attaching people together and impairing the prevailing sense of community*” (p. 233), “*a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as a source of nurturance and that part of the self has disappeared*” (Erikson, 1976).
- Historical trauma is ‘*the collective emotional and psychological injury, in the life of an individual or of a community, both over the life span and across generations*’, (Muid, 2006, p. 36).





# Generational trauma - destruction of cultural worldviews - its cause and effect



- Salzman and Halloran (2004), describe the destruction of cultural worldviews which have sustained Indigenous peoples for millennia; a collective experience across diverse cultures and peoples: ... the Yup'ik of Alaska; Navajos and Athabaskan Indians; Hawaiian Natives; Maori in New Zealand, and Aboriginal Australians, all having experienced similar physical, social, behavioural and psychological symptoms (eg high rates of suicide, alcoholism, accidental deaths, and layers of loss, grief and trauma (p. 233).





**The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study: when kids grow up in a stressful environment, or go through exceptionally traumatic life events this has a significant biological impact on their developing brain and stress-response system. 50 % of the time they are in fear - flight fight freeze mode. (Fellitti, VJ et al 1998)**

1. Emotional Abuse
2. Physical Abuse
3. Sexual Abuse
4. Emotional Neglect
5. Physical Neglect
6. Family Violence
7. Household Substance Abuse
8. Household Mental Illness
9. Parental Separation
10. Household Member incarcerated

- In one prison all the women had scores of between 5 to 6 - some with scores between 7 - 8 - one who had a score of 10.
- In one school for children expelled or suspended from all other schools in region, one child has a documented score of 10, most in the 7 to 9.





# CHILDHOOD TRAUMA



Childhood trauma including abuse and neglect, is probably the single most important public health challenge ... a challenge that has the potential to be largely resolved by appropriate prevention and intervention (healing).

- Van de Kolk, B (2007) Developmental impact of Childhood Trauma, in *Understanding Trauma, integrating biological, clinical and cultural perspectives*, Kirmayer, L. Lemelson, R, Barad, M. Cambridge University Press p 224.



# ACE's Too High - Trauma - Outcomes

Van der Kolk continuing



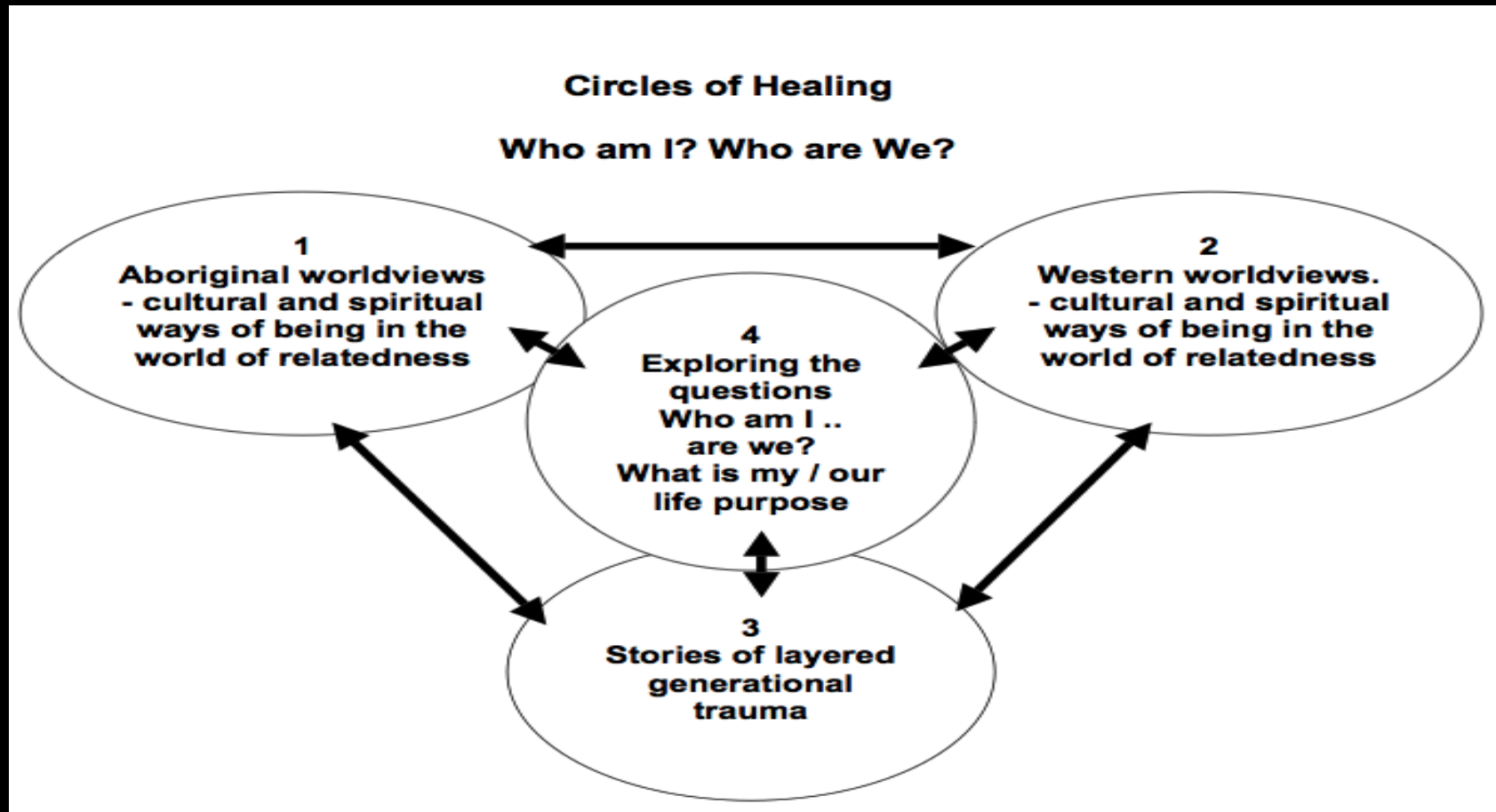
- (Children) - violation of a child's sense of safety and trust, of self worth, with a loss of a coherent sense of self, emotional distress, shame, grief, self and other destructive behaviors;
- (Adolescents) - Unmodulated aggression, difficulty negotiating relationships, clear link between suicide, alcoholism and other drug misuse, sexual promiscuity, physical inactivity, smoking, obesity, mental distress, depression;
- (Adults) More likely to develop heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, skeletal fractures, and liver disease,
- People with childhood histories of trauma make up almost our entire juvenile detention - criminal justice population.

• (van der Kolk, B. 2007)





# *Foundational basis for Educaring approach*

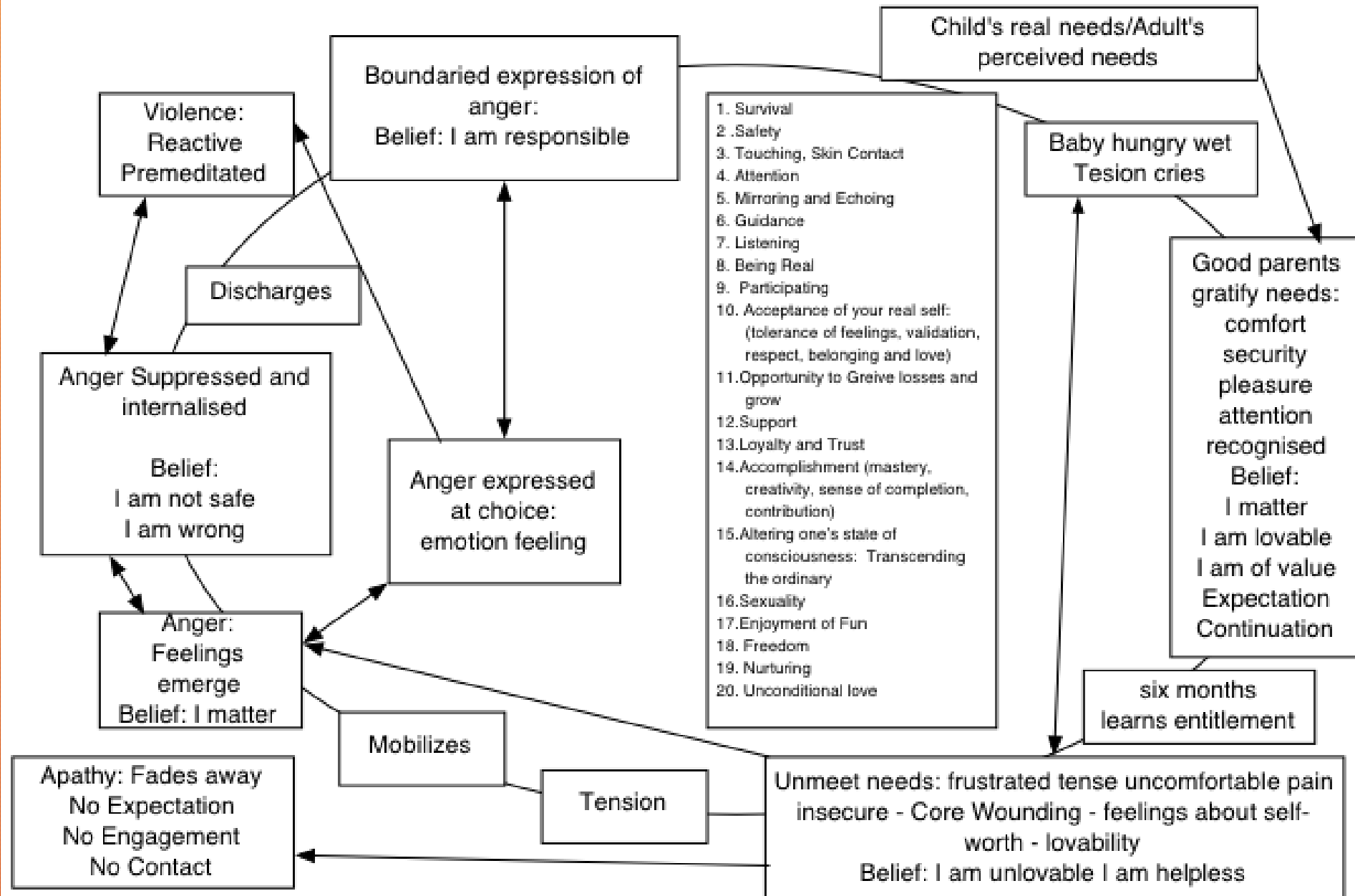


**We are the products of our childhoods. The health and creativity of a community is renewed each generation through its children**  
**Bruce Perry M.D. PhD.**





# The Evolution of Anger into Violence



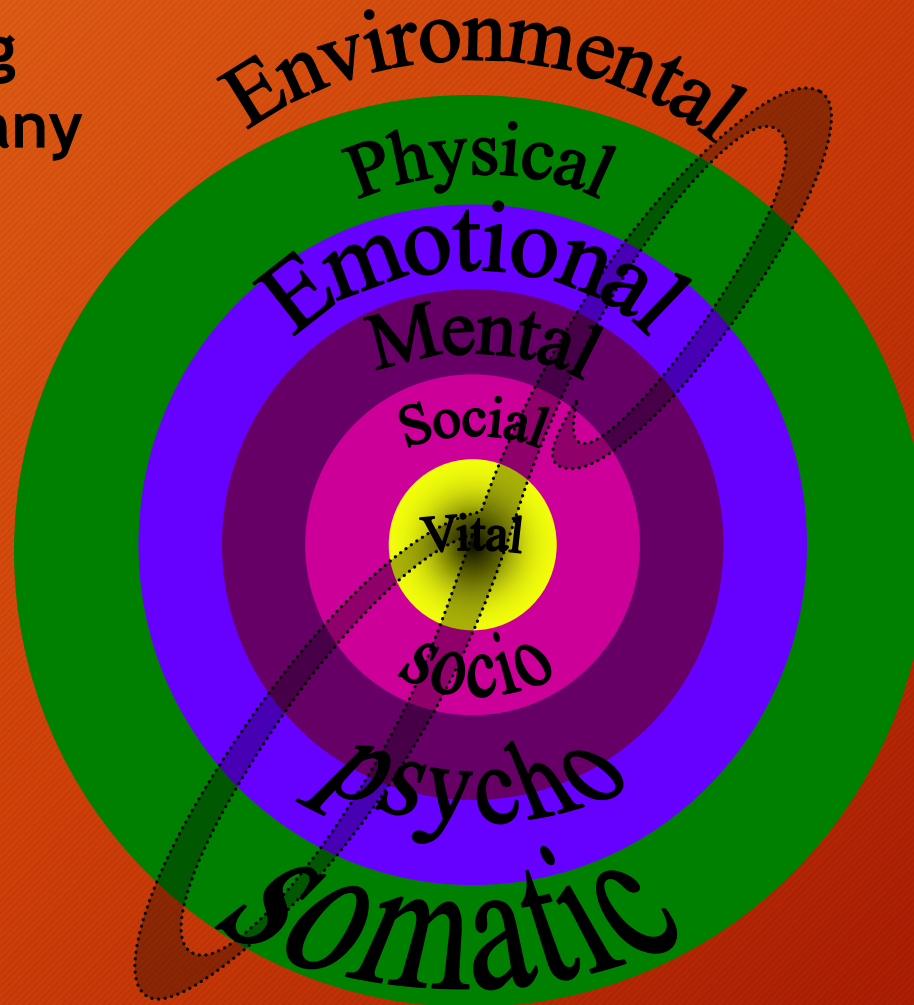
# Families come in all shapes and sizes





# *children are shaped by their early life experiences.*

Experiencing  
happens on many  
levels.



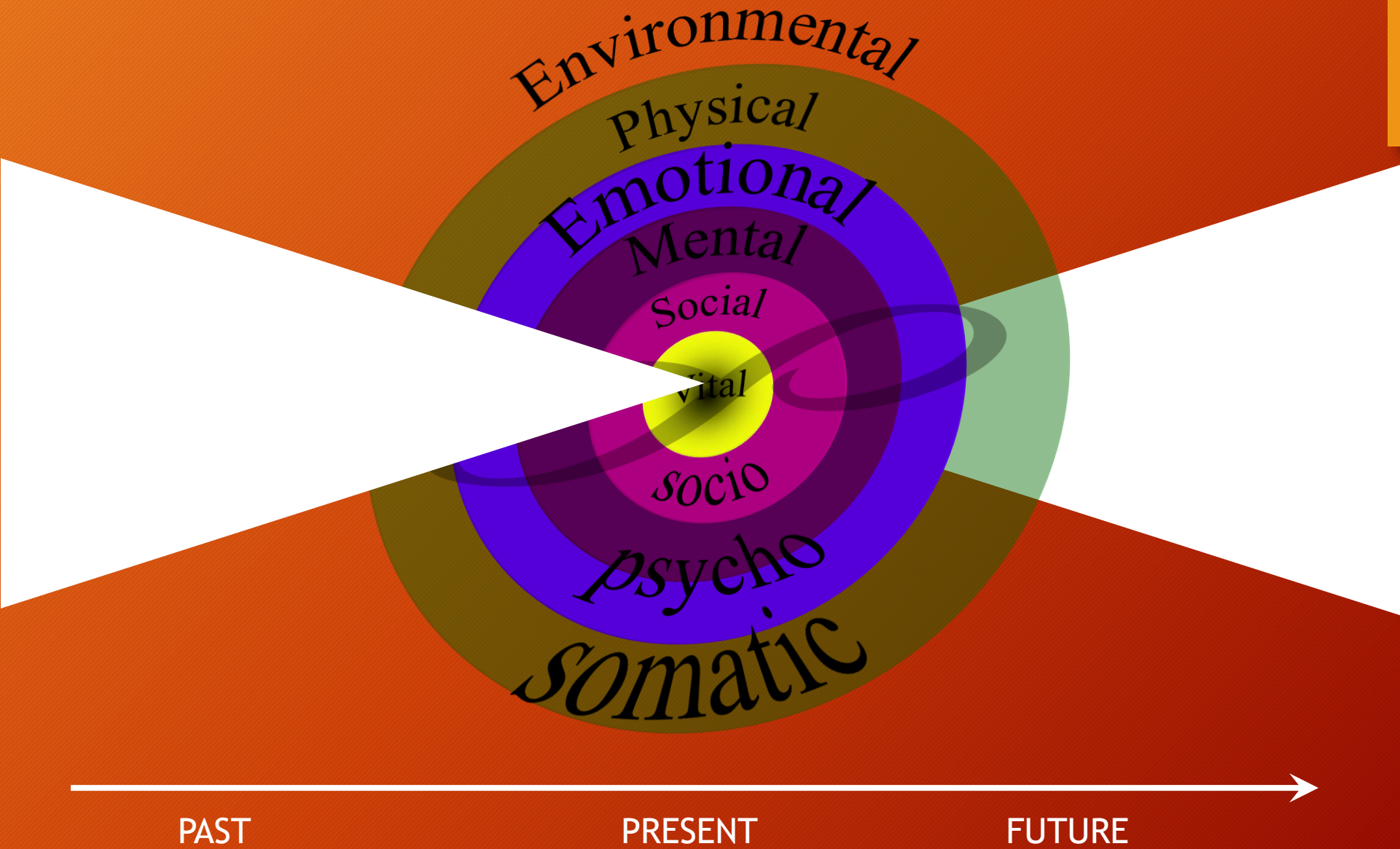


# Children know when they are loved





Our vital organising nature is felt in the moment when we are safe.

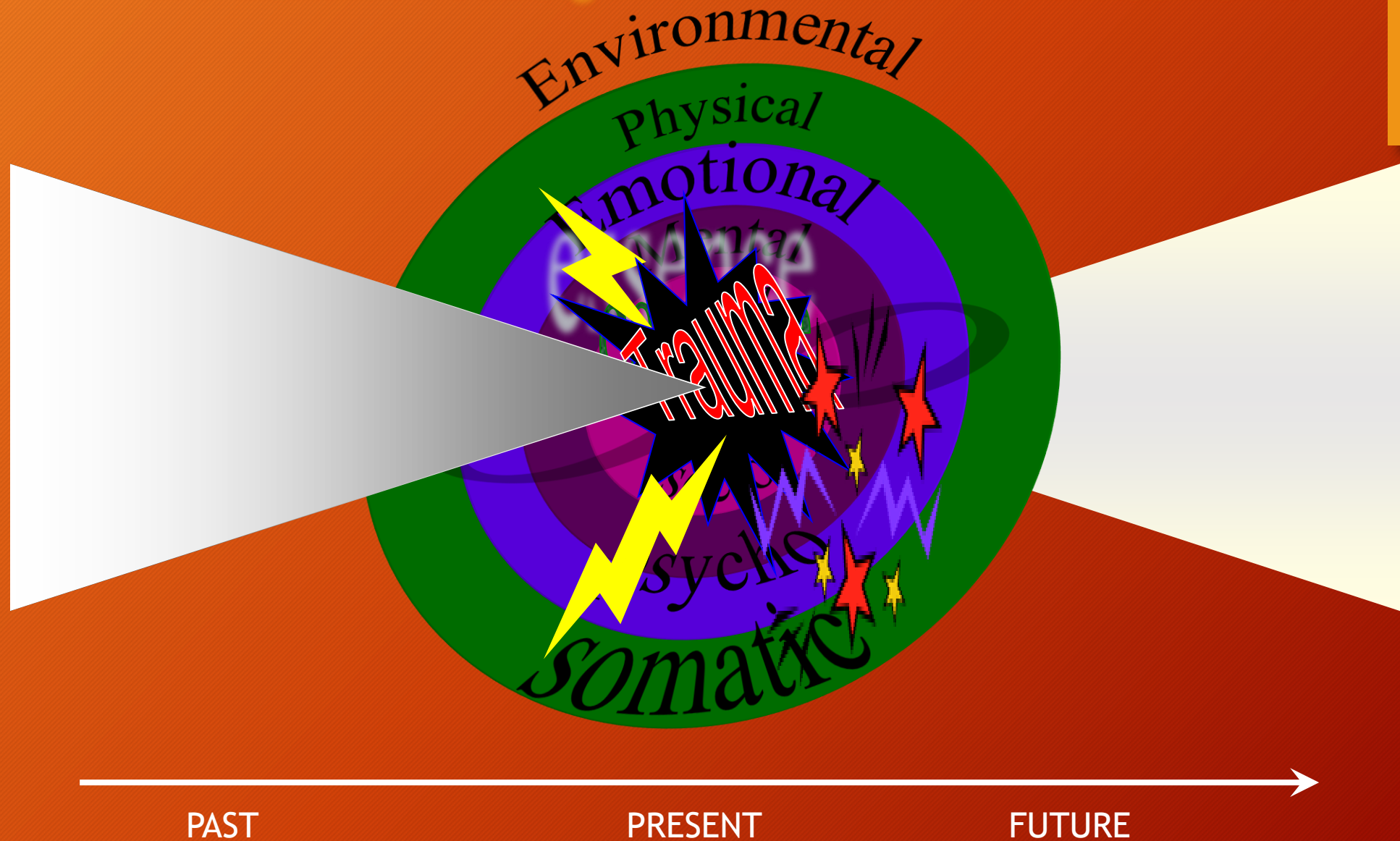


# Parenting is hard work





**Shock Trauma cannot be integrated and digested as  
are normal events, and can cause re-enactment.**



# Developmental Growth - Stage one. Between Birth and 6 Months: Being



- to trust the world
- to feel connected and bonded with a family
- to be nurtured with touch and loving care
- To learn that simply being in the world is important.



# Developmental growth: Stage two

## 6 months to 18 months ... doing



- Move out into the world
- Explore
- Develop a sensory awareness by doing
- Not at the stage to provide self discipline nor able to share, caregivers provide a safe environment and limit 'no' to important issues.
- Helping children 'to do', as well as 'to be'.

# Developmental Growth - Stage Three: 18 Months and 3 Years: Thinking



The task is for children to be able to think for themselves.

To be assertive

To begin to separate from parents

Being dependent when necessary, but being allowed to express themselves forcefully as they explore separation

Parents provide a great deal of information, how- to's and reasons.



# Developmental Growth - Stage Four: Between 3 Years and 6 Years



The tasks in this age group is to learn who they are in relationship to others.

To begin to practice socially appropriate behavior.

To differentiate between what is real and what is fantasy.

Acquire information about the world, their bodies and their sex roles.

# Developmental Growth - Stage Five: Between 6 Years and 12 Years



- The power of being skillful
- Learning to do things their way
- Exploring the importance of rules and
- to test rules within a firm and loving environment
- Caregivers must be able to explain their own values, listen, make clear which (family - social) values are not negotiable, while also allowing for disagreements to help them practice adult thinking.



# 12 to 19 years

## Separating and Sexuality



- Moving into adulthood, children have several major developmental tasks they must master if they are to emerge as independent people with their own values & with responsibility for their own needs, feelings, & behaviours.
- Caregivers play essential roles as teens move from competence to rebelliousness, from using logic to arguing every unimportant detail, and from being both independent and dependent.
- Experimenting with being sexual (which is not the same as being sexually active) and in finding a comfortable place among adults.

# Our brain tells us how to behave in response to our experiences.

**Reason**

**Neo-cortex**

**Prefrontal Cortex**

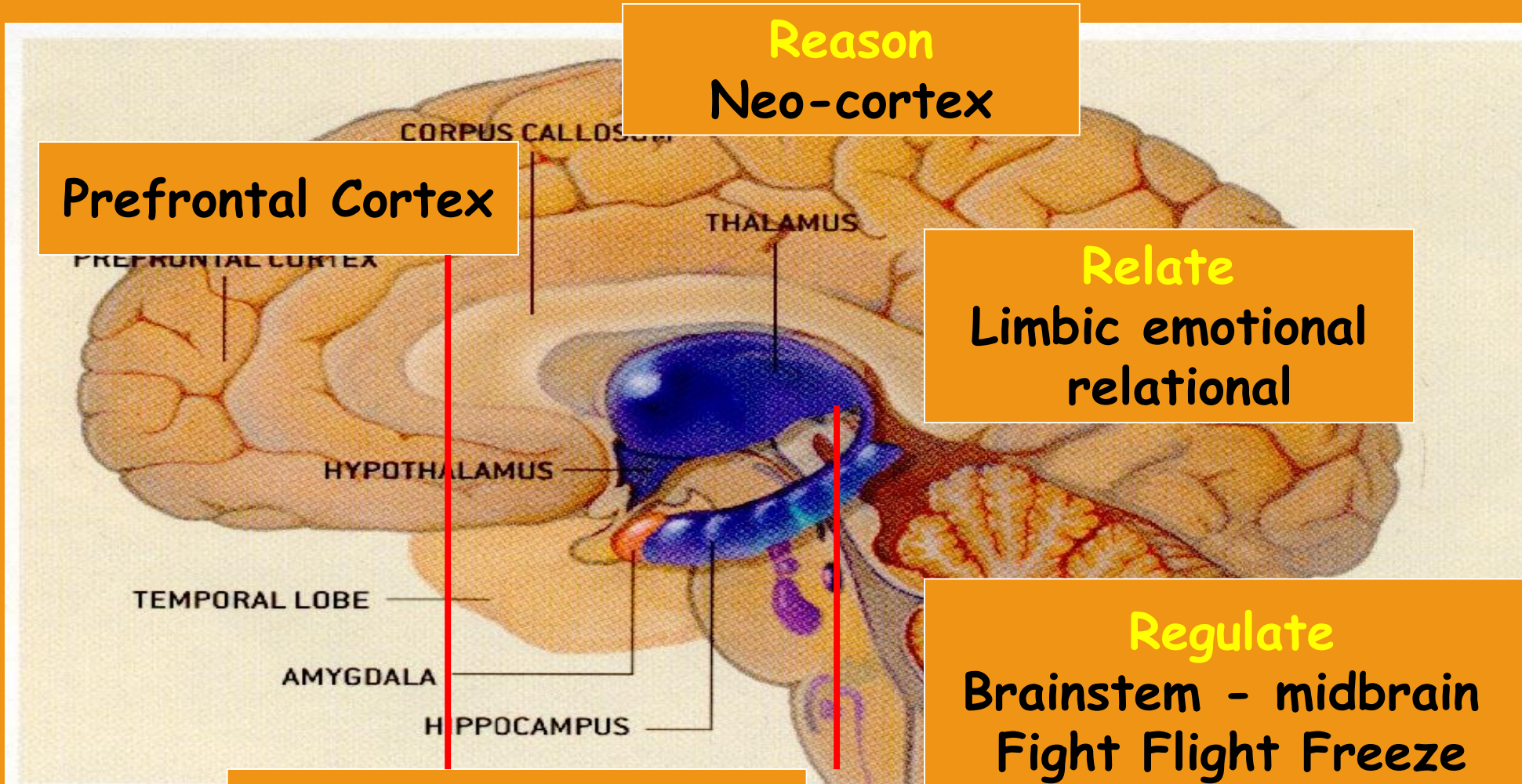
**Relate**

**Limbic emotional  
relational**

**Regulate**

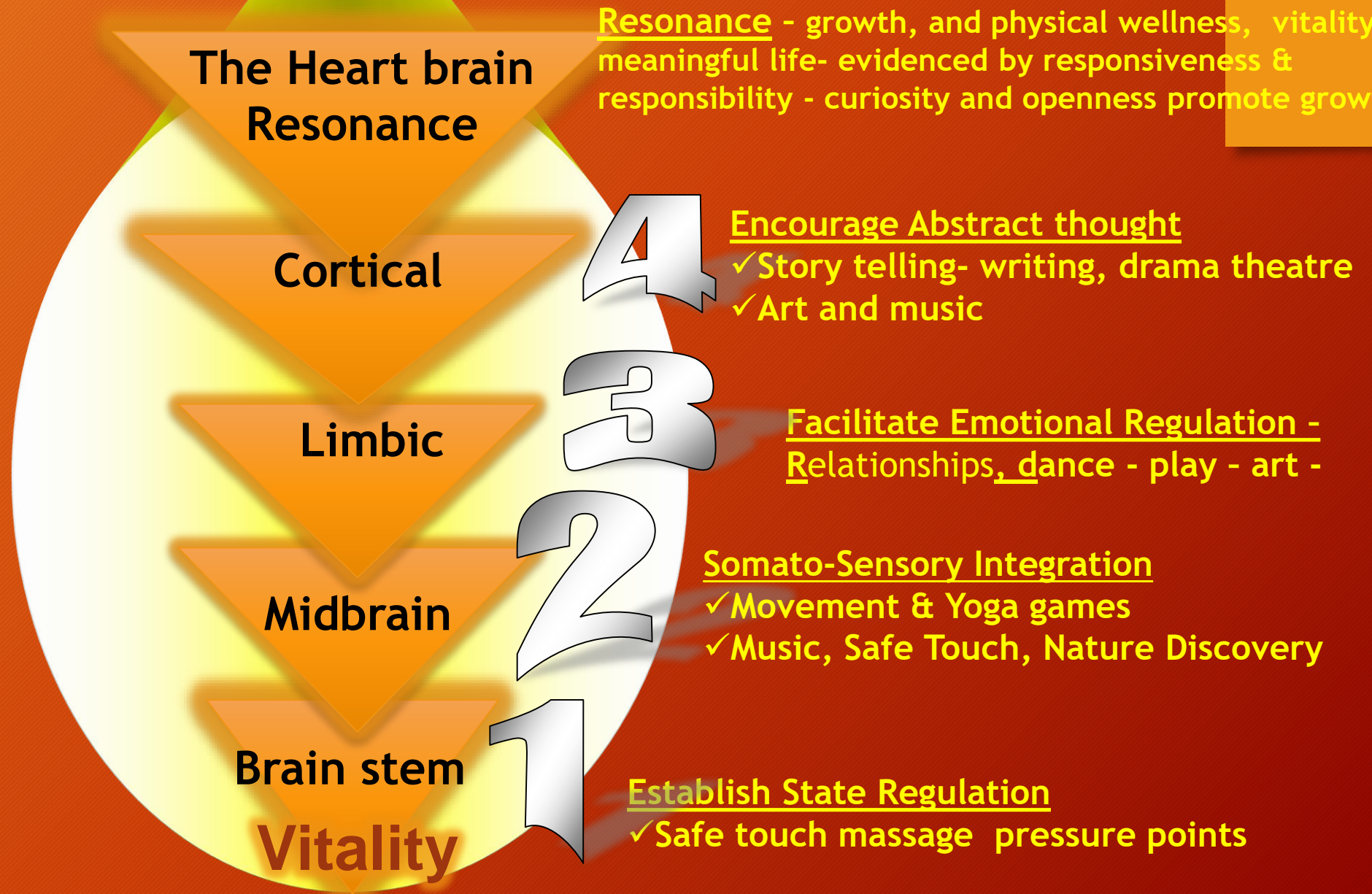
**Brainstem - midbrain  
Fight Flight Freeze**

**Heart Brain**





# Neuro-developmental rationale for healing trauma





# Theatre Dance Music Story Art









## What the children said

- I like music because I can feel the beat through my body.
- I like dance because I can tell different stories.
- I like body work because I feel calm and relaxed.
- I like theatre because I can be growly different characters.
- I like art because I can't make mistakes.
- I like the nature discovery because I can learn things when I am outside.



# What happened when we applied Educaring principles in a school?

Grandparents cried

Look at me  
I can read  
now

Literacy  
and  
Numeracy  
Improved 150% - 300%



Children never  
missed  
a day

Empathy on  
a frozen  
morning

Parents  
regularly  
visit the  
school





Play: - What we  
can learn from  
play.

The Massage circle

Wanting to  
remake ceremony  
- 23 foster homes  
in year -

Saying goodbye to  
Poppy





# We are our Children's Future Behaviour that Teaches Leadership



- Using the following analogy. 'If I got sick and was admitted to this town's hospital, I would get a certain level of diagnosis and treatment....if however, I got sicker, I wouldn't be sent home for a specified period of time.. (like a suspension). I would be given a more specialised, individual level of care. This is what we must do.'
- Reflective, deep insight, and unconditional care and advocacy for children.
- Truly CARE FOR KIDS with UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, and wise insight into why they behave why they do.”

# Educaring Models of Practice

The Educaring model proposes transformational learning designed to provide opportunities for children to learn at their optimal levels, while receiving therapeutic care in the learning environment - Edu-caring.

The model is built on the 7 R's of educaring.

**RIGHTS RESPECT RESPONSIBILITY**

**RECIPROCITY RELATEDNESS**

**RESILIENCE RESONANCE**





- **RESPECT ...**

**for each child  
as a unique  
being with  
unlimited  
potential**







**RIGHT to be safe, protected,  
allowed to grow and learn at their optimal  
level within cultural and spiritual ways of  
being in the world, at home, within school and  
in the community**





Learning  
**RESPONSIBILITY**  
for  
life choices  
and  
behaviours



# Embodied in principles of **RECIPROCITY**







## • RELATEDNESS

how the child  
engages in the  
world in which  
they live and learn

a world of  
relationships.





# RESILIENCE

Flexibility

Hardiness

Toughness

The capacity to  
recover from  
adversity,  
tragedy, trauma.







# **Resonance**

the language of the heart

**empathy - compassion**  
**character - moral integrity**  
**the heart brain**

**To unit hearts and establish order!**





# Principles of whole of community healing to protect children from harm

- Work together
- Begin earlier
- Think Developmentally
- Work from a sound knowledge base
- Make adequate resources available
- Implement the principles & practice of Child Rights, Human Rights, Indigenous Rights
- Support parents, schools, health services, child safety, etc, to 'Educare'.



# Healing childhood trauma within the framework of Whole of Government - Community Healing.



**“You said, 'They’re harmless dreamers  
and they’re loved by the people.'  
'What,' I ask you, 'is harmless about a dreamer, and what,'  
I ask you, 'is harmless about the love of the people?’**

**Revolution only needs good dreamers who remember their dreams  
Tennessee Williams**

**There is always a dream dreaming us**

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# Culturally Informed, Trauma Integrated Healing Approaches



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Sharing Culture  
Regenerating Community

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