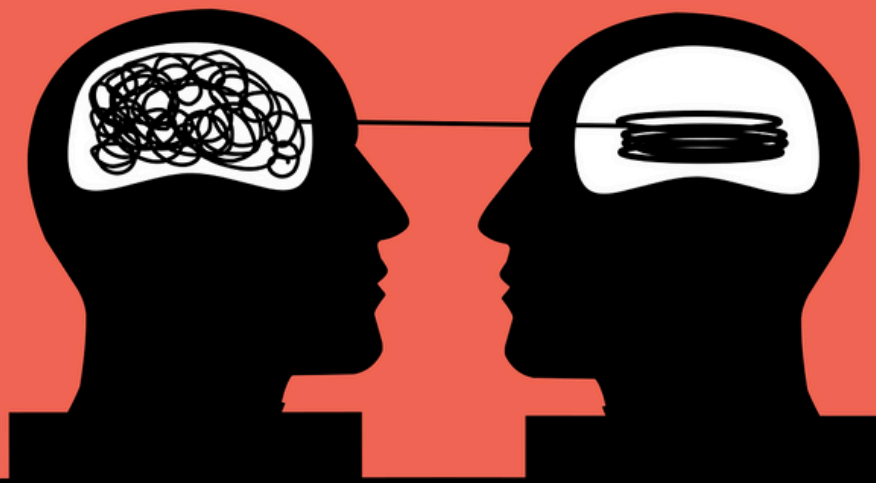


# Harmful Sexual Behaviour



## Challenging Conversations Guide



### YMCA WISE PROJECT

Supporting children and young people  
to stay safe in their relationships

# Understanding HSB

- We should always work holistically when working with young people and their families.
- Consider the **Bio, Psycho, Social** influences.
- Working with peers, working with parents, family professional network.

1. **What is the specifically is sexual behaviour we are seeing? e.g. rape threats**
2. **Are there any other behaviours we are worried about? e.g. criminality or physical aggression.**
3. **What is their age, stage of development, do they have special educational needs?**
4. **What is there ability to self regulate?**
5. **Environmental contexts including home, school, online use and wider community.**

## Remember...

- Challenging and changing unhealthy/harmful attitudes, beliefs and behaviours is an ongoing process which takes time.
- Professionals and services can never completely eliminate risk.
- We can only try to reduce risk within the confines of our role e.g. following safeguarding procedure.



# Exercise Professional Curiosity...

- Professional curiosity is our ability, communication & confidence skills to explore and understand what is happening with young people, families or other groups.
- It is about enquiring deeper and using proactive questioning and challenge.
- It is about understanding one's own responsibilities, limitations and knowing when to act, rather than making assumptions or taking things at face value.
- The organisational contexts within which we work are crucial to understanding where and how professional curiosity takes place.

## Confirmatory Bias

- Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favour, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior beliefs or values. We tend to filter out information that disconfirms our views (prejudices).

## Attributional Bias

- The more we think we identify with an person, the more we see them as likely to change as we over-emphasise external causes for their behaviour.
- When we perceive someone as very different to us, we are more likely to over-attribute their conduct to their internal character and thus see them as less likely to change.



# What is Trauma

Can be a single event (i.e. a sexual assault, death of a parent, a car crash).

Can be more subtle, gradual (i.e. growing up experiencing neglect).

Trauma is when something has overwhelmed an individual's ability to cope.

It is the **response to** an event that defines something as a trauma and not the event itself. However, traumatic events tend to have three elements:

- It was unexpected
- The person was unprepared
- They could not do anything about it happening



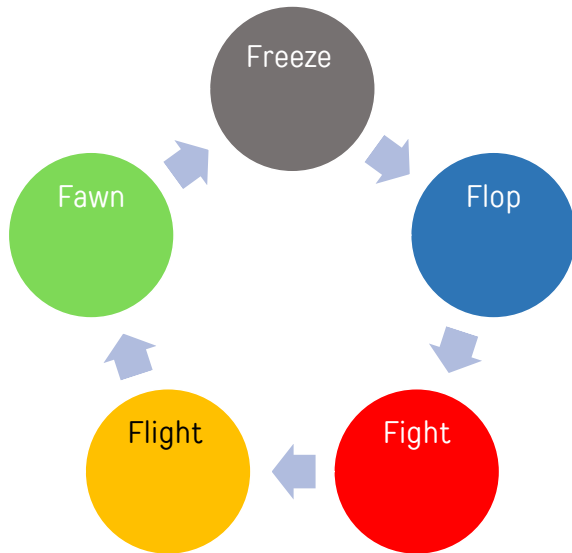
It may not always be obvious that a young person has had traumatic experiences.

We need to be mindful of this throughout our work, especially when dealing with sensitive topics such as harmful sexual behaviour.



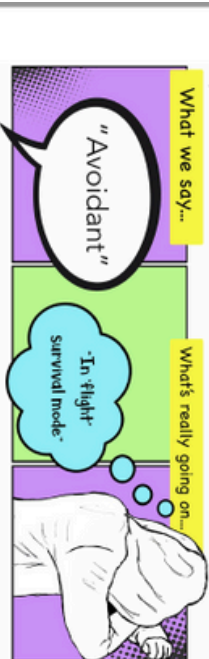
**The Fight or Flight Response is a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event, attack, or threat.**

**Five F's is our primary set of defensive fear responses.**

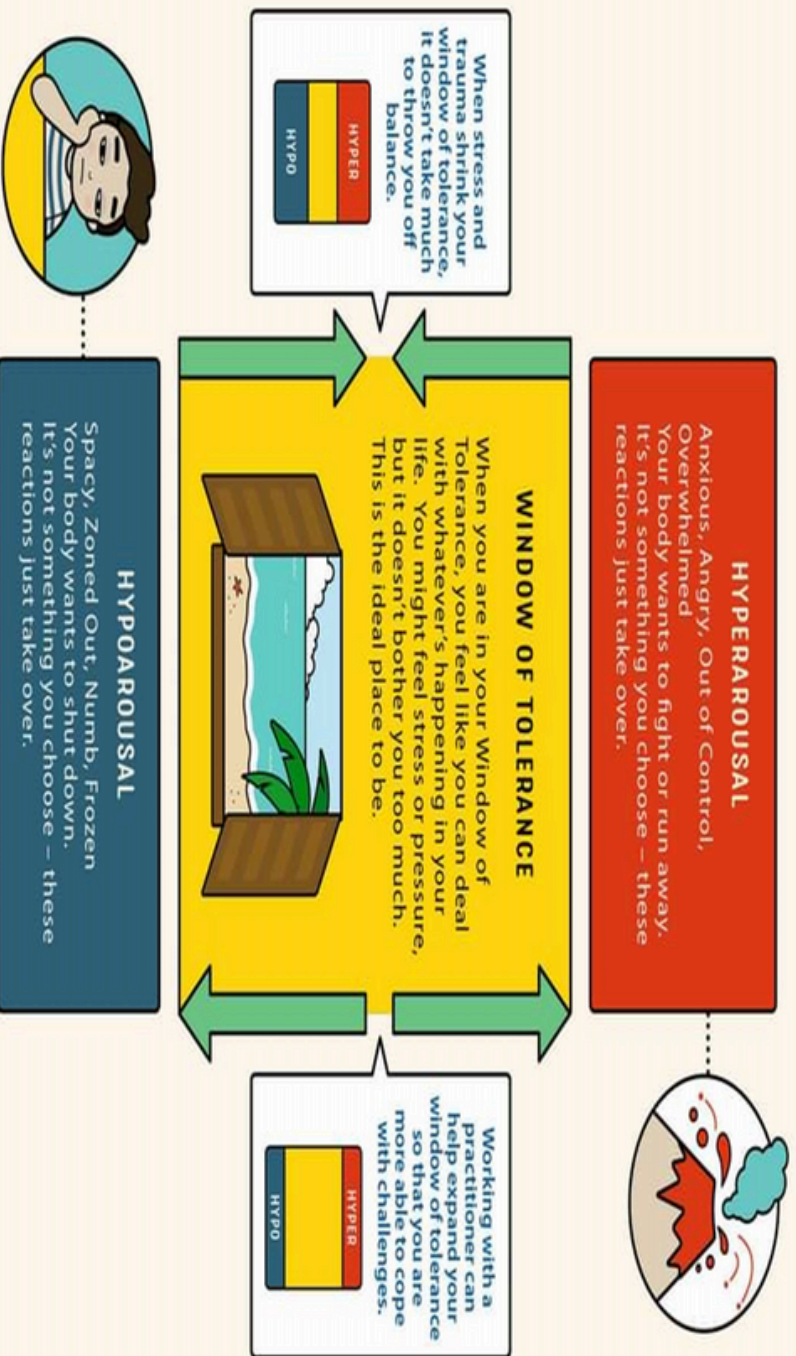


**It is not always obvious when someone is in fight or flight and we may misinterpret what is behind certain behaviours.**





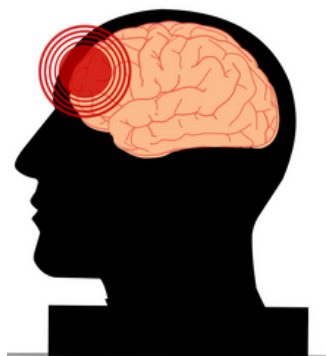
# How Trauma Can Affect Your Window Of Tolerance



nicabm

# What is Trauma Informed Practice?

- Being trauma-informed means understanding that those in most need of services may also be the hardest to reach and least likely to engage effectively with services.
- A trauma-informed approach assumes that all of us have potentially experienced trauma and therefore key principles should be applied throughout our work with all children, young people and families.



**Safety**  
**Trust**  
**Choice**  
**Collaboration**  
**Empowerment**





# Safety

- Physical and emotional safety is crucial.
- Be open and honest in explaining what is happening and why at every stage of engagement: for example, informing the person of what they will be discussing and why.
- Consider the additional difficulties they may have due to socioeconomic status, race, or sexuality/gender identity.

# Trust

- Practitioners can develop trust by explaining and adhering to personal and professional boundaries.
- Being honest, consistent and reliable about what you can and cannot do and understanding the power imbalances between professionals and young people.  
Strive to be non-judgmental and demonstrate empathy and understanding.

# Choice

- Offering real choice may be challenging for both professionals when safeguarding young people.
- We may need to acknowledge the limits in choice around, for example, changes in staff or meeting set-up. But we should aim to constantly keep these issues in mind to establish trust.
- Try to offer choice where possible. The initial meeting should consist of obtaining informed consent, explaining how information will be shared and the limits to confidentiality; giving the person options and discussing with them what they would like to happen.



# Collaboration

- Collaboration is working with a common goal in mind.
- They may not be used to having adults asking about their thoughts and feelings.
- Professionals may invite people to collaborate by sharing useful information.
- Collaboration could involve asking someone what they need for a certain part of the meeting or visit, or identifying coping strategies that may be helpful or problematic in the longer term and discussing options for support.

# Empowerment

- The principles described above all contribute to empowering people we work with. Showing someone that they can be safe, demonstrating you can be trusted and so can they, offering choice and collaboration to someone who has never had these options, are all empowering.
- Empowerment means treating the person as an equal. This may include offering challenge (constructively, rather than judgmentally), which can enable reflection and be very useful.
- Supporting and empowering individuals to recognise unhealthy coping strategies can be a life-changing opportunity.



# Grounding & Ending Safely

Grounding techniques are exercises that may help you refocus on the present moment to distract yourself from anxious feelings.

You can use grounding techniques to help create space from distressing feelings in nearly any situation, but they're especially helpful for improving: anxiety. well-being. stress.

**Grounding Exercise**  
**Name 3 things**


 **you see**

 **you smell**

 **you hear**

 **you feel**

**Breathe in and out slowly 3x**  
Social Work Career Development



Pause. Take three  
slow deep breaths.

@WHOLECHILDCOUNSELING



# Special Educational Needs

Autism, ADHD, ODD & Conduct Disorders, Cognitive:

- May be developmentally younger than peers.
- Struggle to understand social norms/read social cues.
- Issues around impulse control and emotional regulation.
- May be over protected (lack positive risk taking).
- Sexual behaviour may not be sexually driven (sensory or cognitive issues).

## Development and Age

Actual age 14



Emotional age 8



Street age 21



Physical age 17



Consider the different stages of development a child may be at in their life.

If they look older, they may be vulnerable to adultification (being treated like an adult).

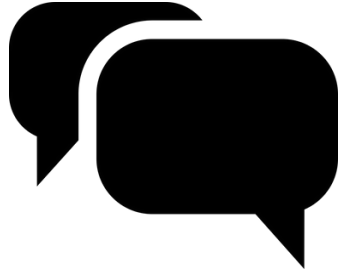
If they are emotionally young for their age, they may be drawn towards children younger than them



# Challenging Conversations

We may need to speak to a young person or their parent/carer about:

- Sexist/misogynistic language
- Sexually inappropriate language
- Sharing sexual content such as pornography



## No Magic Script

- Unfortunately, there is no magic script.
- People and relationships are complicated.
- Challenging conversations are about using a variety of skills to navigate difficult topics such as questioning techniques & body language.
- There are useful prompts, phrases, questions and key pieces of information that can be useful.

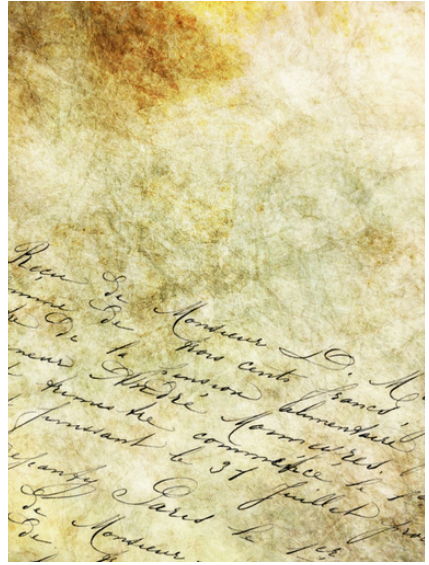


# Sexual Scripts

We all have sexual scripts about sex and relationships

- Healthy relationships
- Boundaries
- Rights & Responsibilities
- Ideas about gender and gender roles
- Values and Human Rights

When we are having challenging conversations around problematic or harmful sexual behaviour, we are discussing ideas and values that relate to sexual scripts.



## What Shapes our Sexual Scripts & Values?

- Personal experiences
- Significant life events
- Family
- Significant historical events
- Friends/peers
- Mis-information
- Genetics
- Culture
- Education
- Perceptions
- Faith/religion/beliefs
- Media
- Community



# Preparing for a Challenging Conversations

## Planning for a Challenging Conversation:

1. What are the facts.
2. What is opinion/up for discussion.
3. What is your purpose for having the conversation?  
What do you want to achieve?
4. What are some common outcomes you both want?

## Things to Consider:

- SEN needs (Do they need additional support to communicate/understand)
- Timing & Environment
- Who is the young person you are speaking with?  
What might they be thinking about this situation?  
Are they aware of the problem?  
If so, how do you think they perceive it?  
What are their needs and fears?  
What solution do you think they would suggest?
- Begin to reframe the conversation as being with someone in partnership rather than opposition.



# Responses

- Make sure the conversation stays within the boundaries of the topic and remains focused.
- Keep the goal in mind throughout.
- Are we making assumptions about the individual and their intentions, views or beliefs?
- Is the topic of discussion or the behaviour we are addressing pushing our 'buttons'? Do we ourselves feel emotionally heightened.

## Remain Calm:

- When people feel their world view is being attacked, they tend to double down on their view, even when presented with information that contradicts it.
- Some sexist, misogynistic and sexually harmful attitudes and beliefs may be entrenched and reinforced by family, peers and what they are viewing online.
- Share concerns or ask difficult questions then listen and be empathetic, be open to views and interpretations.
- Allow for space for the young person to speak openly.
- Allow silence. Difficult emotions can arise during difficult conversations for professionals and service users. Allowing silence enables space to think and can help refocus and calm yourself.
- The child may have been a victim of harmful sexual behaviour themselves.





# Responses

## Points for Discussion

- What is their understanding of why their behaviour/language was inappropriate?
- What is their understanding of the impact it has?
- Challenge harmful beliefs or attitudes in a way that judges the behaviour not the person.
- Remind them of their better self. Would they have said that if they were in a different setting?
- Look for discrepancies e.g. its just banter, but would be angry if someone said it to them/family.
- Discussions about the law, consent, sexual, harassment and sexual assault.
- Support to understand the impact these have on the people who experience these kinds of abuse.
- Discussions around personal and universal values.

## Exploration

Explore positives and what is challenging about being a girl or a boy?

Explore the harmful messages/content they mention. Is it degrading? Why or why not? If you disagree, explain why you think it is.

Explore the harmful messages they may hear from films, music, games or social media.

Help the young person to think critically about the world around them including troubling male roles, attitudes, and behaviours in our culture.



# Unhelpful Thinking Styles

- **Black-and-White Thinking:** inability or unwillingness to see shades of gray - something is either fantastic or awful.
- **Overygeneralizing:** Taking one instance or example and generalizes it to an overall pattern or group of people.
- **Mindreading:** inaccurate belief that we know what another person is thinking.
- **Minimization:** minimizing the meaning, importance, or likelihood of things.
- **Emotional Reasoning:** The acceptance of one's emotions as fact. It can be described as "I feel it, therefore it must be true."
- **Labelling:** Assigning judgments of value to ourselves or to others based on one instance or experience.

## Challenging Unhelpful Thinking Styles

- How do you know this to be true?
- What evidence supports this?
- Are these thoughts helpful?
- Are there other views and perspectives you could see?
- Are you making assumptions?
- Are you overgeneralizing?
- Am you holding double standards?



# Endings

- Keep the conversation focused.
- Know when to end it.
- Make it clear what the school rules are and why they are in place.
- What the consequences may be should this behaviour continue now and in the future.
- Make it clear that the school upholds universal values.
- End with shared goal.
- Decide whether further conversations or work is needed.

# Equality Act 2010



Remind young people that the Equality Act protects everyone including them from unfair treatment.

# What is victim-blaming?

Victim-blaming happens when the victim of a crime is held entirely or partially at fault for the harm they've experienced.

Victim-blaming can be

- **direct and explicit** e.g. telling the victim it was their fault.
- **indirect and unconscious** e.g. questioning what a victim could have done differently, or how they may have reacted differently in the victim's shoes.

## *Think You Know?*

Ensure you challenge young people they are using victim blaming language. Be mindful whether you may be doing this yourself.



# Healthy Relationships

- Build positive ideas about relationships not just give negative examples.
- What does the young person want from a relationship & friendships? What will they bring to it?
- Boundaries and consent are cornerstones of healthy relationships - work with them on this
- Ideas about gender and sexuality, expectations or pressures.
- Difference between friendships, romantic relationships, family and professionals.
- Types of healthy behaviours and types of abuse.
- The law - stalking, harassment etc
- But also how legal actions can still be disrespectful and hurt people.

## Consent

- Understanding consent in a range of contexts and perspectives: CAPACITY, FREEDOM, CHOICE
- Making conversations are relevant to young people from a range of background (e.g. LGBT+).
- Consent can be explored in contexts outside of sex e.g. friendship, medical consent.
- Avoid victim blaming language.
- Avoid gender stereotypes e.g. consent is about boys asking girls for sex.
- Skills for asking for consent as well as giving it.



# Healthy Relationships



## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GIVE AND GET CONSENT?

We think the F.R.I.E.S Analogy is a really helpful way to break down the different important aspects when giving and getting consent during sex (and by sex we mean any kind of sexual activity like touching, oral or penetrative).

**F**reely Given. When there is no pressure (i.e. physical or emotional), when someone has the capacity to choose, and able to say no if they want to

**R**eversible. Consent is a fluid process. Someone might not realise something doesn't feel ok until they are doing it! In this case, consent can be taken away.

**I**nformed. Someone has to know what they are consenting to. If they are tricked or the situation changes, their consent is no longer valid.

**E**ngaged. Making sure sex is a good time for everyone! Checking in before, during and after. Being able to ask for things / saying no to things. Normalizing checking in, talking, and open-mindedness.

**S**pecific. Needs, wants and desires can change depending on mood, partner, hormones, etc. So even if you've done something before, it's always good to check in each specific time. See also: Saying yes to one thing (i.e. kissing) does not mean saying yes to another (i.e. oral).

