

Trauma and young people: Taking a strengths approach

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Website for training, professional development, resources

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Website for research, publications etc DNA-V

www.dnav.international



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DNA-V as a unified framework for growth




www.louisehayes.com.au

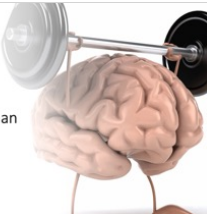
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Overview




Adaptation




Consider trauma adaptations rather than damage

(Decker et al. 2020)



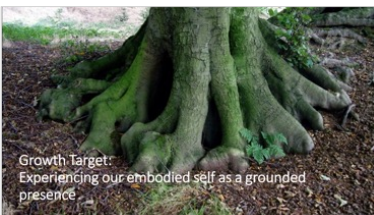
Social view

It begins here




Adaptation

- young people



Growth Target:
Experiencing our embodied self as a grounded presence



Assessment

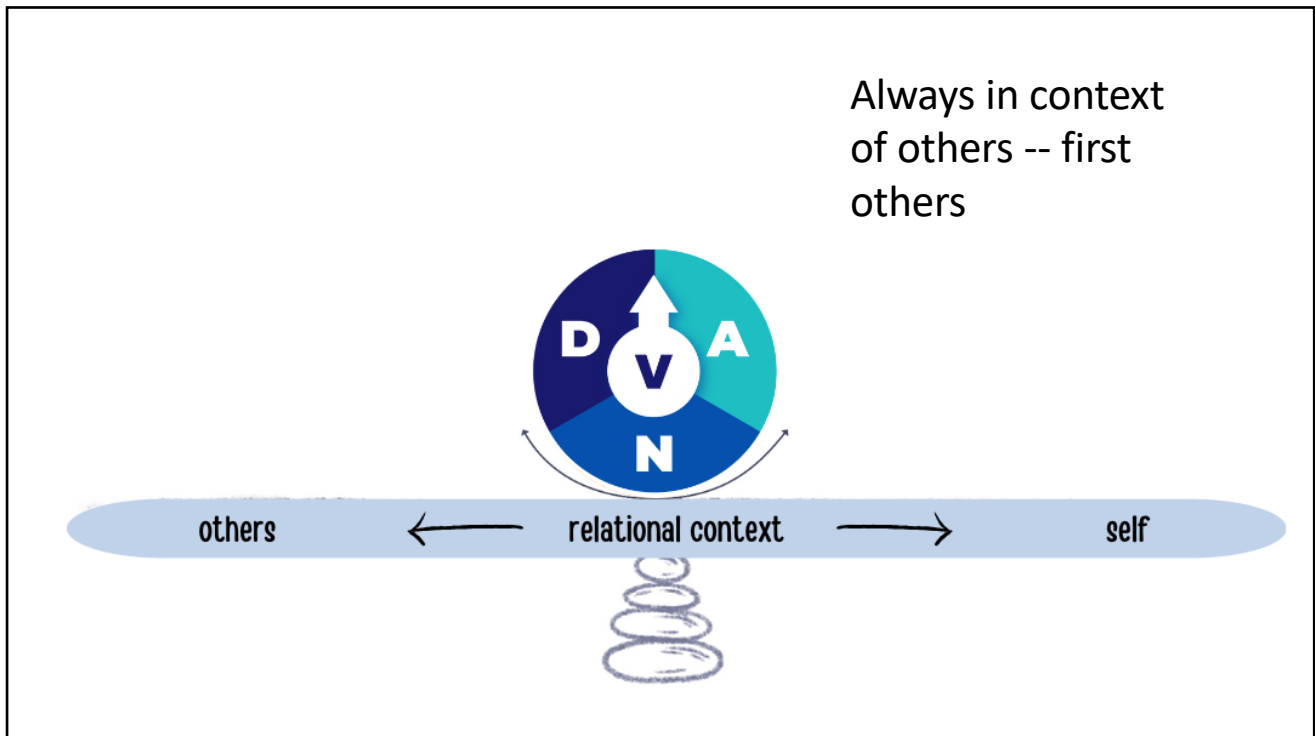
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Adaptation



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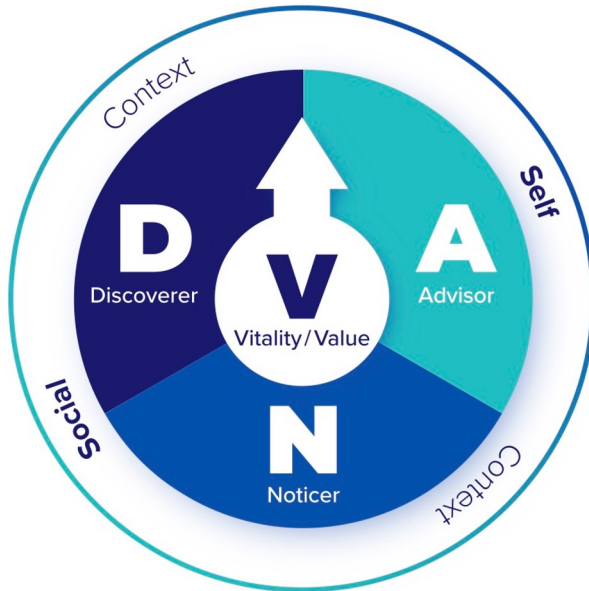
Social view (a perspective on your DNAV)

Taking perspectives on others, to recognize social interdependence and the value of others, and behaving effectively in social situations

<p>Social world is flexible. Perspective of self with other across time (relationships in context). Seeing the interaction between DNA-v and relationships. Able to see others have DNA-v too.</p>	<p>Social world is fixed. Narrow views of others and relationships; e.g. blame, judgement. Unable to see that others have DNA-V too (e.g might be hooked by their advisor).</p>
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- Four abilities every human has:
- noticer – what you notice inside and outside you
- discoverer – what you do
- advisor – what you tell yourself
- valuer – what matters to you

Variation
Selection
Retention

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Valuing & vitality (DNAV four processes)

Vitality is engaging in life, moment by moment.
Value is consistent action sustained across time and hardship.
Creating contexts that empower us to connect with vitality or value.

high in valued
purpose and
action, vitality
engaged

low in valued
purpose, or low
in ongoing
motivation

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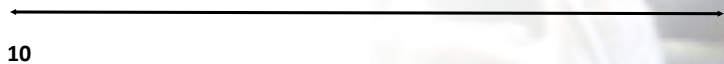
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Noticing (DNAV four processes)

Noticing inner and outer experience and having the capacity to accept rather than or avoid or cling to it.
Attending to the present context, others and the world

Open, accepting
aware - connected
to embodied self,
present to others
and the world

Controlling,
reactive, unaware -
disconnected from
body, others and
the world



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Advising (DNAV four processes)

Help people to navigate their context with language and disengage from unhelpful language processes (rules, beliefs, judgements, evaluations, predictions, problem-solving)

cognitive
flexibility +
attention to self,
other and world

cognitive rigidity
+ inflexible
attention to self,
other and world



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Discovering (DNAV four processes)

Use trial-and-error learning. Willingly engaging in new or non-typical behaviour, to develop their skills and resources, and expand our context.

Discoverer zone -
trying new things,
tracking
consequences,
high in willingness

Comfort zone -
repeated
responses and
habits, poor
tracking, unwilling

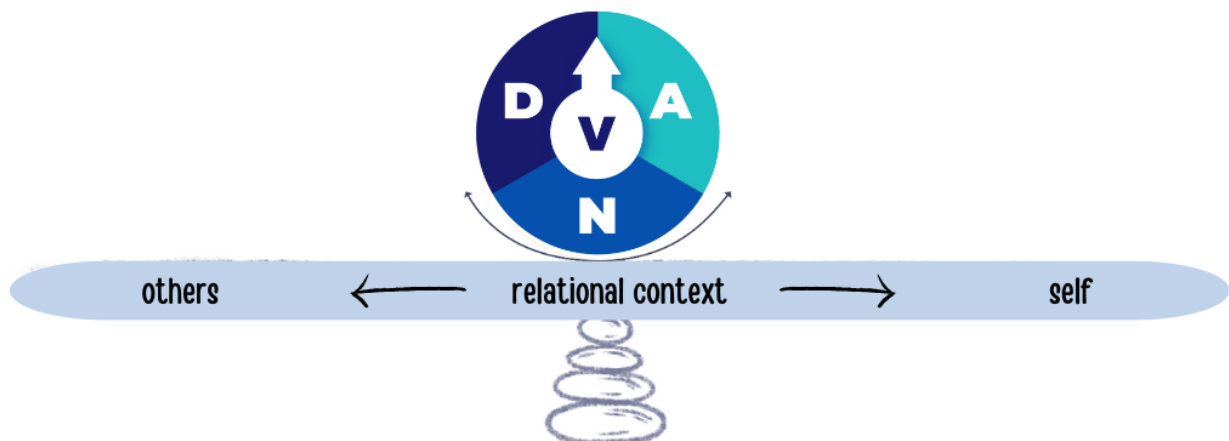
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Always in context
of others, and then
of yourself



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Self perspective (a perspective)

Self is all DNA-v (vs thing like). Being able to take perspective on ourselves, overcome self-limiting beliefs or categories, view self with compassion, and take actions towards self that are self-enhancing rather than self-destroying.

I am the container of my experiences.
Perspective-taking of self as all DNA-v disk. I change constantly

Fluid - changing

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I am the content. Self as fixed or parts. I am my history, labels, body thoughts, etc

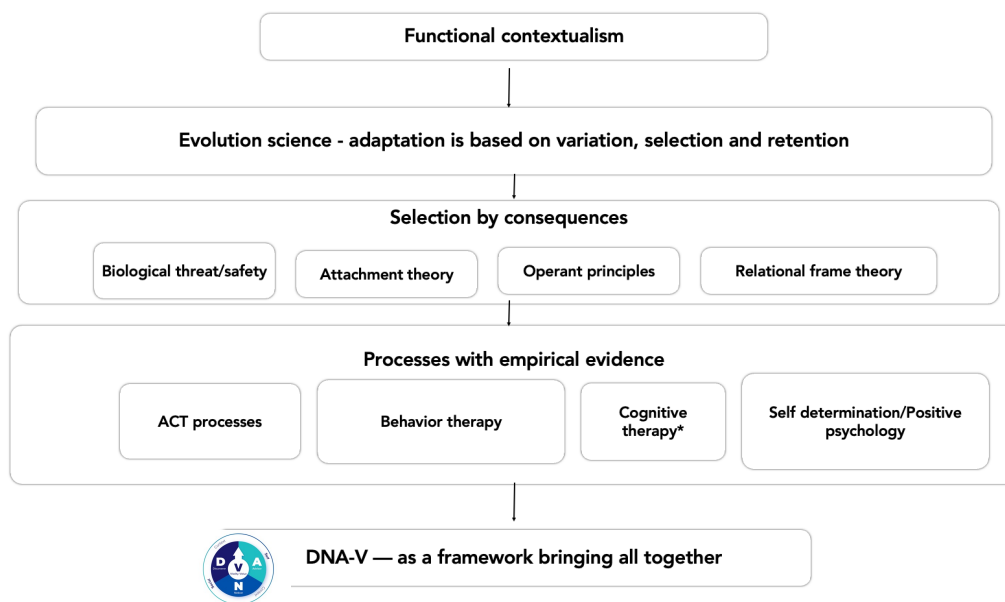
Fixed -thing like

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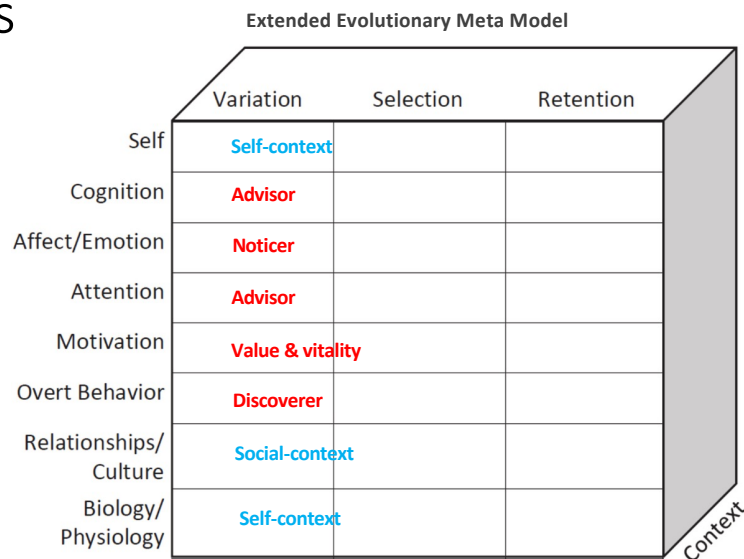
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Theoretical and evidence foundation



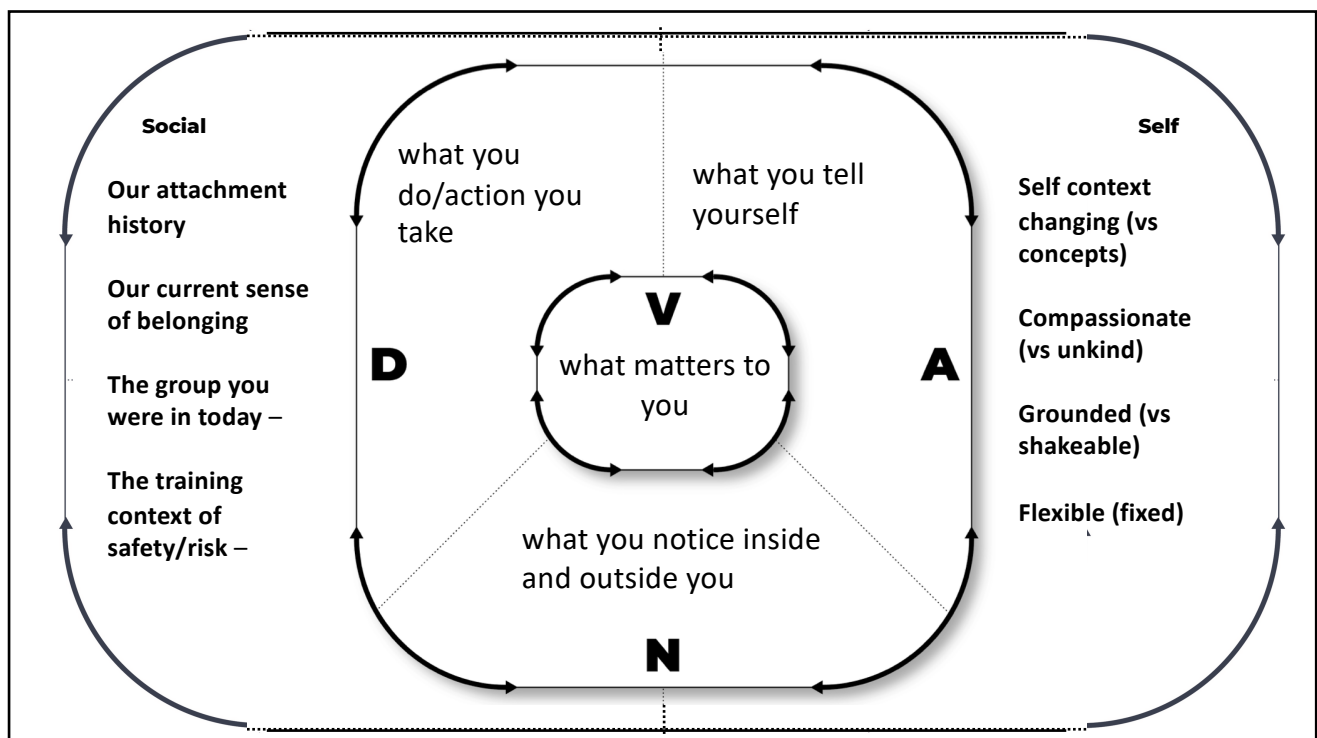
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Process Based

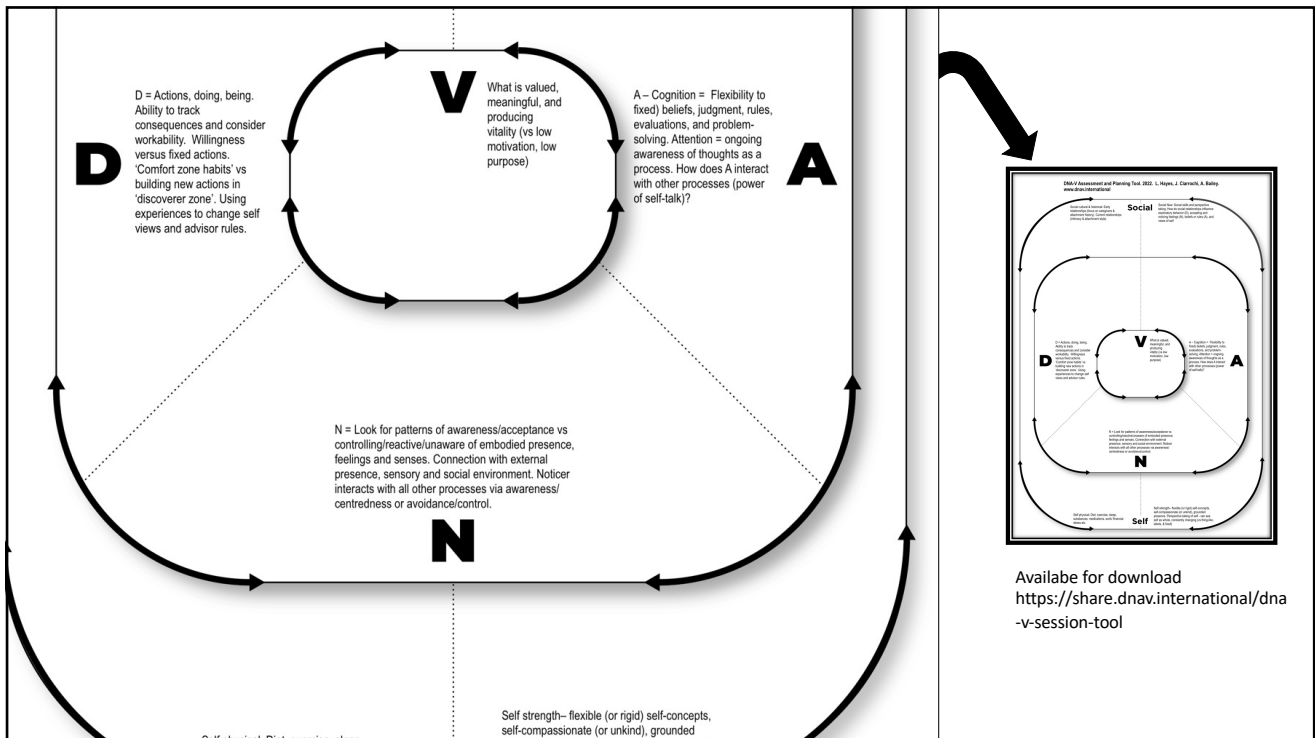


Source: Ong, C. W., Giarrochi, J., Hofmann, S. G., Karekla, M., & Hayes, S. C. (2024). Through the extended evolutionary meta-model, and what ACT found there: ACT as a process-based therapy. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 32, 100734. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2024.100734>

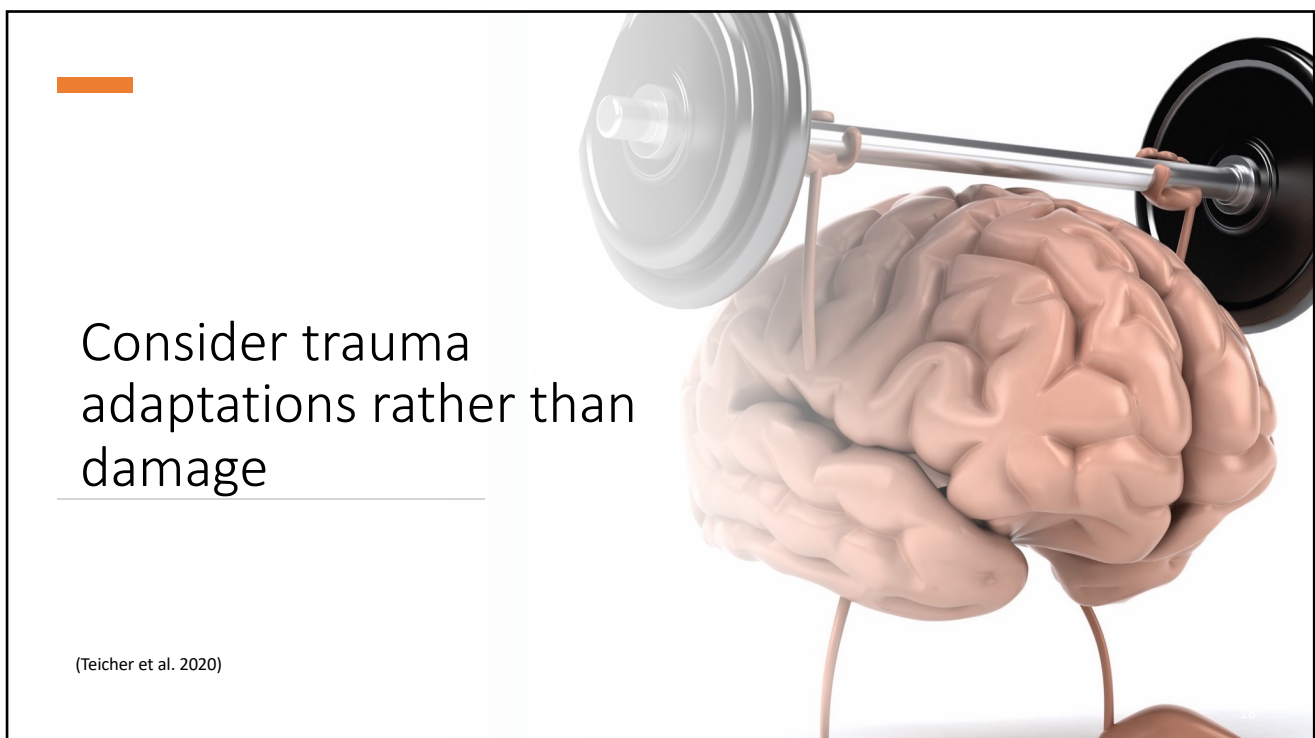
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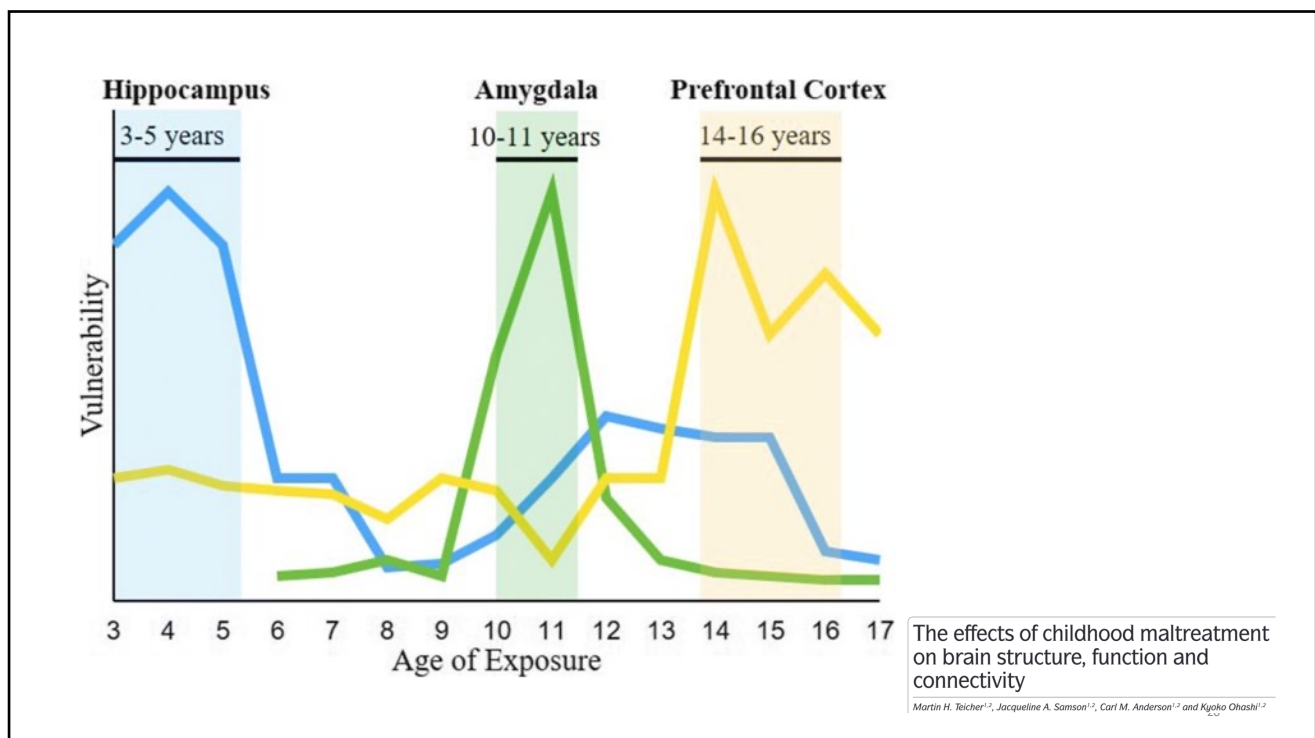


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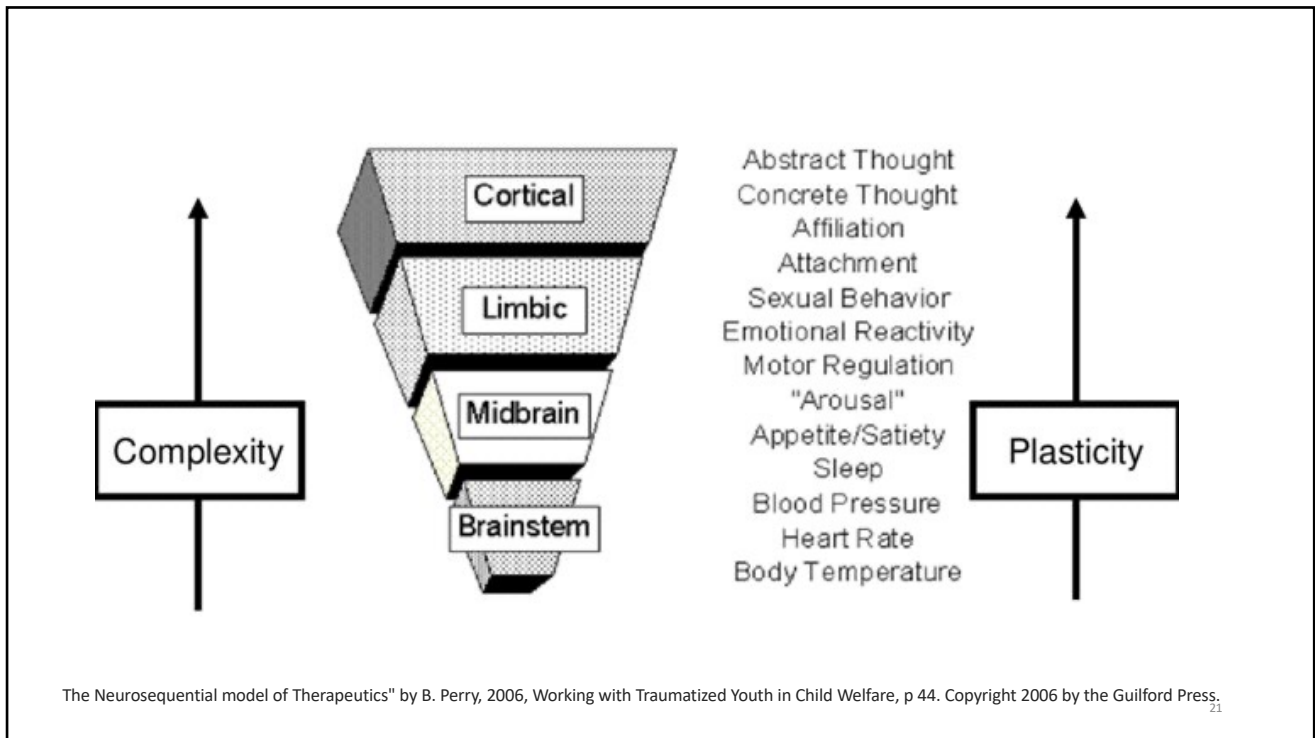
Different types of events have distinct influences on development

- Harm imposed by others = threat
- Insufficient environment = deprivation
- Our task:
 - Leverage stress-adapted skills that enabled individuals to function in harsh/unpredictable environments
 - Use instead for success in normative contexts, such as schools, workplaces and safe relationships

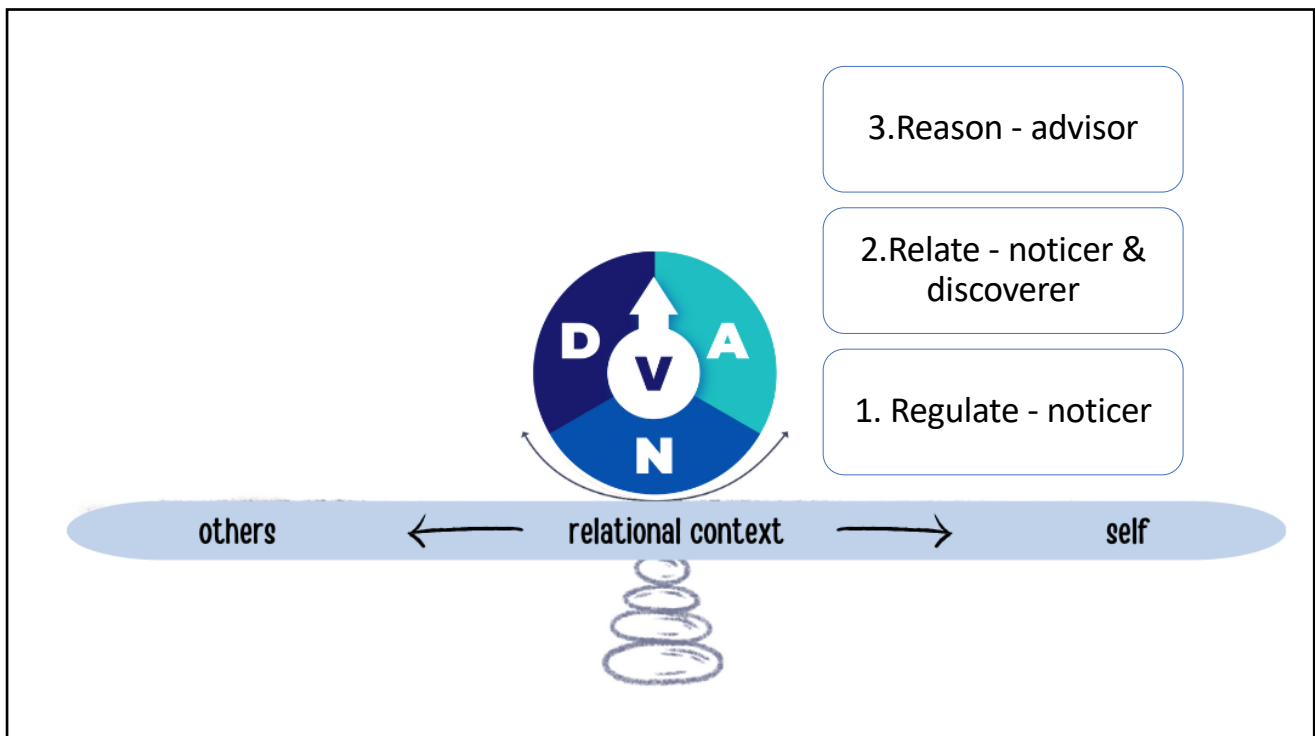
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Trauma as social context



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With
development
brain
architecture
has
implications
for what we
do

A young person's response to trauma is individualised

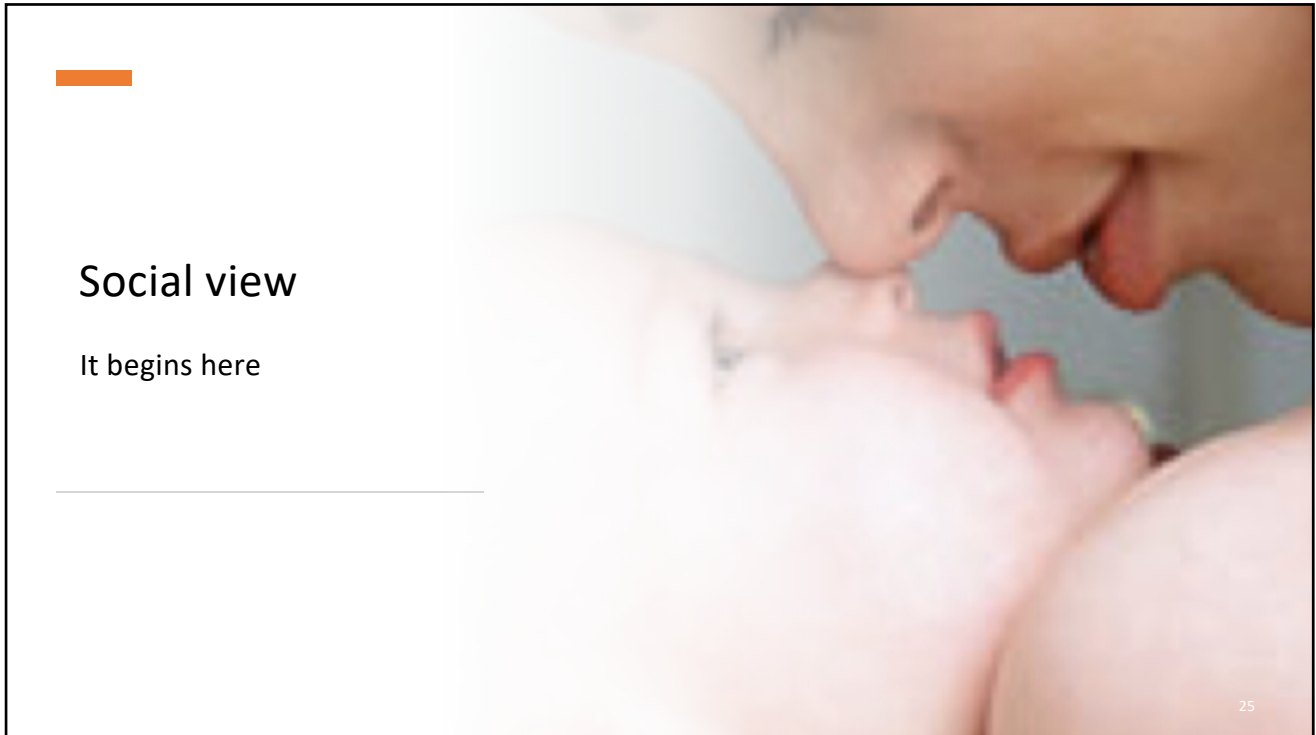
Connectivity in neural structures may be important for therapists to consider – e.g whole DNA-V in context does this

Provide a consistent relational foundation in the present -- creates a mismatch between their past experience and the present.

There we have an opportunity for new learning

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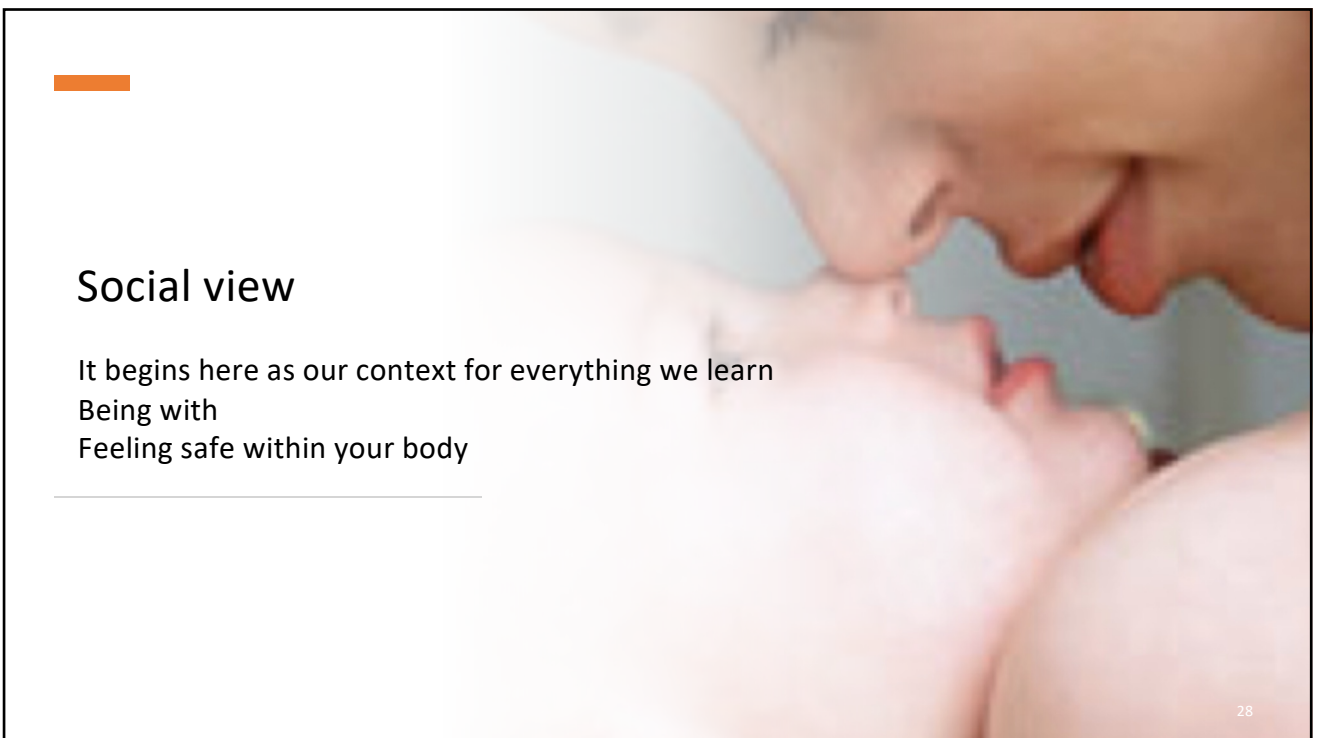
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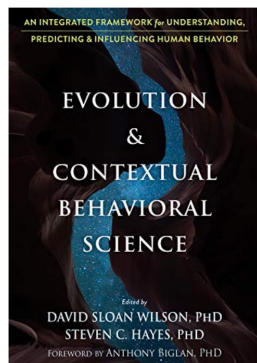
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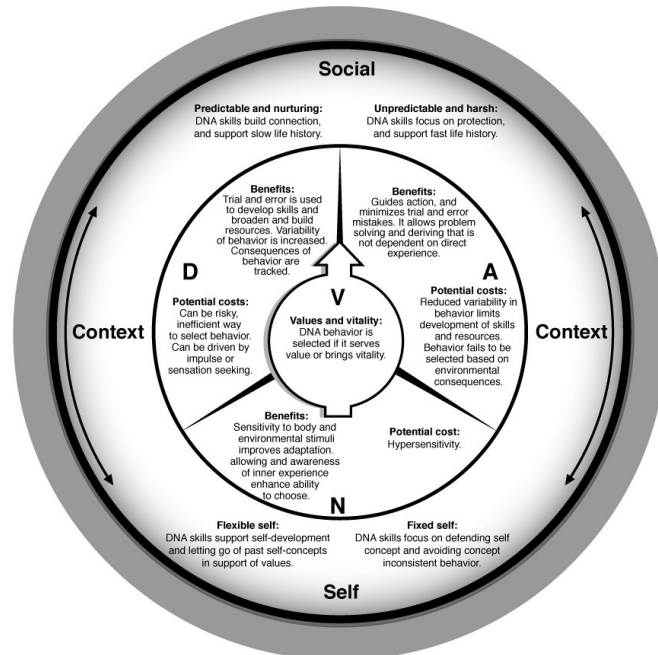
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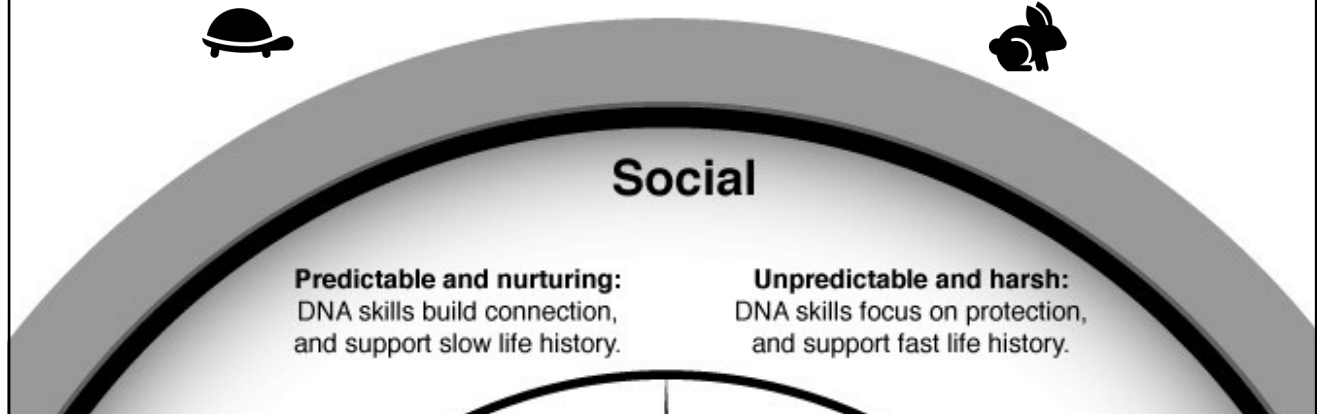
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DNA-V abilities adapt to context

Slow life trajectory
= Connection



Fast life trajectory
= Protection



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Different types of events have distinct influences on development

- Harm imposed by others = threat
- Insufficient environment = deprivation
- + environmental unpredictability

Development and Psychopathology (2022), 34, 447–471
doi:10.1017/S0954579421001838

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Special Issue Article

Why and how does early adversity influence development? Toward an integrated model of dimensions of environmental experience

Bruce J. Ellis¹, Margaret A. Sheridan², Jay Belsky³ and Katie A. McLaughlin⁴

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Relationships are fertile ground for recovery

A child's current level of relational health is the strongest predictor of their current wellbeing and functioning, even more so than their trauma history (Perry and Dobson. 2010)



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Attunement in therapy

Operates from noticer up

Predicted from three action-oriented responses – listening, understanding, and validating (LUV)

It is not the activity that promotes self-regulation, but the activity in the context of the relationship

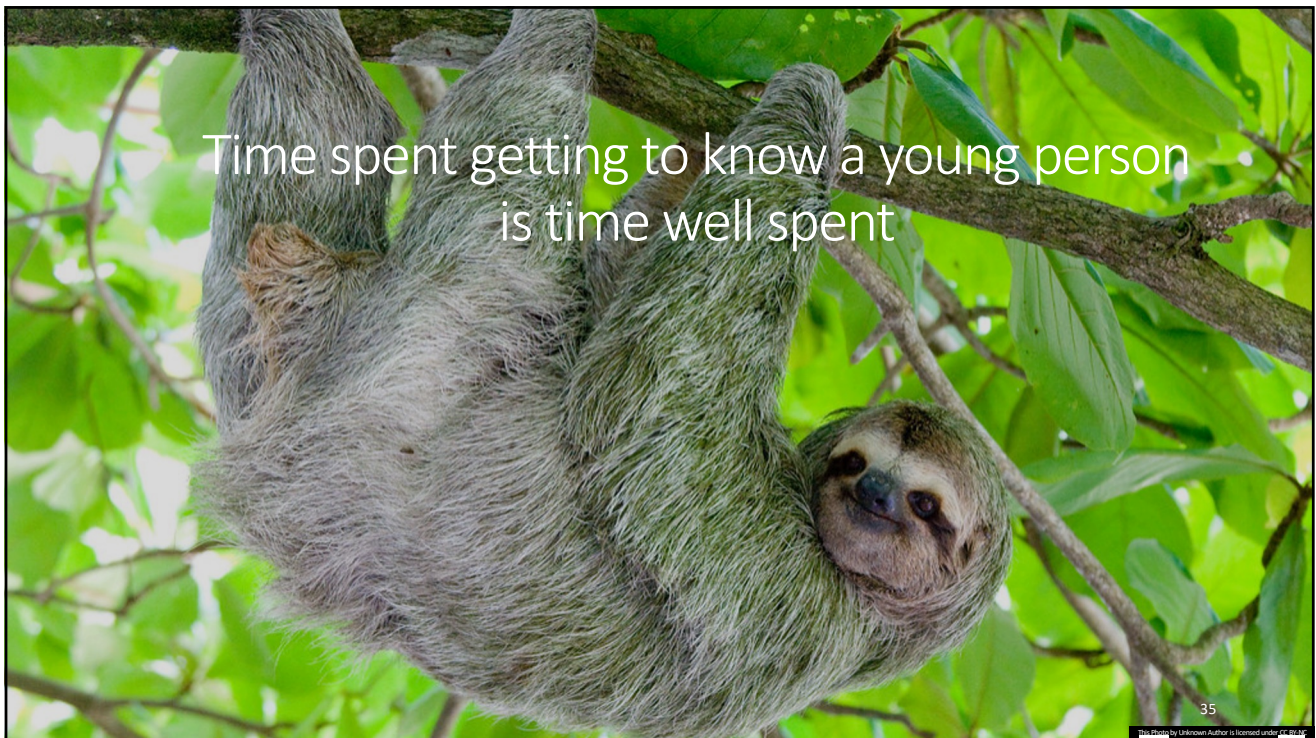
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- Trauma is relational so we want to create a now that vibrates with softness and attentiveness
- Construct a timeline of distress to consider developmental impacts
- Privilege, the young person's needs
- The past is not what happened in the past, but a continuous flow into the current moment - this last minute



Deep safety

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Noticer time

Quieten advisor

- Micro-moments like non-verbal queues, eye, contact, vocalisations, facial expressions, tone of voice, breathing rate
- The therapist is a witness, accepting what the individual expresses
- Creating a context for new adaptive responses

A photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, resting her head on her hand, looking thoughtfully at the camera. A small number "36" is in the bottom right corner of the image.

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Avoid re-traumatisation

- Educate other professionals, teachers, etc
 - Individual responses
 - Neuro type
- Be aware of context triggers, for example
 - Clinical type office
 - Undressing for sports, hospital settings
 - Noises, sensations, fear responses
 - Perceived lack of control
 - Lots of service providers
 - Promising and then leaving

Goddard, A. (2021). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma-Informed Care. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care: Official Publication of National Association of Pediatric Nurse Associates & Practitioners*, 35(2), 145–155. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2020.09.001>

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Adaptation
- young people

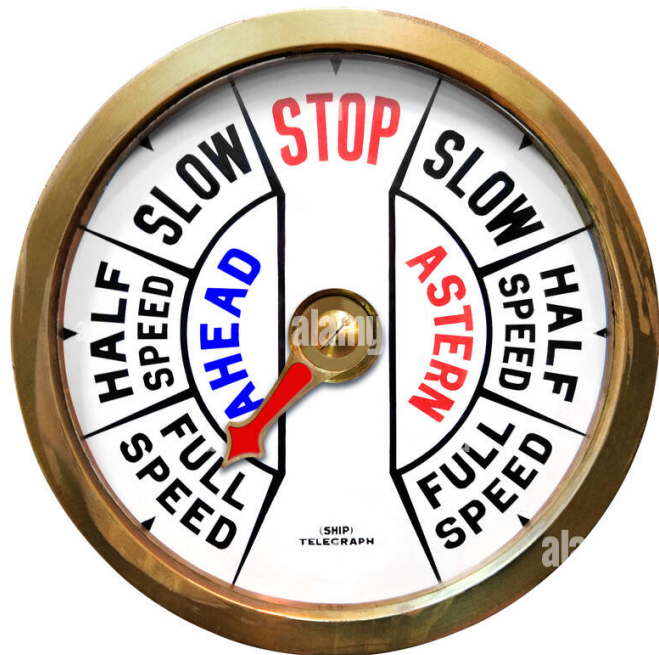
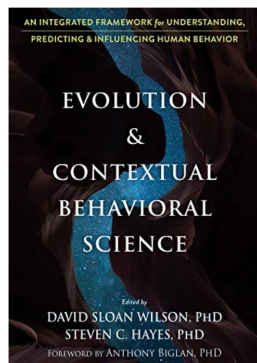
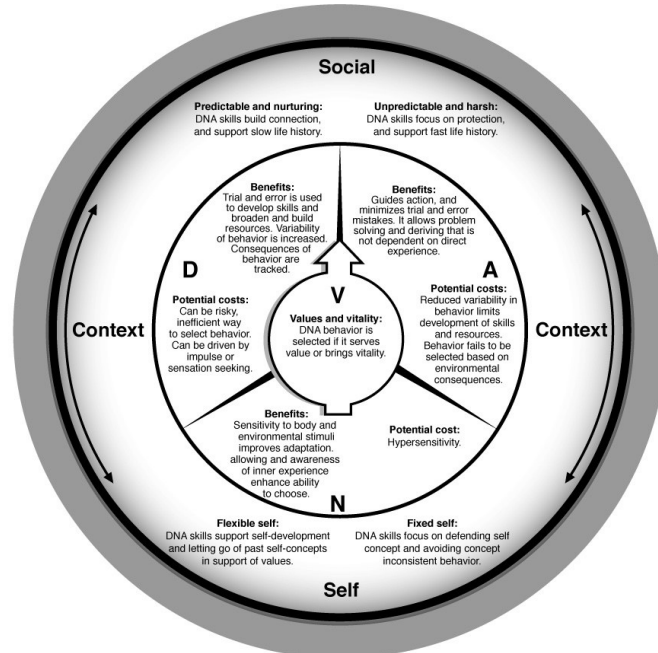


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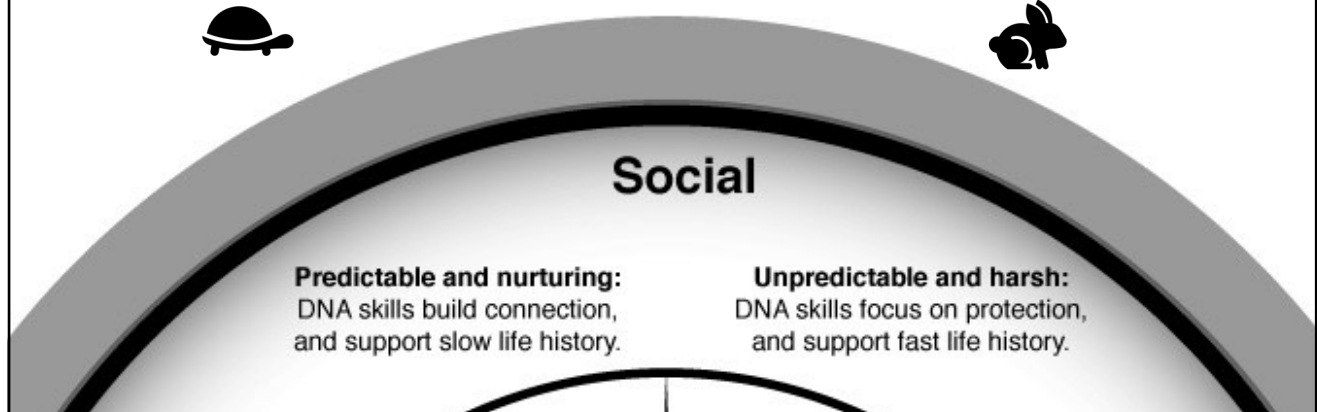
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DNA-V abilities adapt to context

Slow life trajectory
= Connection



Fast life trajectory
= Protection



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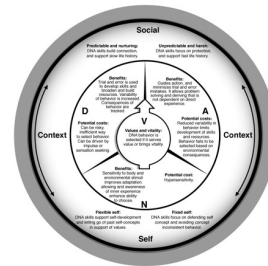
Noticer – navigating life with the body (senses, interoception/neuroception*)



- Advantages of this ability for survival:
 - Sensitive to body
 - Sensitive to environment
 - Variability in inner experience, emotions, and responses



- Costs if developmental context is traumatic:
 - Hypersensitivity to threat cues



* Porges term for ability to detect cues without conscious awareness

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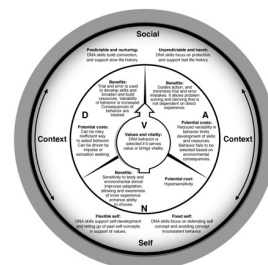
Advisor – navigating life with cognitions



- Advantages:
 - Fast guide to action
 - Use language for prediction, avoids the need for trial and error
 - Not dependent on direct experience



- Costs in trauma development:
 - Content 'words' become fixed
 - Reduced variability can limit growth
 - Reduced selection based on environmental consequences
 - Cognitions become concrete rather than arbitrary



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Discoverer – navigating life through action and reaction



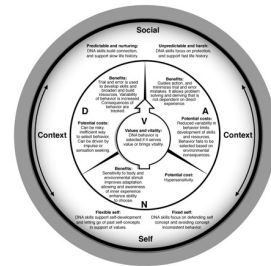
- Advantages:

- Open to variability, mistakes allowed
- Selection based on consequences



- Costs:

- Trial and error can be risky in harsh environments
- Reinforced by impulsivity and sensation seeking



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Value and vitality - retention

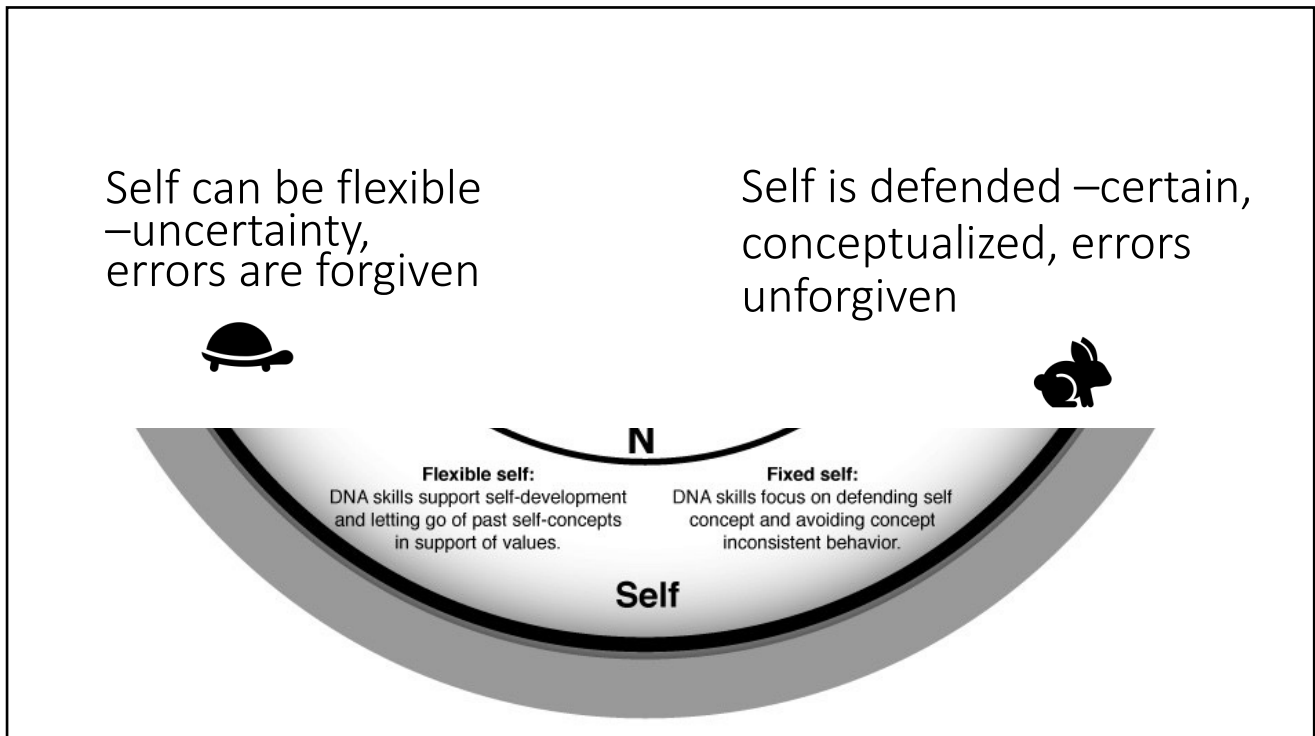


- Verbal behavior that can transform experience and help us move beyond immediate reinforcement
- Values define the consequences that, ideally, would select a particular behaviour in a particular environment
- Select for behaviour that optimises growth

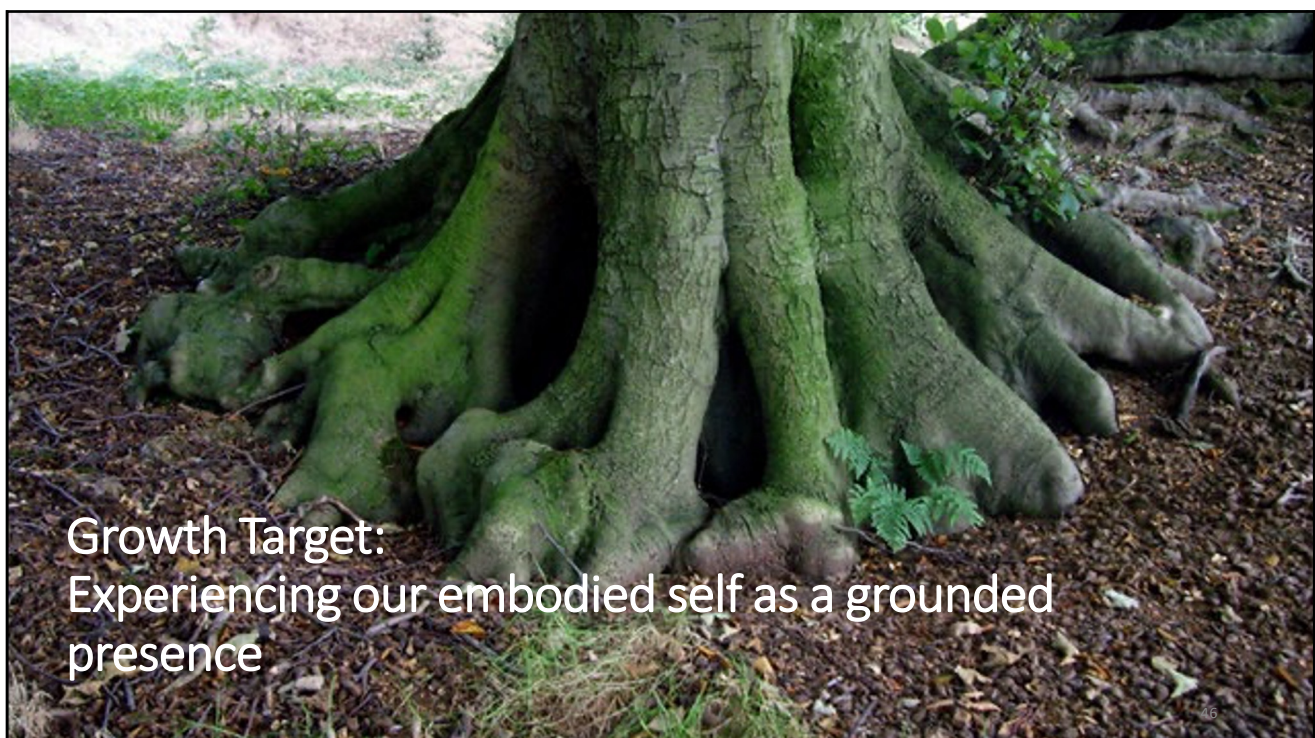
Benefits must outweigh costs



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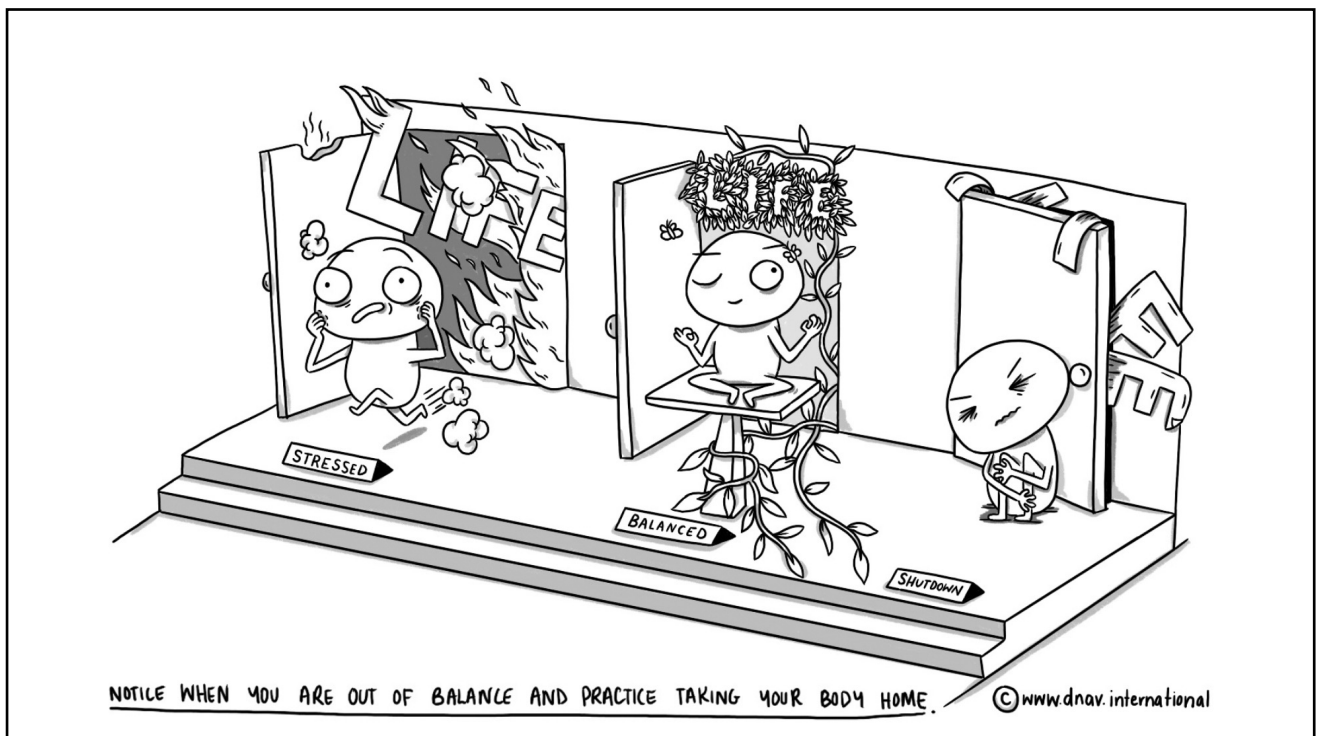
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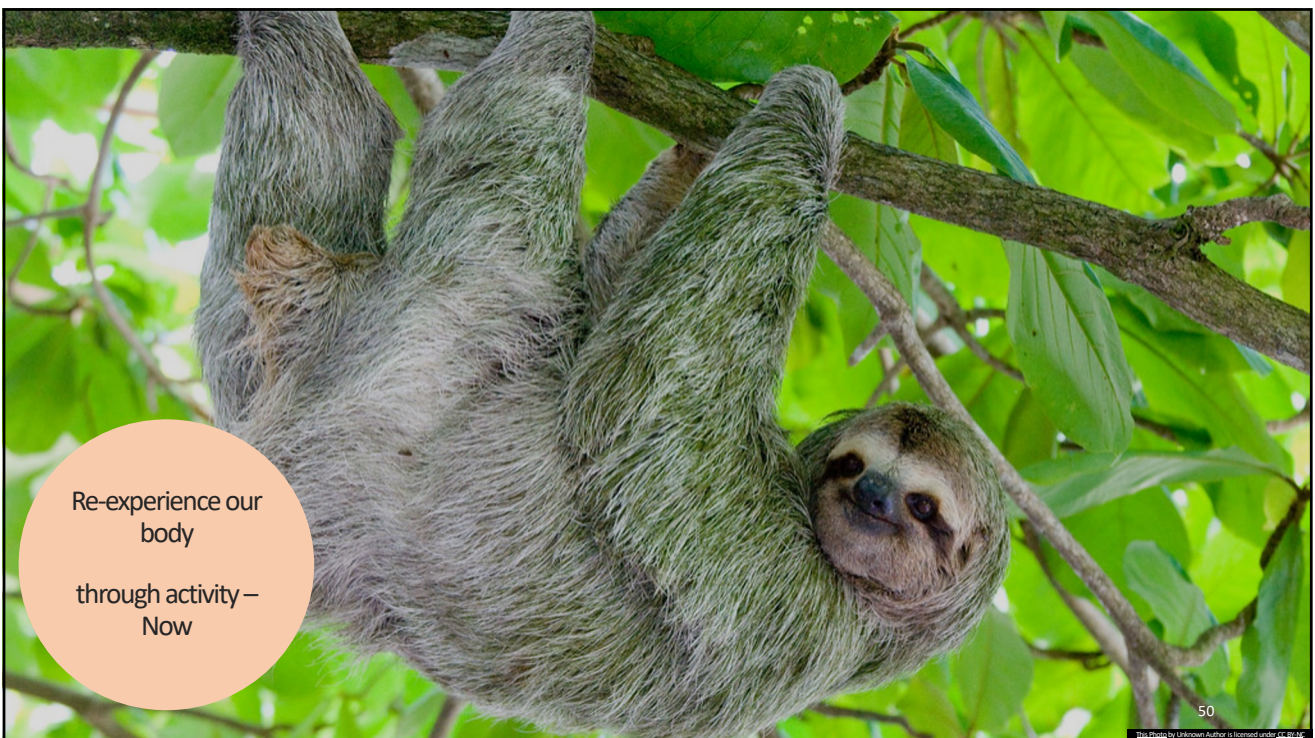
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Aware of your
stress in body

- NOW

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Re-experience our
body

through activity –
Now

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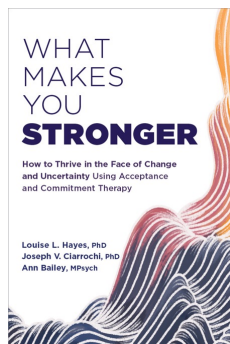


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- Pause, Reset, Plan
- P48 What Makes You Stronger

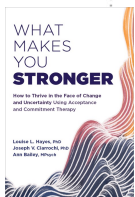


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Pause, Reset, Plan

If a stressful event is happening right now, practice this Pause, Reset, Plan routine:

- 1. Pause.** Stop doing everything. Breathe out long and slow. Notice your breath as you do this. Try not to change your inhale; just slow your exhale.
- 2. Reset.** If you can, allow your gaze to reach off far into the distance for a few seconds; see the sky if you can.
- 3. Plan.** Remind yourself of your values or vitality. Right now, I want to . . . _____.



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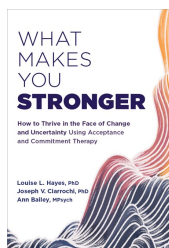
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- Movement – anything from walking to exercise
- Music – listening, playing, rhythm, podcast making
- Eye movement and bilateral stimulation for trauma memories



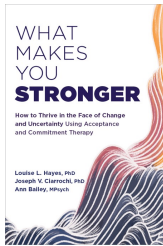
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- Make Peace with All Feelings
- P48 What makes you stronger



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- Make Peace with All Feelings
- P48 What makes you stronger



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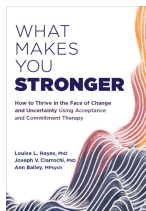
Make Peace with All Feelings

Think about an everyday event that made you feel happy, such as time spent with a friend, reading a favorite book, walking the dog, etc.

- » Take a breath.
- » Make your body into a posture that reflects this happiness. If you found yourself smiling, let the smile rest on your face now.
- » Notice all the internal sensations as you reflect on this moment. Notice how your body changes, your face changes, etc.
- » Label it—this is happiness. Allow this experience to be inside you.
- » Pause and exhale. Wiggle your toes. Release the experience.

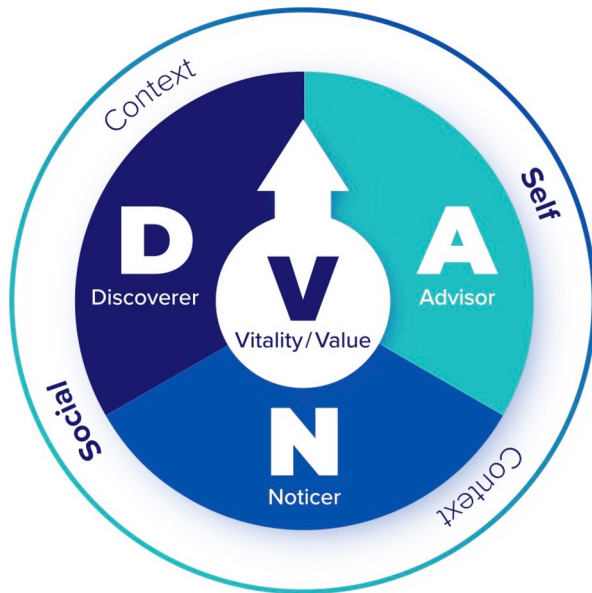
Now, think about a recent event where you felt down or defeated, an argument with a loved one, being overworked, unexpected bills.

- » Make your body into the posture that reflects that moment of low mood.
- » Hold it for a moment, and notice all of the weight inside you.
- » Label it—this is sadness.
- » Allow this experience to be inside you, just as you did with happiness.
- » Now, pause and take a long exhale again, making a whoosh sound as you exhale. Notice the ground under your feet.



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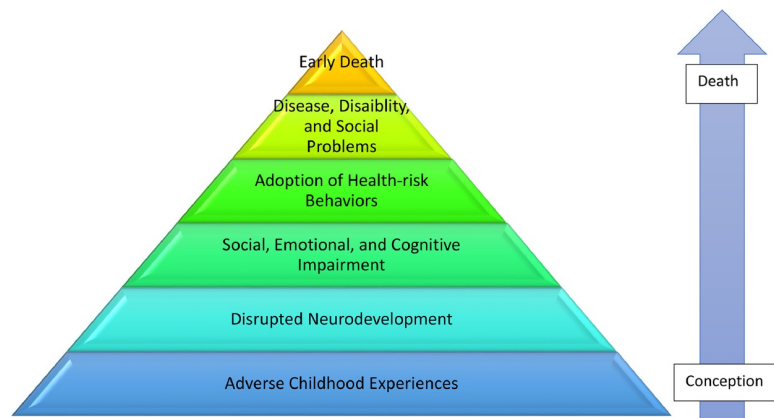


What you're missing

- Four abilities every human has:
- noticer – what you notice inside and outside you
- discoverer – what you do
- advisor – what you tell yourself
- valuer – what matters to you

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Impact of childhood trauma



Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., Koss, M. P., & Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0749-3797(98)00017-8)

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Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Bereavement
- Bullying
- Community violence
- Domestic violence
- Emotional abuse
- Food scarcity
- Forced displacement
- Foster care system experiences
- Illness/medical trauma
- Interpersonal violence
- Impaired caregiver
- Kidnaping
- Living in unsafe environments
- Multiple deaths and traumatic loss
- Natural disasters
- Neglect
- Peer rejection
- Physical abuse
- Physical assault
- Political violence
- Poor academic performance
- Poverty
- Racism over time
- School violence
- Serious injury/accident
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual assault/rape
- Terrorism
- Traumatic loss
- War

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ACEs and Psychological Flexibility

Screening for ACEs along with psychological flexibility measure

Psychological flexibility moderated the relationship between self-reported ACEs and depressive symptoms.

- **High psychological flexibility associated with less depressive symptoms – even when ACEs were higher**
- Average psychological flexibility had no relationship between ACEs and depressive symptoms
- Low psychological flexibility associated with more depressive symptoms when experiencing higher numbers of ACEs.

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Hostutler et al (in press). ACEs Screening in Adolescent Primary Care: Psychological Flexibility as a Moderator. Families, Systems, & Health

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ACEs – not modifiable

but,

Psychological Flexibility – is modifiable

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Hostutler et al (in press). ACEs Screening in Adolescent Primary Care: Psychological Flexibility as a Moderator. Families, Systems, & Health

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Assessment

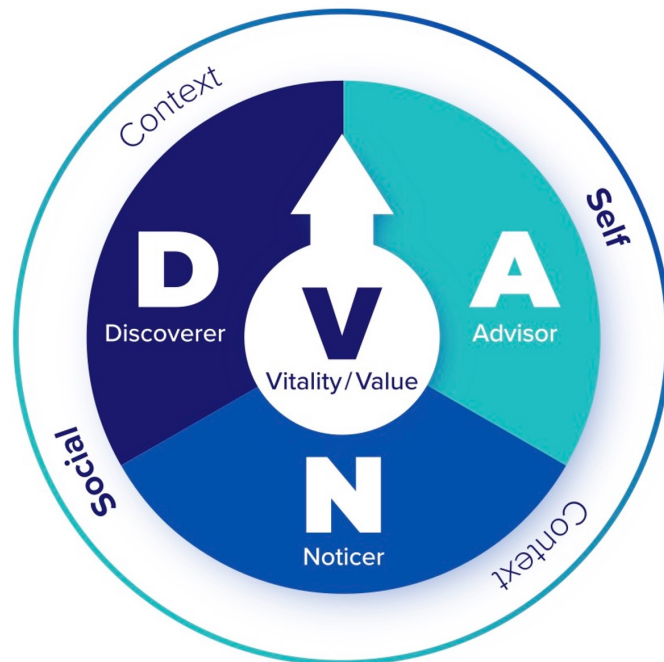


Image Source: <https://c8.alamy.com/comp/ATTM1W/full-speed-ahead-on-an-old-brass-ships-telegraph-isolated-on-a-white-ATTM1W.jpg>

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Protective factors

1. Caregiver support (social)
2. Sensitivity to reward (Discoverer)
3. Relation to their Self – using all DNA-v)

Child trauma exposure and psychopathology: mechanisms of risk and resilience

Katie A McLaughlin , Hilary K Lambert

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.10.004>

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Mechanisms

1. Information processing biases that facilitate rapid identification of environmental threats (Advisor)
2. Disruptions in learning mechanisms underlying the acquisition of fear (Noticer+Advisor)
3. Heightened emotional responses to potential threats (Noticer)
4. Difficulty disengaging from negative emotional content (Discoverer)

Child trauma exposure and psychopathology: mechanisms of risk and resilience

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.10.004>

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Assessment

- Consider in context of what has been lost – age, milestones, relationships
- Assess with open-ended questions “Has anything stressful, sad, or scary happened to you or your child?”
- Screen using ACE screener
- Screen for psych flex – such as PBAT (see later slides)

- Red-flag presentations of suicidality, self-injurious behavior, or psychosis
- Associated with
 - disordered eating, sleep disorders, elimination concerns, developmental delay
- Assess comorbidities - depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, neurodiversity

Goddard, A. (2021). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma-Informed Care. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care: Official Publication of National Association of Pediatric Nurse Associates & Practitioners*, 35(2), 145–155. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2020.09.001>

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Neurodivergence

Autism – a significant proportion likely to have trauma. In this review up to 17% of young people – up to 40% (Rumball, 2019, Rumball et al 2020)

ADHD – a greater proportion of adults with ADHD will report childhood trauma exposure (Konstenius et al 2017)

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Assessment of DNA-V concerns

Discoverer – impulsivity, externalising behaviours, self-harm, risk

Noticer – triggered reactivity, emotional hyperarousal, low awareness of embodied experience, controlling inner sensations

Advisor – rigid cognitions, fixed rules, attempts to navigate with thoughts rather than feelings, blame and judgement on self and others

Values – low motivation, weaker learning experiences of the language of values

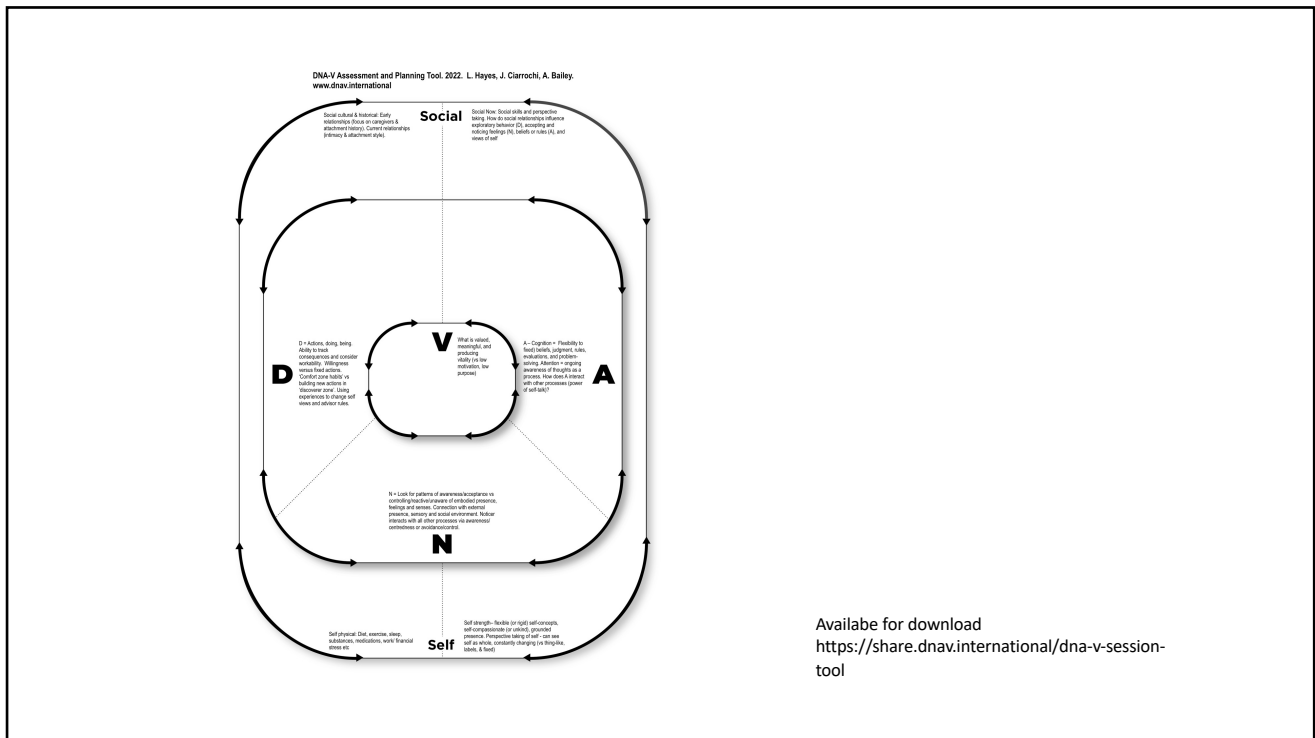
Self – shame, critical/abusive labelling

Social – ruptured relationships, low trust, low vulnerability,

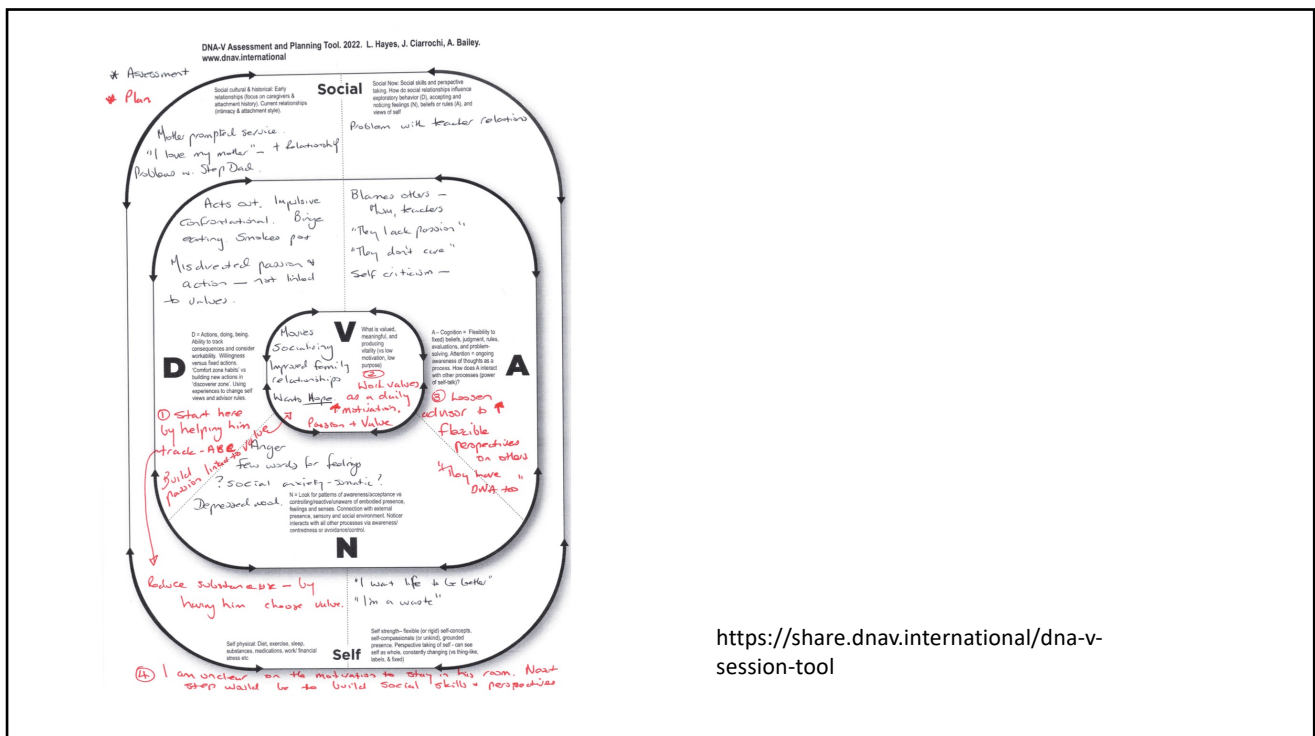
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DNA-V research and theory and what others are doing

www.dnav.international

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