CHILDREN'S SERVICES
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) reflections module

Participant manual

Alberta

Session 1:
Behaviour Makes Sense

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Behaviour makes sense

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Children's Services, Regulatory, Compliance, Quality Assurance, and Business Supports Division
Government of Alberta
April 2021
Behavior Makes Sense, An ARC Reflection Framework

For more information regarding this content visit: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/3e4bccf4-6758-4e4a-bfb9-f7f063b83962/resource/d3739e94-9dd4-4514-8ba3-67ca1ebff81b/download/GoA-Publications-Guideline.pdf

An ARC Reflection Module: Session One- Behaviour Makes Sense | Children's Services

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An ARC Reflection Frame Work

ARC, or Attachment, Regulation and Competency, is a framework for working with children and youth who have experienced trauma. Developed by Margaret Blaustein and Kristine Kinniburgh of the Justice Resource Institute, ARC builds on the resilience of children, youth and families.

ARC Reflections — an ARC-informed caregiver training curriculum for foster parents, kin and other caregivers — was written by Blaustein and Kinniburgh with support and consultation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The model was piloted in six child welfare agencies in 2015 and evaluated by Child Trends, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center with a focus on child welfare.

Learning Outcomes

1. Review how trauma influences development.

2. Identify how behaviours are often survival strategies.

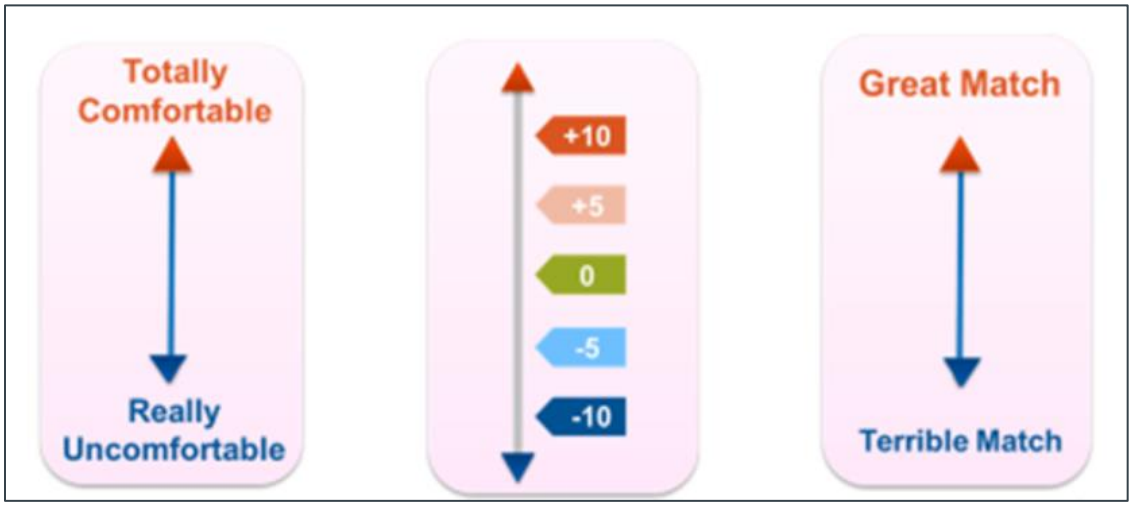
3. Discuss how early relationships, labels and self-preservation impact the child's and youth's lens.

4. Explain how behaviour addresses a need and are often the child's and youth's unconscious attempt to avoid perceived danger.

5. Outline the importance of the ability to recover – a skill needed to recover when in distress and to manage day-to-day lives.

6. Demonstrate how to be curious and to learn to observe, listen and respond to the messages children and youth are sending.

Energy Level Exercise



Take a moment to check in with yourself. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

If your energy is comfortable and a good match, great. If not, what can you do to get it there?

Identify one strategy or skill you can use to feel more comfortable and effective.

Warm Up

1. What is the first thing you see why you look at this picture?
2. Why do you think people see so many different things when they are looking at the same picture?

It All Starts with Understanding Who the Children and Youth Are

Many people believe that the word “trauma” refers only to things that we see in the media: violent assaults, car accidents, acts of terror, natural disasters and acts of abuse. Trauma occurs as a result of an intense event that threatens the safety or security of an infant, child or youth. We are learning more and more that there are many different types of stressful childhood experiences that may challenge children and youth. They may also experience multiple and overlapping traumas that happen at the same time or in close proximity to one another. Some examples include caregiver mental health issues, poverty or racism.

It is also important to understand that trauma can also be intergenerational. Our Indigenous children are being raised in communities and by parents who have survived significant and repeated historical trauma. Historical trauma is defined as a complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation. It is the outcome of numerous traumatic events experienced by a community over generations and includes the psychological and social responses to those events. It is accompanied by unresolved or prolonged grief over the losses associated with the trauma, grief that has not been expressed, acknowledged or resolved. Like trauma, the unresolved grief can span across generations. It is important to understand that these historical traumas have impacted the child’s, the parent’s and community’s connection not only to each other, but also to their land and to the ways of knowing and understanding their world view. As caregivers, it is important not to presume what particular traumatic experience has most affected the children and youth you are caring for.

Remember it <u>IS</u> about what has happened to the children and youth who come into care <u>NOT</u> what is wrong with them.

What type of experiences may have influenced the children and youth whom you care for

When thinking about the children or youth who have come into your home, what type of experiences may have profoundly influenced their lives?

Journey Home

While watching the first part of the video The Journey Home, take time to reflect and write some notes about how each individual has been impacted by both the trauma that they have experienced and the intergenerational trauma that their families and communities have experienced.

Kevin

Chris

Harold

Hayley

Christina

Meet Olivia

Olivia is a 5 year old Indigenous girl. (Indigenous refers the three peoples of Canada, First Nation, Metis and Inuit). Her parents, Mark and Debrah, used substances (primarily heroin, alcohol and marijuana) and there was frequent violence in their relationship.

The family moved four times during Olivia's first two years and they were homeless at one time. Often Debrah would leave Olivia with friends or other relatives for brief periods.

Olivia and Debrah moved into a shelter when Olivia was 3 years old, but Debrah returned to Mark after six months.

Mark is a survivor of intergenerational trauma. His grandparents and parents went to residential school. Due to his experiences growing up and the trauma he has endured, he finds it difficult to maintain healthy relationships and can become violent when using substances to cope. After a domestic violence incident with Debrah, Mark was arrested in front of Olivia.

Olivia remained with her mother after her father was arrested for a period of 3 months. However due to subsequent reports and substantiated concerns of neglect and physical abuse an apprehension order was granted by a Judge. Olivia was removed from Debrah's care. In the past year, Olivia has lived in three different foster homes. She was just placed in her current home. Debrah has struggled with following through with the case plan goals such as attending to the treatment of her diagnosed bipolar disorder and substance abuse.

Questions for consideration:

1. What in Olivia's experience would you consider traumatic? Why?
2. What do you think Olivia has learned about relationships? How do you think she may react to other people?
3. What do you think Olivia has learned about herself in the past five years?
4. How do you think Olivia got through her experience? What survival skills might she have learned?

What is the Lens

Trauma shapes the way that children and youth understand and make meaning of their world. There are three important ways in which children and youth's system of meaning are shaped.

Early relationships influence how a child responds to future relationships

Infant's initial attachments are a big influencer on how a child and youth begin to understand and make meaning of their world. Later as children and youth experience anxiety, a lack of care or at times harm in their relationships. They develop strategies for managing future relationships. One such strategy is to assume that others will harm them and therefore enter into relationships prepared to defend themselves.

Always think about who might also be in the room with you

When you interact with children and youth who have experienced repeated harm, it is important to remind yourself that at any given moment the child or youth may be interacting not just with you, but with every person who has ever hurt, rejected or abandoned them in the past.

Labels and their influence on a child and youth's lens

Children and youth develop a sense of self, based on their early experiences, including their successes and failures, the labels others use about them and their ability to influence — or not — the world around them.

Most of the children and youth who come into your home will have been through many layers of negative experiences and will have heard — and been given — numerous labels by other people. Over time, these experiences and labels may become the filter through which children or youth see themselves. This is especially important to remember when caring for Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth can feel it is unsafe to identify as Indigenous due to racism, negative cultural stereotypes and social stigma. These all will create labels that they internalize into their lens. It is important that we are sensitive to and think about the labels that children and youth may be internalizing.

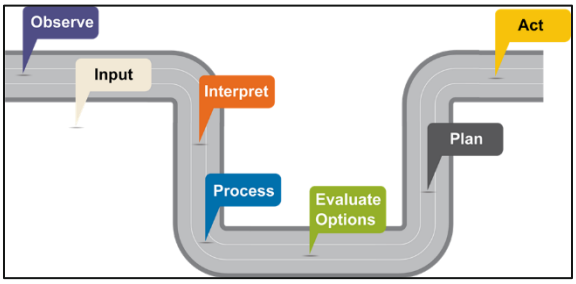
Self-Preservation and its impact on a child and youth's lens

Another result of repeated negative and traumatic experiences is that the children and youth start to look at the world as a dangerous place – because they have not had who were there to buffer them from the trauma.

Children and youth will then start to see all situations through the lens of self-preservation. We realize that every experience is subjective and each of us has different views of what is and isn't

dangerous. But a person's views about danger were created in the context of the caregiving they received.

Trauma and its impact on the brain

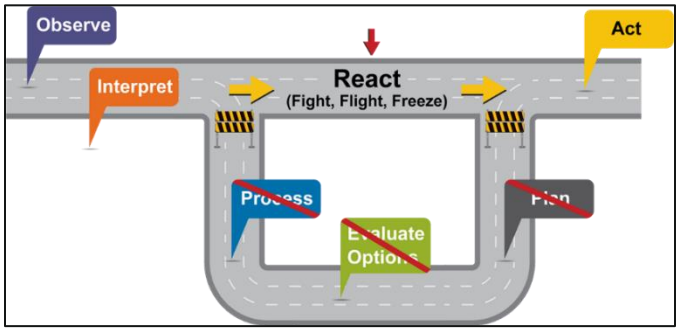


Our brains process much information over a typical day. When faced with a new situation or new information our brains are responsible for filtering the information, making meaning of it and choosing a fitting response. Under typical conditions it will observe, seek input, interpret, process, evaluate our options as to how to respond then plan how to react and act.

However when we face danger, our brains operate a little differently. When faced with danger, our brains make the best judgments they can, very quickly, based on what we hear, see, taste, smell, feel, and based on what we have learned over time about the signals of danger. Once a situation is perceived as dangerous, the brain helps us survive by skipping some responses and speeding up others. This is a survival mechanism, people need to react quickly and efficiently to keep themselves safe.

Even though the Express Road is activated by danger, what each individual perceives as dangerous is very different. Children or youth who have been exposed to long-lasting or repeated negative experiences perceive many different things are potentially dangerous or negative, even experiences that don't seem at all dangerous to others. These experiences like a situation, a touch, a look, a smell or a feeling in their bodies can potentially put them on the Express Road.

All of us get better over time at the things we do often. That's true of repetitive actions such as driving, these things that typically take focus and conscious effort when we first start doing them, but that become automatic over time. If we do these actions enough, we may not have to think very hard about doing them. That is because our brains learn to be more and more efficient over time. Our thinking brain gets out of the way and lets our action brain take over, except in unusual circumstances. Unfortunately, when children or youth experience danger over and over, the same thing can happen, only the behaviour or action that is getting efficient is survival. A child or youth's response to perceived danger can



happen frequently and lead to survival behaviours instead of thoughtful processing of information. In other words, the Express Road can become the Main Road.

Where does this leave Olivia?

What happens?

1. When a child expects people to be dangerous, untrustworthy or unavailable?
2. When a child believes they are unworthy of care?
3. When a child like Olivia expects the world to be dangerous and can view even “safe experiences” as frightening?
4. When a child has limited capacity to cope with any of her experiences and believes they have no one to turn to?

Behaviour Makes Sense

Trauma affects how children and youth filter in information, the ways they understand themselves and other people and how they make meaning of their experiences. All of us develop strategies to help us adapt to our world. Many of the behaviours we see in children and youth who have experienced trauma are survival strategies. They can have many challenging behaviours that may be confusing, hard to manage and may lead to strong emotional reactions in caregivers. When we do not understand where this behaviour comes from, it is easier to get caught up in our own emotional responses. Often, we react to these behaviours without understanding what drives them. The more we understand where behaviours come from, the more effective our response will be to those behaviours.

Consider Olivia

When Olivia was living with her parents, her house was unpredictable. Sometimes there was a lot of screaming and violence and things felt very scary. In those moments, Olivia learned to stay very still or to hide. If no one saw her, it felt like she was safer.

At other times, when Olivia's mom was using drugs, she might be affectionate or loving, even if her behaviours didn't always make sense. Olivia had to work hard to get her mother's attention, because her mom would seem spacey or talk to herself. If Olivia climbed on her mother, hugged her or cried loudly, her mother would sometimes give her a hug or rock her.

Understanding behaviours

To understand and respond effectively to trauma-related behaviour, it is important to observe and think through the behaviours. As a caregiver, you will need to become like a detective, to really think about what has happened to the child or youth and how they have experienced the world. To do this effectively it is important to have a guide by which you can do this. Here is one guide on how to think about and understand their behaviour using three factors that we discussed earlier:

1. The lens the child or youth is using to understand the world.
2. The need the child or youth is trying to meet with his or her behaviour.
3. The child's or youth's ability to recover.

Factor One: Remember the Lens

All of us are influenced by our experiences. Over time, our experiences affect how we see and understand everything around us and shape our filter or lens for understanding what is safe and what is dangerous. Danger is one of our strongest teachers and when experiencing something dangerous, we teach our brain to move to action and to protect us.

"Experience is not always the kindest of teachers, but it is surely the best."

-Spanish Proverb

What are your filters?

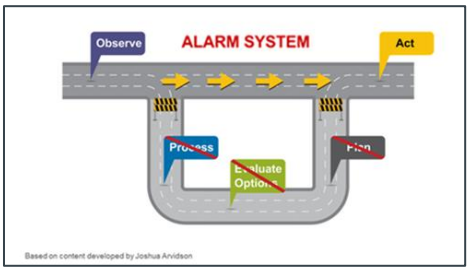
Each of us responds differently to different situations, in part because of our beliefs we have about those situations as well as our previous experience with those situations.

Consider the following. How might you react to each one? Would your reaction be positive, negative or somewhere in between? How strong would your reaction be?

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	How strong, on a scale of 0 - 10
Raised voices				0 ⟷ 10
Someone not looking at you in the eye				0 ⟷ 10
Someone who is quiet				0 ⟷ 10
The smell of fire				0 ⟷ 10
A hand on your shoulder				0 ⟷ 10
The sound of crying				0 ⟷ 10
A child who shares with you their gender identity				0 ⟷ 10
Pregnant Teen				0 ⟷ 10
People in authority				0 ⟷ 10

Notice the situations to which you have the strongest reactions (whether positive or negative). Why do you think that might be?

What is a trigger?



Triggers are signals, or clues about our world, that have been learned as a result of previous experiences of danger. These signals or clues help us mobilize rapidly when there is danger. This rapid mobilization is a way our brain has learned to keep us safe. These signals of possible danger will put children's and youths' brains on the Express Road to action. The more danger a child or youth has experienced, the more likely it is that many different things in the world will be interpreted as dangerous. Even in the absence of danger – the interpretation of the experience may set the child on the express road.

Examples of common triggers

- Lack of power or control; feeling helpless
- Unexpected change (caregiver getting sick)
- Physical closeness or contact (too little, too much)
- Sensory input – a taste (your favourite food), smell (mother's perfume), something you hear (the sound of sirens) , a touch (touching your shoulder)
- Feeling shame
- Positive attention or feelings of connection
- Needs/deprivation
- Feeling rejection or abandonment
- Direct reminders of specific events (going to church)

What might trigger Oliva?

Thinking about what we know about Olivia and her journey, what types of things do you think might act as triggers, or signals of danger for her?

[W]hile there are an infinite number of stressors that can cause a subjective sense of overwhelming stress and distress in a child, there are finite ways that the brain and the body…..can respond to those stressors."

-Michael DeBellis, 2001

Factor Two: Behaviour addresses a need

Most behaviour serves a function. There are two primary functions of behaviour.

1. Safety

Because of how the children and youths' brains have been built and because of their past experiences, many different things may feel dangerous to a child or youth. However, the challenge for our children and youth is that once someone feels as if they are in danger, there are only a few behavioural options available.

The actual behavioural choices a child or youth makes may vary. Generally speaking they fall into four primary survival responses:

- **Fight:** An aggressive response to attack or ward off the danger.
- **Flight:** A withdrawal response to escape the danger.
- **Freeze:** A high-energy, becoming still response, which is an attempt to remain unseen or unnoticed (used when neither fight nor flight is available).
- **Submit or comply:** An attempt to accommodate or please the perceived source of danger.

What are some of the ways that these behaviours may show up in a child or youth in your home?

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These Strategies require energy

When our brain perceives danger, energy is released into the body. The more chronic the danger response has been, the higher the likelihood that the starting baseline energy level for a child or youth will be high, so that the child or youth's body is essentially in a chronic state of readiness. This chronic hyper-alertness can cause challenges in not only how the child or youth perceives danger but also in how they react to danger. This can include not only being in a chronic state of alertness but also challenges in how to slow their body down or in managing rapid shifts in their energy level. Some children and youth who live with chronic hyper alertness become so overwhelmed by their energy level that they learn to disconnect from their energy or numb their feelings and emotions. This can confuse caregivers as the child or youth can seem to be doing fine, but suddenly explode when they the disconnection becomes too challenging for them.

2. Fulfilling Unmet Needs

As well as ensuring that they are safe, children and youth also need to make sure that all their basic and developmental needs are met. Often the children and youth that we are working with will have experienced challenges in their relationships with the adults in their lives and have not had these needs met by those adults. When their needs are not consistently met, children and youth have to find ways to fill these needs on their own. Just like survival oriented behaviours, these needs-focused behaviours can be very difficult to change and may persist even when a child or youth in a situation where their needs are being met.

The challenge for caregivers in dealing with children and youth who are struggling to get their needs met is that they may do so in ways that are confusing or undesirable. Again the best way to manage them to understand what need they are trying to fulfill. Therefore, it is important not only to understand why they are behaving in this way but also to shift how you view the behaviours by reframing them. Remember we are shifting from thinking about what is wrong with the child to what has happened to the child. Reframing the function of the behaviour also helps us to understand and have empathy for a child or youth even when those behaviours feel very challenging.

Let's reframe some common words:

- ***Manipulates:*** A child or youth who has learned to get their needs met
- ***Hoards:*** A child or youth who keeps items in case everything disappears
- ***Steals:*** A child or youth who makes sure to get what they need or want
- ***Clingy:*** A child or youth who tries hard to make an adult pay attention

Looking at Olivia's strategies

How would you reframe Olivia and her attempts to meet her survival and other needs?

Based on the descriptions of Olivia's behaviours, why might each of these behaviours have developed?

Factor Three: Ability to Recover

For most of us, intense feelings are followed by attempts to manage those feelings. We try to use our internal resources (our coping strategies) or our external resources (such as our support system). However many children and youth who have experienced trauma will have difficulty in managing those feelings and in regulating their internal energy. For us to recover from intense feelings we need to recognize we are upset, believe we can manage our experiences and have both the resources to recover and be motivated to use them. Children and youth who have been affected by trauma often lack both internal resources, such as the ability to manage hard feelings, and external resources, such as people they trust to go to for support. As a result, many children or youth who have experienced chronic trauma may get stuck in that high-intensity feelings and cannot move on. This is where you as a caregiver can

be vital. Working with the children and youth to build a relationship where you can support them to understand and recognize their feelings. Once they understand their feelings, your role as the caregiver is to provide them with support and ideas to regulate their feelings. Examples of ideas to support regulation include a calming box, listening to music, ceremonies, sweats, smudging. We will explore ideas for regulation further in upcoming sessions. Once a child or youth have those recovery strategies, the next step as a caregiver would be to help them to use the ideas. But again, it all starts with understanding where these behaviours are coming from.

This is your opportunity to get curious once again:

- **The trigger:** What led to the behaviour?
- **The need:** What is the function of the child or youth's current behaviour?
- **Your immediate response:** How can you ensure safety in this situation?
- **Your regulation strategy:** How can you help a child or youth return to a more regulated state?

In future sessions of Understanding Child and Youth Behaviour, we will talk about many tools and skills caregivers can use to support yourself when responding to trauma-related behaviours, as well as ways to respond to and support the children and youth in your home.

Journey Home continued

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you think a child's experience with their culture contributes to the building of their lens?

2. How do you think supporting a child to become involved with their community, their ceremonies and learn about their spirituality will affect the child's ability to manage their energy and recover after experiencing challenges?

3. Reflect on the difference between Chris's experiences growing up and those of William Arcands'. What stood out for you as a caregiver?

Wrap Up

A review of the important points from this session:

- Trauma can profoundly influence child development
- Trauma shapes the child's or youth's lens for self, for relationships and for danger
- Trauma responses are designed to help the child or youth protect themselves and survive
- Behaviour makes sense and is often an attempt to meet a need
- To understand the behaviour of your child or youth, remember:
  - The lens: Perception is reality
  - behaviour addresses a need: Survival trumps everything
  - If a child or youth is struggling to recover, ask: Where are their resources?
- To address challenging behaviour, cultivate your curiosity

Self-Reflection

Take a few minutes and reflect on an incident this week that made you frustrated or angry. Try to work through the three factor sequence we discussed today.

- What set you off? What was the situation?

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- **Lens:** What meaning did you make of the situation? Do you think the other person saw it the same way?

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_____

- **Function:** What did you do? Why? What were you trying to accomplish?

- **Resources:** How did you get yourself back on track? What resources (internal or external) did you use?

Practice

Part 1: Identify a behaviour

Pick any behaviour that you find irritating from someone you know (child, partner, friend). Be sure to pick something you see on a regular basis. Describe the behaviour you will be focusing on:

Part 2: Identify patterns

Start with curiosity. Observe the behaviour closely. Write down when the behaviour happens each time this week. Write a quick description of what is going on when this behaviour occurs.

Time 1:

Time 2:

Time 3:

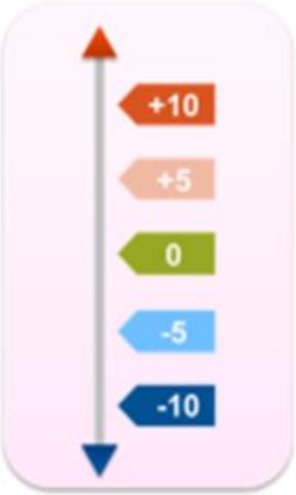
Part 3: Tune into patterns

After the behaviour happens several times, think about any patterns that lead up to it. Can you identify a specific trigger that leads to the behaviour (a time of day, an interaction, a specific location, etc.)?

Part 4: Think about the *function* of the behaviour

Why do you think this behaviour might be happening? What do you think the person you are observing is trying to do? What need might the behaviour be meeting?

Closing check in



Take a moment to check in with yourself before you go. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

Session 2:
Put on Your Oxygen Mask

CHILDREN'S SERVICES
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) reflections module: session two

Put on your oxygen mask

Participant manual

Alberta

Children's Services, Regulatory, Compliance, Quality Assurance, and Business Supports Division
Government of Alberta
April 2021
Put on Your Oxygen Mask, An ARC Reflection Framework

For more information regarding this content visit: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/3e4bccf4-6758-4e4a-bfb9-f7f063b83962/resource/d3739e94-9dd4-4514-8ba3-67ca1ebff81b/download/GoA-Publications-Guideline.pdf

An ARC Reflection Module: Session Two- Put on Your Oxygen Mask | Children's Services

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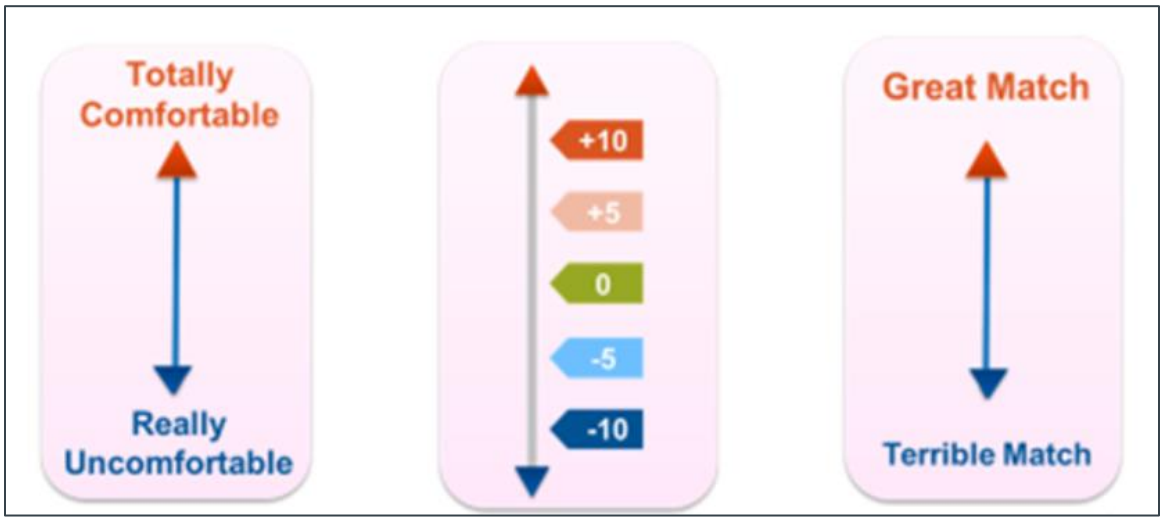
Learning Outcomes

- Participants will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of self-care for caregivers.
- Participants will recognize how self-awareness contributes to self-care and self-regulation.
- Participants will demonstrate an understanding of how self-care can enhance your ability to respond to a child's behaviour rather than reacting to it.
- Participants will begin to develop a diverse set of tools for self-care that they can use on an ongoing basis.

Energy Level Exercise



Take a moment to check in with yourself. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

If your energy is comfortable and a good match, great. If not, what can you do to get it there?

Identify one strategy or skill you can use to feel more comfortable and effective.

Warm Up

Look at the illustrations on the slide and think about your journey as a caregiver.

1. Which illustration best demonstrates the type of caregiver you thought you would be when you first started? Why?

2. Which illustration best demonstrates how you feel as a caregiver today? Why?

3. What do you think is the biggest contributor to the difference between your two experiences?

Review and Report Back

Important points from Behaviour Makes Sense:

Behaviour can act as a clue to help us to discover and then understand the needs of children and youth in our care. Remember behaviour makes sense. To help you understand what the need is, here are three ways to look at that behaviour to help you understand:

- **Remember the lens – Perception is reality?**
- **Behaviour address a need and survival will trump everything else.**
- **What is their ability to recover: Where are the resources?**

Your role as a caregiver is to cultivate your curiosity. It is very difficult to address or change a child or youth's behaviour if you do not know what the behaviour is communicating.

How did your practice at home go?

You were to identify a behaviour that bothers you and work through a 4-part process to cultivate your curiosity and identify the function that the behaviour serves that person.

1. Identify the behaviour
2. Identify patterns around the behaviour
3. Tune into the patterns
4. Think about the function of the behaviour

What went well?

_____

_____

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What was challenging for you?

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What was something you noticed?

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Put on your own oxygen mask

Being a caregiver for children in the care of the director is one of the most difficult tasks an individual can take on. Even with biological children, there are times when it can be challenging to figure out what a child or youth needs in a given moment. In part, this is because of the unique characteristics of each child or youth, the dynamic process of development and the complicated nature of parenting in general. Caring for children who have experienced trauma and are in the care of Children's Services adds many layers of complexity to this process. Often caregivers do not have the luxury of easing into the process. Often, you begin your journey with a child or youth at a stressful moment, knowing very little about a child or youth's strengths and needs. The child that comes to you may come from a very different background than you, whether it be race, religion, language, socioeconomic status, gender or sexual identity or just different experiences in life. Although kinship caregivers may already have a prior relationship with the child, it can still be a difficult transition for their families, as they have little time to prepare for or understanding of the role that they are taking on. Added to those challenges are those that come from existing family tensions and expectations on the caregivers. Regardless of how you became a caregiver, it is important to remember that all of these differences can add to the complex relationship between you and the children or youth in your home.

Parenting is hard. Caring for children who have experienced trauma is HARDER!

Checking in on Olivia

Olivia is now 5 years old and she has been in her new foster home for about six months now. It is her longest placement since she came into the care of Children's Services. While chronologically she is 5 years old, developmentally she appears much of the time more like a 2- or 3-year-old. She needs constant support and supervision to complete daily tasks related to self-care, feeding and using the toilet. She has limited capacity for independent play and is persistent in her attempts to engage positive or negative attention.

When attention is provided by her caregivers she often rejects it, screaming, "I hate you" or "I want a new family." Even minor redirection can lead to severe and persistent tantrums that include screaming, crying, throwing things, profane language and, at times, aggression toward her caregivers. Olivia's caregivers report that even on less challenging days, she still struggles with settling every night at bedtime, crying and clinging when her caregiver leaves the room.

Some questions for you

Thinking about your journey as a caregiver:

What are some of the things that have been most challenging for you?

What do you wish you had known before becoming a caregiver?

What feelings and thoughts do you notice coming up for YOU when parenting feels hard?

How do you connect with a child or youth for whom connection may be loaded, undefined, unpredictable, undesirable, frightening, desperate or all of these at once?

Why self-care is important

Children and youth in foster care enter into the relationship with you and your family looking through a lens coloured by abuse, maltreatment, neglect, loss and separation. Often, they have developed self-protective strategies and may distance, disconnect and withdraw from the adult who is attempting to help. For caregivers, this can feel very personal and is often emotionally draining. For kinship caregivers there is added pressure to succeed given your relationship with and commitment to the family and child or youth.

Caregivers play an incredibly important role in the lives of children and youth. The more in control, regulated and competent you feel, the more likely you will feel effective in caring for children, and the more likely that child or youth is to experience you as a safe resource. Almost everyone struggles with hard feelings sometimes. It feels personal when a child or youth calls you a name, targets a vulnerable spot or seems determined to hurt you. It is OK to feel how you feel. It's what you do with the feelings that matters the most when caring for children and youth who have experienced trauma. ***It is important to remember that children and youth with early life and developmental trauma aren't giving you a hard time, they are having a hard time.*** So even when it feels personal and you feel like they are determined to hurt you, these are behavioural responses that come from their prior experience with trauma.

What is self-care?

Self-care is the ability to actively focus on your own basic needs for safety, security, connection and regulation. Self-care is personal and everyone has different ways to take care of their needs. As well our self-care practices are going to change, ebb and flow depending on our situation and circumstance. Our experience and our feelings about our self-care success is likely to vary over time. We tend to do a better job with self-care when things are going well and struggle when there are more challenges in our lives. Our self-care practices are more likely to break down or become absent during moments or periods of stress or when we need them most.

What makes a Hard Day?

There are many things in our life that affect our stress level, that in turn contribute to making a day harder for us to care for our children, manage our own stress level and our world around us. These stressors are not mutually exclusive and can add to or build on each other. These can include your current stressors, past traumas such as the 60's scoop or residential schools, as well as your experience of racism and discrimination. So it is important for us to think through what our experiences are and how they impact us.

Factors related to the your child or youth	Factors related to your larger world	Factors related to your self

How do you deal with all this Hard Stuff?

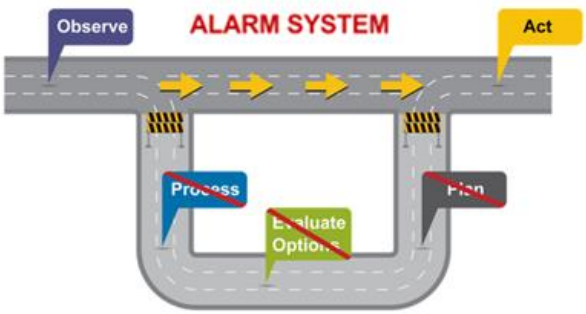
Step One: Acknowledge that this is Hard

The first step in managing challenging emotions is to first acknowledge that they exist. It is common for us to experience shame and guilt about our feelings. This can cause us to criticize and question the validity, morality and importance of what we feel. In response to this, we may shut down or deny or dismiss our own feelings and experiences. Although feelings are not always comfortable or easy to experience, we need to acknowledge them. Remember it is our responsibility to take care of ourselves.

Step two: Stay Aware of yourself, your feelings and your push buttons

In the last session, we talked about how, when faced with signals of possible danger, children and youths' brains can take the Express Road to action, bypassing things like thinking, evaluating or planning. The same is true for adults who experience stress or who have their own traumatic experiences. The challenges of caring for children and youth who have experienced trauma may lead you to take the Express Road to reaction. Our goal is to become aware of when we are starting down the express road. Then we know when to activate our plan.

How do you know when you are on the Express Road?



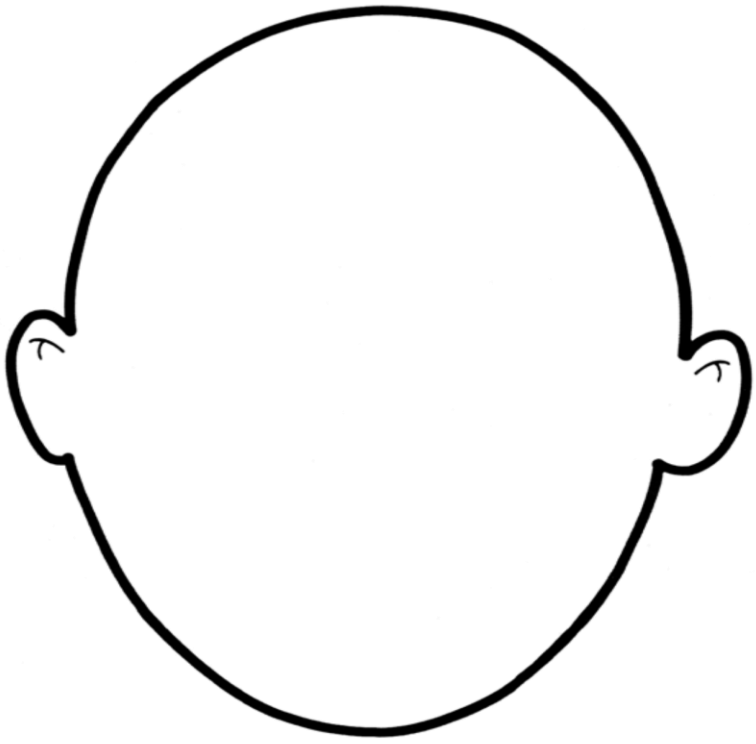
Based on content developed by Joshua Arvidson

Self-Awareness and Self-Care go hand in hand

Our goal in caring for children is to respond to the needs or behaviours we see rather than to react. We generally react when we are on the express road. The more we become aware of and pay attention to our own stressors or push buttons, the more we are able to anticipate and manage our reactions to them. When you anticipate and think ahead about what could be a challenging situation (or a hard day), it puts you in a particular state of mind — one that allows you to *think, plan and problem-solve.* ***This helps you respond instead of react.*** Checking in with ourselves, like we do with the Check-In tool (we can anticipate and react to our energy levels), can help us pay attention to all of those clues that suggest we are entering the Express Road. Remember these are skills that are easy to practice on easy days. So start on easy days and work toward being able to do so on a day that feels hard. Paying attention to our thoughts, feelings and body sensations can give us important information. However, it can be hard to remember to do. Practicing different ways of checking in with yourself on a regular basis can be a good tool for self-care.

What's in your head?

What are all of the things that are taking up space in your head right now? Some may feel good and others may be worries. Write them somewhere in the head below. We all have many different things in our head at the same time. Some things take up a lot of space and energy; some take up less. How much space does each thought take up in your head? If it is a big thought, write it large, and if it is a small thought, give it a small space in your head on the paper below.



Step Three: Building a diverse toolbox of self-care strategies

As caregiver, we expect the children and youth in our care to develop a tool box for self-regulation/self-care but we don't spend a lot of time thinking about our own box. However, we know that our ability to self-regulate or co-regulate the children in our care is an invaluable tool for them and us.

Tools to prepare yourself

We cannot expect to be able to run a marathon, perform on stage or pull together a dinner for 30 people without taking time to prepare. A lot goes into being and feeling ready to take on those activities. Think about the example of preparing a large family holiday meal, think about all the steps that might go into preparing a large family holiday meal, planning what you need, purchasing the ingredients, cooking a turkey, prepping mashed potatoes, stuffing, and all the other dishes your family loves.

We often do not think about everyday stressful situations in the same way, but it can be helpful to prepare for those as well. How can you prepare yourself before going into a stressful situation?

In your pocket tools

These are tools that you can use in or during moments of stress such as situations that happen without any warning. **The best in your pocket tools are simple and concrete.** They allow you to change your emotional or physical state in moments of stress because you are purposefully doing something to shift it.

Recovery Tools

Research shows that stress does not stop or go away the moment the situation has passed. Often our body and mind continue to experience the impact of the event or situation that has occurred. Because of this, it is important to build not only your in-your-pocket strategies and your recovery skills, or the things that you do to help yourself after a stressful situation is over.

Ongoing Self-care Tools

Beyond the skills that we wrap around specific stressful moments, all of us need tools, strategies and supports that are in place every day in an ongoing way to support us to stay regulated and ready to care for children and youth. The challenge is that when caregivers become busy, they can also be the things we let go of first to ensure everyone else's needs met.

Cultural tools for Ongoing Self-Care

Cultural strategies are an important part of thinking about our ways to cope in a holistic manner beyond the skills that we wrap around specific stressful moments. They are practices that support us to stay regulated and ready to care for children and youth. We need

to think about ourselves holistically and ensure that we stay balanced and able to care for children and youth.

What would you do?

Think about what you would do if you were Olivia's caregivers and are now dealing with her needs during her bed time routines every night. Think about what you know of her past and current situation. How would you respond and get her ready for bed every night? If you need to you can look back and review her story on page 8.

1. How would you prepare for the inevitable struggle at bed times (plan ahead tools)?
2. What is one "in your pocket" tool you would have should you need to redirect her as she is struggling with going to bed at night?
3. What would you do to recover after she was finally in bed at the end of the day?

You can't use the same tool in every situation.

Wrap Up

A review of the important points from this session:

- Parenting is hard. Caring for children who have experience trauma is harder
- Your feelings matter, for lots of reasons
- Self-care is easy on good days, but harder on hard days
- Keep in mind what makes a hard day
- Stay on the main road:
    1. Acknowledge your feelings
    2. Stay aware
    3. Build and use a self-care tool box

Self Reflection

What are your lifesavers?

What is the one thing you have found most valuable in getting you through a hard day?

Practice at Home

What makes a Hard Day?

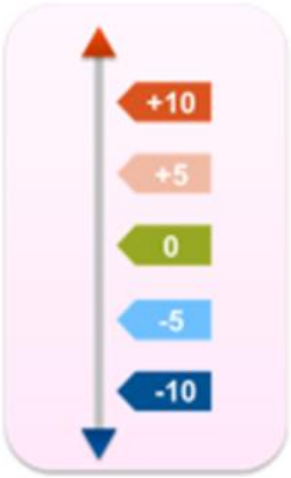
What pushes your buttons or leads to big feelings in you?

This week, try to notice if any of these things happen and how they affect your mood or responses.

Ask yourself:

- What is my body telling me?
- What am I feeling?
- What am I thinking?
- What do I want to do?

Closing check in



Take a moment to check in with yourself before you go. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

Session 3:
Cultivate Connection

CHILDREN'S SERVICES
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) reflections module: session three

Cultivate connection

Participant manual

Alberta

Children's Services, Regulatory, Compliance, Quality Assurance, and Business Supports Division
Government of Alberta
April 2021
Cultivate Connection, An ARC Reflection Framework

For more information regarding this content visit: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/3e4bccf4-6758-4e4a-bfb9-f7f063b83962/resource/d3739e94-9dd4-4514-8ba3-67ca1ebff81b/download/GoA-Publications-Guideline.pdf

An ARC Reflection Module: Session Three- Cultivate Connection | Children's Services

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An ARC Reflection Frame Work

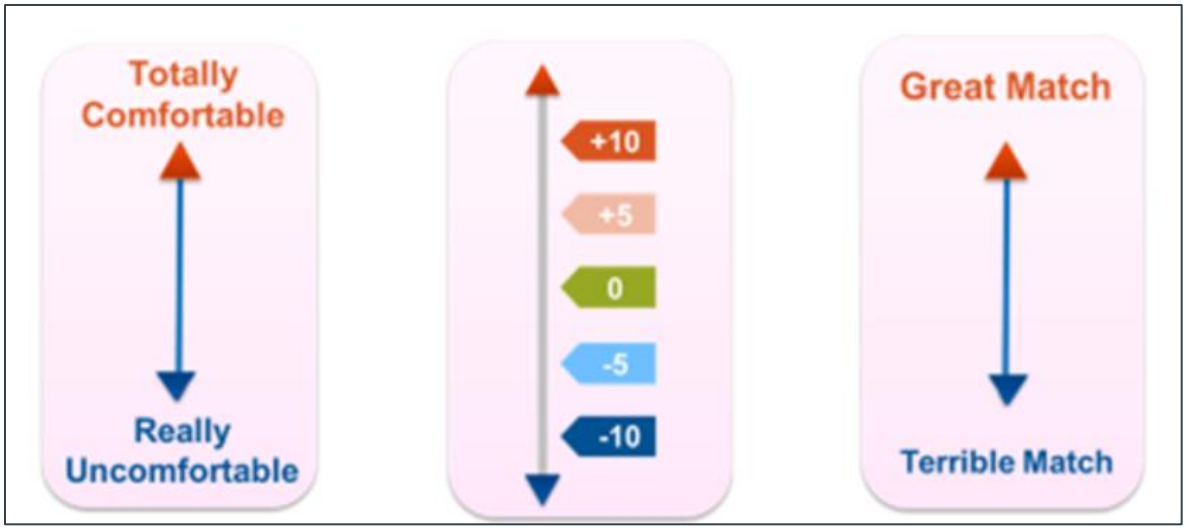
ARC, or Attachment, Regulation and Competency, is a framework for working with children and youth who have experienced trauma. Developed by Margaret Blaustein and Kristine Kinniburgh of the Justice Resource Institute, ARC builds on the resilience of children, youth and families.

ARC Reflections — an ARC-informed caregiver training curriculum for foster parents, kin and other caregivers — was written by Blaustein and Kinniburgh with support and consultation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The model was piloted in six child welfare agencies in 2015 and evaluated by Child Trends, a non-profit, nonpartisan research center with a focus on child welfare.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will demonstrate an understanding of how to build a relationship when a child or youth comes to live with them.
2. Participants will be able to explain how a child or youth can use disconnection as a coping mechanism for protection and not rejection of the caregiver.
3. Participants will identify how being an effective observer of a child and or youth's behaviour can build a relationship with the child or youth in their care.
4. Participants will understand how to use mirroring to understand the child or youth's needs that underlie the behaviour the child or youth is showing the caregiver.

Energy Level Exercise



Take a moment to check in with yourself. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

If your energy is comfortable and a good match, great. If not, what can you do to get it there?

Identify one strategy or skill you can use to feel more comfortable and effective.

Warm Up

After you have paired up with your partner, you have five minutes to identify 5 things that you have in common. However, the challenge is that you cannot focus on the obvious such as you are both caregivers or other obvious things such as the colour of your hair. Your goal is to try to identify the commonalities that may be less apparent.

Review and Report Back

Important points from Put on Your Oxygen Mask:

Parenting in general is hard. Caring for children who have experienced trauma is more challenging. Your experiences as a caregiver and your feeling matter so it is important to pay attention to them. That is why self-care is important. The challenge is that as caregivers it can be easy to engage in self-care when we are experiencing good days, but it is easy to neglect it on the hard days. To stay emotionally regulated and on the main road we need to:

- Acknowledge your feelings
- Stay aware
- Build and use a self-care toolbox

How did your practice from at home go?

In session two you were asked to take time and reflect on what makes a hard day for you. In particular you were to spend time thinking about what pushes your buttons? In those moments you were to tune in and determine:

1. What is my body telling me?
2. What am I feeling?
3. What am I thinking?
4. What do I want to do?

What went well?

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What was challenging for you?

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What was something you noticed?

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Building a relationship with the child or youth who comes to live with you

If we think about building a healthy relationship like a recipe that we need to follow. We would need to ensure that we carefully and thoughtfully gather and use the ingredients. What type of ingredients (words) do you think a good relationship would have?

In thinking about relationships, what do you think these words (or ingredients) mean to children who are placed with caregivers who they did not know previously.

Keep in Mind

When you interact with children and youth who have experienced repeated harm from previous relationships, it is important to remind yourself that at any given moment, the child or youth may be interacting not just with you, but also with every person who has ever hurt, rejected or abandoned them in the past. The challenge this brings to you as a caregiver is that even if you are kind, gentle, generous and loving, the child or youth may ***anticipate*** that you will criticize, reject, abandon, judge or be otherwise harmful to them. Remember the lens that they bring to your relationship continues to have an impact. Therefore, you need to remember their lens and work through it when building a relationship with the child or youth who comes to live with you.

Cultivating Connection: Ideas for building a relationship with a child or youth who comes to live with you.

Caregivers often think about addressing relationship issues when they arise, but often the best time to start thinking about building the relationship is before a child or youth is placed in your home. However there are many strategies that can be used when building relationships with children and youth who come to live with you.

Before the youth arrives:

The best time to start thinking about building the relationship is before a child or youth is placed in your home. An important first step is to explore all your family members' thoughts, feelings and ideas about having a new member of the family. You may want to seek outside supports (Elders, therapists, spiritual counselors, mentors etc.) to speak with each of your family member. Your own children and youth may need extra supports and preparation, just as they would if you were expecting a birth child. Remember that the post-placement period is a time of transition and can feel overwhelming and isolating for everyone in the family. It is important to identify resources and connect with supports beforehand to counter this. This is a good time to create support networks for your family. This can be done by exploring the supports in your community, exploring the Indigenous supports in your area, and who in your life is open to being a support to your children. It is important to be specific: Let your supports know what you would like from them after the placement of a new child in your home.

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As the young person arrives, start with the basics

It is important to start with the basics when getting to know a child or youth. Let the child or youth know from the beginning that you want to learn about what is important to them. This can start with a welcome kit that you make up in advance. Remember many children and youth come into your home without the essentials. This kit can give them a way to have something that is theirs from the start. It could include basic hygiene items, but also other more personal items such as a nightlight if you know they are afraid of the dark. Children and youth coming into your home may have experienced unpredictable rules, excessive punishment or negative experiences with adult

expectations. Being clear about household rules and expectations can reduce anxiety and fear about what to expect. However it could also create a sense of institutionalization. Ask the child or youth about when they would like to have the discussion in the first few days. This will give them a sense of some control. It also may be a good time to talk about any fears around safety and privacy that they may have. That way you can establish some boundaries for that youth and the space that belongs to them. If a child or youth coming to your home is of a different racial, ethnic or religious background or has a different sexual orientation or gender identity than members of your family or household, it may be helpful to have an open conversation about this with your family or close connections ahead of time. Consider having a similar conversation with the child or youth. Determine how they feel about their differences and how they want to talk about them. For example share your pronouns with them and ask them about which ones they would like to be known by. It important to consider the child or youth's privacy and feelings when having this conversation within your family. Opening these lines of communications demonstrates that even those we are all different, we are accepted for who we are.

Ease into the relationship with them

Although it is important to communicate your interest in a relationship with the child or youth, it is also important to be clear that it is their choice how much, if anything, to share with you. They should be able to set the pace and depth of the relationship that they develop with you. It is also important to regularly monitor your own assumptions. For example, do not assume that a child or youth will or will not struggle with behaviour or relationships. You want to be prepared — but you also don't want your assumptions to influence your interactions with the child or youth. Expectations will be important over time, but start slowly. A child or youth may struggle to function when they first arrive in your home. Keep your goals simple early on and build. The goal is to set that child up for success.

An important note about names and labels

Words are meaningful. Within what's comfortable for you and the child, provide children or youth with choices about what to call you. Bear in mind that you are a stranger to them, but also in a position of immediate imposed closeness. Language and labels will let them manage that boundary in a way that is comfortable for them.

Ongoing relationship building

Your relationship with the child or youth is likely to grow and change over time. Stay aware and curious about your own experience in the relationship, as well as their experience. Look for opportunities to ask the child or youth how they are feeling about how everyone is getting along, the names people use for each other and any questions they may have about living with you, etc. Just like adults, children and youth have many unique qualities. Be purposefully curious and try to learn about them, at whatever pace feels comfortable to all of you. Make a point of spending connected time together. You can play, listen to music, and talk about the day or attend ceremonies with them. Relationships are built on moments of connection. Your job as a caregiver is to create them if you need to.

Support their stability by learning about previous relationships, experiences and preferences. See if you can find ways to continue those (if possible) or at the least acknowledge them (if not). Observe how the child is interacting with their environment. They may not always be comfortable answering questions about their past. Ask a child or youth how you can be supportive. Be concrete. For instance, ask, "Do you like getting help with homework or would you rather do it alone? This is especially important in regards to their culture. If the child is Indigenous, take time to include their culture in their life. Learn about their community and its practices. Learn how to make their traditional dishes with them. Take time to visit their community and participate in ceremonies with them.

Adapting your caregiving

We need to remember that every family has a way of doing things. You and your connections have standards around things such as how you communicate with each other, how you express emotions, how you spend time together, etc. Within those standards, though, it is likely that different family members have different temperaments and needs. As a caregiver you adapt. Children or youth entering your home may differ from you, as a result of their individual experiences and personalities, or religious or cultural practices. Often, adults expect children and youths to adapt to their ways, this may feel very different and difficult to the child or youth. This is when you need to be curious. It can help to learn more about the child or youth. You don't need to completely change who you are, but your expectations or interpretations of the child or youth's interactions with you may change if you learn their temperament, needs or values.

Olivia and her relationships

Olivia is now 6 and in her fourth foster placement with Dan and Jennifer. The home she is in is noisy — four kids, two dogs and some extended family. Jennifer works in child care and is enthusiastic about playing with Olivia. Olivia is overwhelmed by all the chaos. She has lost three homes in three years and does not trust that this one will stick. She is quiet and watchful and resists her caregiver's attempts to engage her. When Jennifer tries to play, Olivia sometimes shuts down, but may explode, yell and scream.

Questions for reflection:

1. What do you notice about ways in which Olivia's relational needs may be different from that of the family she came to live with?
2. What ideas do you have? If you were Jennifer, how might you engage with her in a way that matches her relational needs?
3. Why might Olivia's approaches be hard for her caregivers?

Dealing with the disconnects in our relationships

DISCONNECTION IS OFTEN ABOUT

PROTECTION, NOT REJECTION!

All relationships have ups and down, even those that are going well. Relationships naturally change daily based on our moods, our stressors and various experiences we have in our lives. Even the best of relationships can feel hard sometimes. However for children and youth who have experienced trauma and multiple losses, there are many things that can lead them to withdraw or disconnect. These disconnections can feel personal and can lead caregivers to disconnect, feel angry, hurt or rejected. Even when we understand that children and youth are protecting themselves, we can feel rejected and disconnect further. This is why it is important as a caregiver to pay attention to your feelings and self-care needs.

How to reconnect after a disconnection.

To protect yourself against taking things personally, try to anticipate that there will be good days and hard days. Remember to use your self-care toolbox that was discussed in session two. When disconnects happen in your relationship with a child or youth, allow yourself time to regroup, and then take steps toward reconnection. Your ability to reach out will be a powerful message to the child or youth that they are worthy of care and repair. A key goal in caregiving is to teach children and youth that their relationships can weather conflict and distress — and help them to learn to do this in a healthy way. To move toward that repair, put on your detective hat. Try to understand the situation from the child's perspective. Remember that even if you don't agree with or understand the child's or youth's lens, the behaviour makes sense from their perspective. Look for ways to reconnect with a child or youth in your care after relational breaks, conflict or distress.

There are many ways to do this but some include: re-engaging in daily activities, reaching out to ask how they are doing or simply saying, "I know we had a hard afternoon, but I still care about you." After moments of distress or conflict, children or youth are likely to stay on the Express Road for a period of time. They may not be able to think about how they are acting. This may mean that they are not yet able to be in a relationship with you or begin to repair the relationship. It is important to give the child or youth permission, whether implicit or explicit, to take the time needed to recover.

It can be hard to apologize to a child or youth, but doing so provides a powerful message that you care about their experience. Apologizing will not make you less of a person or diminish your own emotions. Instead, it serves as a model to the child or youth of how to handle relationships well. Your efforts to repair or apologize validate the child or youth's experience. One of the most important — and hardest — things we can do after conflict is to move on. Our own ability to regulate and release our hard feelings can help the child or youth do the same.

How to strengthen your relationship

All relationships are strengthened by positive experiences. The more pleasurable experiences and moments of connection you share with children in your home, the easier it will be to ride the roller coaster and manage the moments of challenge and disconnection for both you and the child or youth you are caring for. Therefore it is you role as the caregiver to look for ways to create positive moments of connection that seem natural, not rehearsed or forced.

Mirror, Mirror

Communication with another person is based on so much more than just what we say to each other. Not only do we listen to what each person says, but we also have to learn to read and respond to both verbal and non-verbal cues. The better we can read both verbal and non-verbal communications, the more effectively we can respond to people. We need to see the whole picture. What complicates this process is that no two people communicate in exactly the same way. Especially when we are talking about learning another person's emotional language. This take takes time, even in the most connected of relationships. Another tool for your caregiving toolbox is mirroring. Mirroring is a communication tool that supports you as a caregiver to strengthen and deepen your relationship with the children and youth in your home.

Mirroring starts with becoming a good observer

When you are observing, you are actively attending to information, reflecting on what you are seeing and choosing a response that makes sense based on what you have learned. To react means to be influenced by something outside of yourself and, in some ways, to be at the mercy of what you are reacting to. As a caregiver it can be difficult to make sense of the signals that the children and youth are sending as their signals can be confusing or don't make sense to us for many reasons. This can include the fact that we don't always know what experiences the children and youth had prior to coming to our homes, the may come from a different culture and they may have experienced trauma. It can be easy to react to those signals without first fully understanding them or where they come from It is nearly impossible to be an observer, if we are experiencing distress or overwhelming emotions that pull our attention inward. To be a good observer, we need to stay aware of our own ability to stay regulated. The strategies discussed in session two can help you do this.

Observing another person sounds simple, but it can be very complicated and challenging to do well. It is about more than what you see on the surface. To build this skill, you need to focus intentionally on your role as observer. It is important to ensure you are aware of your own bias or lens that you are seeing the experience through. Don't project your own life experience on to the child or youth who has experienced their own trauma. The process of observation unfolds in steps and involves being a detective. It starts with noticing overt clues and patterns of clues used by the person you are observing to communicate something about their need (related to safety or to physical, emotional or relational needs). Then, it involves identifying the underlying need driving those overt clues. Becoming an observer would be pointless if we simply observed. What's important is using what you have observed to guide effective responses.

Olivia's hard day

Olivia has just arrived home from a hard day at school. Kids were talking about her, someone laughed at her and her teacher said she wasn't working hard enough. Someone wrote, "You're stupid!" on the new notebook her mentor gave her. She arrives home, slams the door and ignores your attempt to say hello. When you ask what the problem is, she says, "School sucks. I don't want to go back."

How do you think Olivia would like you to respond?

_____

_____

_____

_____

It is common in this kind of situation to for adults to:

- **Try to fix the problem by asking:** “Why didn’t you talk to the teacher about what was going on?”
- **React to the surface behaviour:** “Stop talking to me so disrespectfully; don’t slam the door.”
- **Minimize the problem:** “It’s only a notebook, you can always get another one.
- **Invalidate the emotion:** “Don’t be so dramatic. Calm down.”

What is Mirroring?

Mirroring is a way of letting other people know you see them and understand them and their needs. When we mirror:

- We actively reflect back or share some of our observations with the person with whom we are observing and interacting.
- We observe not just the surface of what we see, but reflect what we think the emotion or need might be driving the behavior.

Mirroring helps you communicate in the moment but over time, it helps you build an understanding of the child or youth. It also shows the child or youth that you are paying attention and that you care. Another function of Mirroring is that it is an important support for regulation. It helps children and youth build awareness of their feelings, and helps give them support in managing those feelings. We will talk much more about the ways that we help children and youth with their feelings in our next session.

Ways you can use mirroring to communicate

Mirroring through language

When talking to the child about their experience you can use your conversations to:

- Communicate curiosity and interest
- Reflect emotions back to the child or youth
- Check your assumptions about why they are behaving the way they are.
- To reassure someone that their experience makes sense.
- To show the child or youth that they are not alone in their experience which can continue to build your relationship with the child or youth.

Mirroring through behaviour

Language is only one way to mirror experience. Remember: Most communication is nonverbal, so finding nonverbal ways to mirror can be powerful, too.

- Match the child or youth's non-verbal clues to you such as tone of voice, facial expressions, emotions, energy, body tension, eye contact etc. Be careful when using this tool as it can feel to some youth as if you are mocking them. Go slowly and see how the child or youth responds to your mirroring.

Responses that interfere with mirroring

- **Fixing** "We can just…"
- **Minimizing** "It's not such a big deal…"
- **Limit setting** "I don't care how angry you are, you can't slam doors."

- **Trying to change their feelings too quickly** “Let’s do something fun.”
- **Invalidating** “It is silly to be so angry about a notebook.”
- **Pushing** “What do you mean you don’t want to talk about it?”

Wrap Up

A review of the important points from this session:

- Good relationships require many ingredients
- When building the relationship, remember the child or youth’s lens
- Relationships take time:
  - Prepare
  - Ease in
  - Meet the child or youth where they are
  - Ride the roller coaster
  - Reconnect
  - Cultivate joy
- We communicate our experience in ways that go beyond language
- To build good relationships with the children and youth you are caring for – you need to learn their language – this takes time and starts with curiosity.
- Sometimes we get it wrong
- Slow down and be a detective
- Mirror what you see

Self-Reflection

When thinking about your own relationships:

What has led you to disconnect in relationships?

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What has helped you ease back into relationships? Think about what you do and what you want others to do for you as you reconnect?

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Practice at Home

Be a Detective

Pick one person in your life to observe (child, partner, co-worker, friend). You won't have to share who you picked when you bring this back next session.

See if you can identify all the clues that suggest what a person might be feeling in the moment. Notice how changes (even subtle) in these clues might communicate feelings or needs:

Body Tension:_____

Tone of Voice:_____

Eye Contact:_____

Facial Expression:_____

Language:_____

Behaviour:_____

Connection or Disconnection:_____

Other Observations:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Closing check in

Take a moment to check in with yourself before you go. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

Session 4:
Calm, Cool and Connected

CHILDREN'S SERVICES
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) reflections module: session four

Calm, cool and connected

Participant manual

Alberta

Children's Services, Regulatory, Compliance, Quality Assurance, and Business Supports Division
Government of Alberta
April 2021
Calm, Cool and Connected, An ARC Reflection Framework

For more information regarding this content visit: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/3e4bccf4-6758-4e4a-bfb9-f7f063b83962/resource/d3739e94-9dd4-4514-8ba3-67ca1ebff81b/download/GoA-Publications-Guideline.pdf

An ARC Reflection Module: Session four- Calm, Cool and Connected | Children's Services

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An ARC Reflection Frame Work

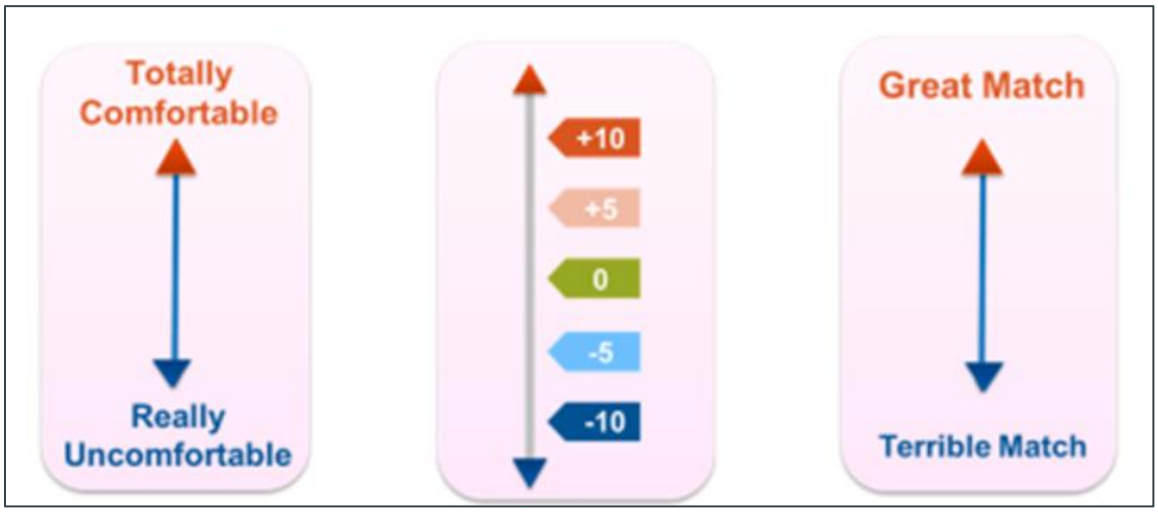
ARC, or Attachment, Regulation and Competency, is a framework for working with children and youth who have experienced trauma. Developed by Margaret Blaustein and Kristine Kinniburgh of the Justice Resource Institute, ARC builds on the resilience of children, youth and families.

ARC Reflections — an ARC-informed caregiver training curriculum for foster parents, kin and other caregivers — was written by Blaustein and Kinniburgh with support and consultation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The model was piloted in six child welfare agencies in 2015 and evaluated by Child Trends, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center with a focus on child welfare.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants learn how a child or youth progressively builds the capacity to self-regulate
2. Participants learn the effect of a child or youth's dysregulation on their caregivers.
3. Participants will understand how self-regulation contributes to a child or youths understanding of feelings as well as their ability to communicate their feelings to their caregivers
4. Participants will discuss strategies that promote a child or youth's regulation and how to reconnect with the child or youth when everyone is calm.

Energy Level Exercise



Take a moment to check in with yourself. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

If your energy is comfortable and a good match, great. If not, what can you do to get it there?

Identify one strategy or skill you can use to feel more comfortable and effective.

Warm Up

Everyone has strategies that help them to stay regulated. For example, what are you doing right now to help yourself to stay regulated during this training? Some people chew gum or drink coffee, some bounce their knee, and some doodle. How do you know if your energy is starting to become uncomfortable and you are starting to become dysregulated? What do you do to help yourself to re-regulate?

Review and Report Back

Important points from Cultivate Connection:

Relationships take time to develop and require many ingredients. When entering a relationship with children or youth who have experienced trauma, it is very important to remember to consider their lens for thinking about relationships, connection, family, home, etc. Their perspective can help guide how you enter and build the relationship. Remember it is best to meet children and youth where they are. Ease into the relationship with them. It can sometimes feel like being in a relationship with children and youth is similar to riding a roller coaster. There will be moments or periods when you feel connected followed by moments or periods when you do not. It is very important to remember that disconnection is about protection, not rejection. Find opportunities to reconnect when disconnection occurs.

When building a relationship with a child or youth it is very important to be curious. The starting place for building a good relationship is in your strong desire to learn about who they are. However remember that individuals use different strategies to communicate their wants and needs. Many of our strategies are nonverbal rather than verbal. This makes the process of learning another person's communication style complicated and, at times, challenging.

Give yourself permission to slow down and use your detective skills to figure out clues people are sending you about their wants and needs. Clues may be obvious or subtle. Pay attention to the range of nonverbal and verbal cues. Mirroring is an important strategy for letting others know you see them and that you understand them and their needs. Even in the most secure relationships, connecting with one another can be hard; mistakes will be made along the way. However, the best of relationships are built when we continue to try and understand each other.

How did your practice at home go?

For practice from the last session, you were to pick one person in your life to observe (child, partner, co-worker, or friend). You do not have to share the person whom you chose. The point of the practice assignment was to see if you could identify how a person was feeling from observing them. How did it go? What were you able to notice about how changes/clues (even subtle ones) that might communicate feelings or needs:

What went well?

_____

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_____

_____

What was challenging for you?

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What was something you noticed?

_____

_____

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Calm, Cool and Connected

This session will focus on the process of learning to sooth and regulate. How children and youth learn to manage or control their own thoughts, emotions and energy at different developmental stages. With this information caregivers can support and teach the children and youth in their care to regulate. As part of the session you will be able to start creating a toolbox and a set of tools to use to respond to the needs of the child or youth better. While reviewing how things are not working well with Olivia and her caregivers, you can think about different tools for your toolbox and how they could support Olivia's caregivers to understand her situation better. With a different understanding and tools, her caregivers start to see Olivia's behaviours as an indication of needs that are not being met, and can respond better to her needs this supports building better connections and Olivia's ability to regulate.

Let's Talk about Soothing

Self-Regulation is a skill that is learned from your caregiver. It begins in infancy when a caregiver responds to the distress that an infant is experiencing. The challenge is that every baby is different and all have different preferences. There is no one size fits all strategy. Some infants respond to swaddling (deep pressure) while others respond to singing, rocking, etc. Within Indigenous culture there are many different strategies used such as moss bags, cradle boards, swings, and singing. As you think about what is soothing and what helps teach self-regulation to the children in your home, remember that context matters. For instance, the effectiveness of a given soothing strategy may vary depending on a baby's emotional state, environment and the caregiver with whom they are interacting. This continues on into later childhood and adolescence.

Regulating Infants

Infants are instinctively attuned to their caregivers' physiological, emotional and behavioural responses. As a result, it is important for caregivers to feel regulated as they support infant regulation. Infant regulation is supported by the adult's ability to tune into and effectively respond to the baby's clues and underlying need for play, soothing, sleep, etc. Over time, adults learn the infant's preferences for different regulation strategies (rocking vs. touch vs. movement) through experimentation or trial and error. One thing many caregivers do is to develop daily routines and rhythms, such as feeding, bedtime, bath, etc. While we often do this to help us organize and manage daily tasks, this is actually a very important foundation for the infant's early ability to regulate and develop a feeling of safety in the world. Predictability encourages this safety. Regulation is further supported by the many ways we engage and connect throughout the day, rather than only when the infant is experiencing distress or discomfort.

The effect of regulation strategies on the infant's experience

When regulation support is consistently offered and provided to the infant, they experience security and comfort in connection to another person. Regulation support provides the infant with a felt understanding that feelings do not last forever and they may come and go or have a beginning and ending point. The infant will learn that a primary function of connection is to increase their internal sense of comfort and safety. This is how the caregiver's response to infant's distress creates their attachment to the caregiver.

How regulation in Infancy supports skill development over time

The development of regulation capacity is progressive and builds and becomes more sophisticated over time. Infants learn to understand their inner experiences initially because others read and respond to their needs effectively. One of the primary skills that a caregiver uses to attune to a young child's needs is reflection. When a caregiver reflects the infant or child's experience back to them by stating, "Oh, you're hungry," or "Oh, you're happy," or "Oh, you're mad," the infant or child begins to learn how to label their internal experience and to discriminate between emotions and body states (mad is different from sad, hungry is different from tired). These labels you provide for their experience over time are adopted and offer a child or youth language for their experience.

Similarly, the earliest foundation for communication begins in infancy. For instance, babies may learn that if they cry, someone will come and soothe them. If they put up their arms, someone will pick them up. If they smile, someone will smile back. Communication skills will build on this early foundation and become more sophisticated and direct as children learn to talk. When their caregivers are able to provide consistent support for soothing throughout the day, especially in moments of distress or discomfort, the growing child begins to internalize the felt comfort experienced in these moments of co-regulation. This internal sense of comfort helps them

increase their tolerance for distress and bounce back more quickly. As the infant moves into toddlerhood then into childhood, there is an increasing ability to use strategies with less support and more independence, although caregivers are still a primary source of regulation and comfort.

What happens when children or youth do not experience consistent support for regulating?

These children will struggle much more with even basic regulation skills than might be expected based on their chronological age. When you are caring for older children or youth, it can feel unnatural to teach very basic regulation skills.

For instance, we often expect that a 10-year-old will have the ability to identify basic emotions or that a 16-year-old will have a set of effective coping strategies. But often that is not the case. If a child or youth has not had consistent support for regulation, their self-regulation skills may not have developed. Remember how the brain is built – each skill is built on previous skills. As well, it is even more complicated, when a child or youth who has not experienced early co-regulation did not learn that relationships are a source of calm and comfort. In fact children who come from chaotic or abusive environments have often they have learned the opposite: that relationships are chaotic and frightening. This is one reason why it may be hard for children and youth to feel safe in relationships in general. This may make it more challenging for you as their caregiver to figure out how to provide regulation and co-regulation support.

How a lack of adequate support for regulation can impact their understanding of feelings

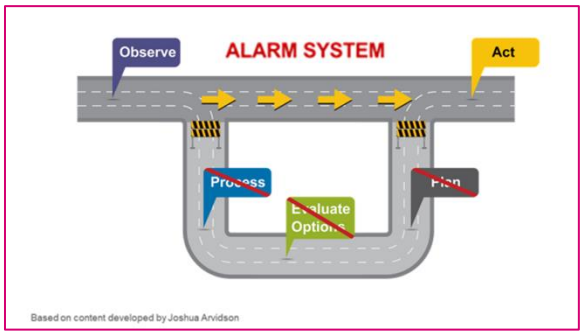
If an individual does not have consistent exposure to reflection and labeling of emotions early on, then they may not have the language needed to help organize, define and label their experiences. In response to questions about feelings, a common and valid response is “I don’t know.” Many children have experienced early “mis-attunements” not being “seen” accurately by the adults taking care of them, or having adults not pay attention to their feelings at all. Another challenge is that children may also defend against very hard emotional states like sadness or fear due to a sense of shame and vulnerability. As a result, children and youth may only be able to identify, name and access a limited number of emotions. For instance, they may always say “I am mad,” but never being able to say, “I am sad.” Because of their lack of ability to consistently label emotions and read emotional cues in themselves and their “lens for others described in session one, it can be difficult for them to read the emotions in other people. It is important to be aware of the challenge as it can lead to misinterpretations of their caregiver’s emotions or intentions in different situations. For instance, they may perceive anger or danger in others’ facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, etc., even when it may not actually be there.

How a lack of adequate support for regulation can impact how they communicate their feelings

Children and adolescents who have experienced trauma may have very little language for their experiences, making it even harder to communicate their emotions to others. On top of this trauma may also interfere with a child's or youths ability to access language when they feel unsafe or is reminded of past trauma, even by subtle reminders or triggers. Remember the Express Road to action? When children or youth are on the Express Road, the thinking parts of their brains (and the language centers within it) shut down. That makes it even more challenging to use words to describe what they are experiencing. Language allows each of us to communicate our experience directly to others. The absence or lack of access to language means a child or youth has to use other strategies to communicate their wants and needs. These indirect ways of communicating may be confusing or difficult for caregivers or others to read and respond to effectively. As caregivers it is also important to think about the cultural beliefs and practices of the child or youth in your care. Within Indigenous cultures, crying is seen as a form of healing, sometimes cutting ones hairs is done when grieving a loved one and the use of humour is believed to be an important part of healing. The expression of emotion may differ based on the child's cultural experience and expectations.

How a lack of adequate support for regulation can impact how they manage their feelings

To manage your feelings effectively, you have to have some understanding of what the feelings are and where they come from. You also have to have a set of strategies for dealing with them which could include access to supports. In the absence of these things, it is common for children or youth to become very overwhelmed by things that may seem minor to others. Other challenges can produce the same response. These could include it could be due to their unique temperament, developmental delays/challenges or prenatal exposures. An example of these challenges is a minor schedule change may trigger a fear response in a child or youth whose early caregiving environment was chaotic. The human danger response also known as the Express Road often creates the experience of going from 0-60 miles per hour in less than a minute. When upsetting feelings occur (particularly when feelings are a trigger or are related to a trigger), they get very big very quickly. This can be quite overwhelming and frightening to the child or youth. When overwhelmed, children or youth will do whatever they can to feel better in the moment.



For instance, a common strategy is to disconnect from feelings that are uncomfortable or overwhelming. The primitive and survival-based strategies used in early childhood (including but not limited to disconnection) often continue to be the go-to strategies later in childhood. This can prevent children or youth from developing more sophisticated or age-appropriate coping skills. As challenging emotions get more complicated, the strategies children or youth use to manage them are often more risky, particularly as children move into early and late adolescence. Risky behaviours such as self-harm, aggression and substance use can be reframed as coping strategies designed to provide immediate relief from overwhelming or distressing emotions.

Checking in with Olivia

Olivia is now 7 years old and has been moving her way through foster homes for the past two years. She has just entered a new home after a series of placements that failed because adults could not cope with her tantrums, not listening, stealing and lying. Though Olivia has had some successes in her life, she continues to exhibit unhealthy coping behaviours. Although she seemed thrilled to be in the home, calling her caregiver "Mom" immediately, she melts down every night at bedtime, crying and clinging when "Mom" leaves the room.

Her caregiver has noticed that small items from around the house are missing, but when she confronts her about it, Olivia shuts down, denies taking anything and then explodes and says, "You don't care about me. I hate you!" Olivia can be endearing and charming at times, but often feels exhausting. She demands help with many things that her caregivers expect her to be able to do for herself (get dressed, tie her shoes) and cries and screams when they suggest she try it herself. When they try to comfort her, she pushes them away.

Triggers	Clues of dysregulation	Needs

Olivia's caregivers

They are worn out. They believe they've tried to hang in there with her, but they are confused by her emotions, which are intense and unpredictable. At this point, it feels like they have tried everything, but nothing works. Now when Olivia begins to throw a tantrum, they feel like it is manipulative and she is just trying to get attention. Their anxiety and anger climb and they find themselves pulling away from her

_____
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_____

Remember: caring for children and youth who have experienced trauma is hard. You are trying to soothe a child or youth who:

- Never learned how to be soothed
- Is frightened of and may be triggered by relationships, even if they really crave them
- Escalates quickly and unexpectedly due to triggers you are not always aware of
- **Expects to be rejected** by you and kicked out of your home
- Can feel like they exhausts you

Making a Toolbox: How to Support a child or youth's Regulation?

First Set of Tools: The foundation of regulation

- Being a detective to learn a child's or youth's patterns,
- developing daily routines and rhythms,
- using ongoing activities and
- Foundational regulation strategies

Being a detective to learn a child's or youth's patterns

As a caregiver you will need to take time to get to know the child or youth in your care. As we know everyone has a different temperament and personality. Learn to take time and reflect on the clues that your child or youth is showing you from their responses to the environment. Pay attention to their energy and how it shifts through the day. Think about what activities help them regulate and what activities challenge their ability to regulate. Actively track these clues to see patterns over time by using your daily logs. This will help you in developing strategies for dealing with hard days/times, when they happen again.

Questions to reflect on:

- What sorts of activities or experiences lead to feeling more or less organized/in control?
- How do you know your child or youth is comfortable or uncomfortable in their body/feelings? **What are the clues?**
- What patterns of strength and challenge does your child or youth show? When does he or she do best, and when does he or she predictably have a harder time? Target soothing routines to those times
- Actively track clues every time your child or youth has a hard time; these will be useful the next time

Daily routines and rhythms

People have routines or rhythms that we follow throughout our day and these rhythms serve a very important purpose. They keep us organized. They keep our days predictable and generally help us to feel internally balanced and safe. They are not about rigidity. It is important to create this routine to support your child and youth as well. Remember routines should decrease a child or youth's distress, if your routine is making things harder, change it.

Use routines to:

- Target challenge points, such as transitions, hygiene, expectations (homework, chores)
- Provide natural soothing opportunities at bedtime, playtime, bath time, etc.
- Provide engagement and connection points, such as check-ins, asking about the day, solving problems together

Example of Olivia's New Routine:

Olivia's caregivers develop **a new evening routine** that gives Olivia a lot of control and seems to calm her distress. They make picture cards showing each step of her evening: finishing homework, brushing teeth, taking a shower, getting in pajamas

- Each card has two sides: one showing a child doing the task alone, and the other with support
- Every evening, Olivia puts her cards in the order she wants to complete them, and picks which side of the card she wants (support or no support)

Ongoing Activities:

Many routines are naturally regulating. They are naturally modulating and soothing. Creating predictable and ongoing activities that your child and youth can participate in to meet their energy needs at the right time can be an excellent support for their ongoing regulation.

- Drumming
- Playing (alone or with others)
- Sports
- Expressive art, dance, theatre
- Smudging
- Yoga
- Reading
- Listening to music
- Crafts

Foundational Regulation Strategies

Think about strategies used to soothe an infant, such as rocking or playing calm music. Often these are strategies a caregiver uses routinely throughout a given day at times that are generally associated with comfort and safety. It is this association with comfort and safety that eventually increases the effectiveness of the strategy during moments of distress or discomfort.

This is true for children and youth too. You don't want to only offer strategies to soothe in moments of distress. Use them on a regular basis, so the child or youth sees them as familiar and connected to feelings of regulation. If children and youth are presented with regulation or coping strategies only at the moment of distress, those strategies are likely to be rejected because of lack of exposure and practice. As well as the fact that the strategies themselves have become associated with distress and discomfort. Also remember that depending on their past experiences and the lens that they view adult caregivers through, the child or youth may not assume you are to help when you first intervene. It can take time for them to believe you are a helper and safe person. You have to work from where the child or youth is.

There are a number of possible strategies that can be used in an ongoing way to support regulation. It is important to remember that strategies are not a one size fits all. Every child or youth is different and the strategies should be associated with their developmental needs rather than with their chronological age. Culture can also play an important role in finding the right strategies. A couple of examples for Indigenous children are regularly smudging with them,

drumming and working with an elder to understand ways to promote balance through the Medicine Wheel.

- Sensory strategies
    - Sound (listen to music, noise machines, audio books)
    - Touch (weighted blankets, stuffed animals, chewable jewelry)
    - Smell (smudging, lotions, air fresheners, scent of cooking)
    - Taste (favourite foods from home or culture)
    - Sight (pictures of important people, favourite places)
- Gross motor activities (Opportunities to run, jump and play, small trampoline)
- Dedicated sensory or soothing space/soothing box
- Ongoing opportunities for connection (reading together, games, crafts together)

Important point from previous sessions:

Remember the lens that children or youth who have experienced trauma have for themselves as well as others. Also think about the labels that they feel they have been given or have given to themselves. A big one to remember in this process is shame. Shame can often act as a trigger in the moment, leading to dysregulation. Because of this, the more that children or youth are engaged in activities that increase their sense of competence, the less likely they are to experience shame and associated distress.

Second Set of Tools: Supporting regulation in the moment of distress

- Catch the moment
- Be a mirror
- Meet the need
- Smudging
- Support the child's or youth's tools
- Control and choice
- Reconnect

Olivia

Olivia has been getting really upset, yelling and screaming for her caregiver to help her whenever she has a hard time with something. If her caregiver doesn't respond right away, Olivia will call her names and will sometimes run to her and hit her.

Her caregiver has been worried about reinforcing this behaviour, so tries to ignore Olivia or tell her she won't answer until Olivia calms down. This seems to be making things worse, and Olivia has become increasingly demanding and aggressive lately.

Catch the moment

Try to **catch the moment** at the earliest possible point — when the child or youth is still able to regulate

- Ideally, try to catch the child or youth when they are still on the Main Road. Do not let them get onto the Express Road.
- If you cannot, aim to increase your ability to read and anticipate your child or youth's patterns. *Ask yourself, "What clues does my child or youth give that they are starting to get upset?"*
- Plan what to do when your child or youth starts to struggle and adjust over time. Keep in mind that different strategies are likely to work at different times

Thinking about Olivia:

What would this look like for Olivia and her caregiver?

Thinking about Olivia's Caregiver:

Remember as a caregiver you also need to use your tools to keep yourself steady.

- Prepare yourself
- In-your-pocket tools
- Recovery tools
- Ongoing self-care

Thinking about Olivia's caregiver, what does she need in this moment? What advice would you give her is addressing her own emotional needs?

Be a Mirror

Mirroring is a strategy you can use to let another person know you see them, are paying attention and understand the person and their needs.

- Provide simple reflection by naming feelings, validating experience and normalizing ("Looks like you're feeling sad right now")
- Less is more. If a child or youth is upset, they will be less able to hear language. Consider mirroring with relationship, energy, body state.

Thinking about Olivia:

What strategies might you use in mirroring for Olivia? How do you think this might help her regulate in this moment?

Meet the need

Dysregulation is often a signal of unmet needs (such as the need for survival or safety or an emotional, physical or relational need). Our responses to a child's or youth's behaviour can inadvertently increase rather than decrease distress. One of your most important tools for addressing dysregulation early is identifying and meeting the child's perceived needs

Thinking about Olivia:

How do you think Olivia's caregiver might be able to meet Olivia's needs in this moment? How might this help Olivia manage her dysregulation?

Support the children or youth in using their own self-regulation tools:

Ideally, as part of building foundational regulation strategies, you and the child or youth will have begun to build a toolbox of regulation strategies.

As these are solidified, they can be cued or prompted in the moment using these three strategies:

1. Modeling. Shame and vulnerability are common triggers for children or youth who have experienced trauma. When they feel shame or vulnerability, it can be hard to acknowledge they are distressed and harder still to ask for help. When a trusted adult models vulnerability and shows how they use tools to support regulation, it allows children and youth to feel safer doing so themselves. It can also provide opportunities for co-regulation.

2. Prompting use of tools. It is essential to prompt the use of specific tools instead of making general statements, such as, “go calm down.” Regulation is a complicated skill. They may need support to identify and implement each of the steps involved in the calm-down process. This is also true for children or youth who have shut down, or gone numb, and who need to wake up or re-engage with their world.

3. Experimenting. If one strategy doesn’t work in the moment, try another. There is no single strategy that is going to work all the time. Even preferred tools may not work when they are most needed.

Thinking about Olivia:

How could Olivia’s caregiver model, prompt or help her experiment with one of these strategies in the moment?

_____
_____
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Offer opportunities for choice and control

Choice and control can be very powerful for children or youth who have experienced trauma. They have likely had countless experiences in which they experienced a lack of control and feelings of powerlessness. Many of those experiences felt threatening and dangerous. Ironically, when children or youth are dysregulated, one of the things we do as adults to try to keep a situation safe is to take control away. This can actually escalate the situation, rather than helping a child calm down. This is because perceiving a loss of control may act as a trigger and

lead children and youth to increased arousal and in some situations, survival behaviours. To avoid triggering and prevent survival behaviours, find opportunities for control and choice.

Thinking about Olivia:

What are possible ways you might help Olivia feel more in control in this moment?

Reconnect/Re-engage when everyone is calm

Children and youth develop a sense of themselves and of others, their lens for self and a lens of relationships based on early experiences with caregivers. This is heavily influenced by trauma and those relationships are often marked by crisis, chaos and disconnection. To reduce a child's or youth's feelings of shame and hopelessness, it is essential that you find a way to reconnect, re-engage and repair once everybody is back on the main road. However it is important to check that the youth is ready to reconnect. Sometimes they can look calm but aren't. This is a good time to give the child or youth some choices.

Thinking about Olivia:

How would it help Olivia to experience reconnection and relationship repair after a difficult moment?

Remember the four strategies we can use to manage disconnects:

1. Reaffirm the relationship. Find a way to assure the child or youth that the relationship can exist and continue, even when times are hard.
2. Reconnect at the child's or youth's pace. Give the child or youth permission to protect themselves, even if you don't believe it is needed.
3. Make repair if needed. Give apologies, but don't expect them.
4. Move on. Try to shift out of the hard and into something positive. You're not reinforcing the negative when you reconnect in positive ways.

Wrap – Up

- Remember how infants and young children learn to regulate
- Children and youth who do not have help to regulate as young children have a much a harder time managing their feelings and behavior
- You can help by:
    - Laying a good foundation
      (routines, ongoing strategies, engaged, connection and learning their patterns)
    - Responding in the moment
      (reading the clues, using your own tools, cue and support the child or youth's tools, offer opportunities for control and reconnect)

Self-Reflection

As you reflect, think about a time when you didn't understand what was happening with a child or youth you were caring for and as a result the situation got worse. You could have misunderstood something that they said or did.

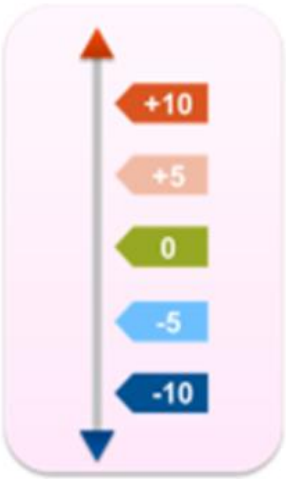
- What happened to make the situation worse?
- How did you figure out that your perception was not correct?
- How did you figure out what changes you needed to make to understand the situation with the child better?
- How did the outcome shift as a result of the changes you made?

Practice at Home

Take time this week to look around your home.

- What do you have that lends itself to supporting regulation?
- What might you need to add? (Keep in mind that this includes items as well as daily practices)
- Make a list of what you have and what you need

Closing check in



Take a moment to check in with yourself before you go. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

Appendix

Daily Routine Examples:

Morning	Morning transitions are often difficult for everyone, but particularly for highly stressed or chaotic households. Work to create consistent and realistic morning routines.
Mealtimes	Meals are often a forum for communication and a place for family together time. Use mealtimes to provide an opportunity for less structured peer interaction and conversation. Mealtimes can support the development of social skills, turn taking, manners and interest in others' activities. Work to come together for meals that are part of a daily routine as often as possible.
Play	Play is a child's natural means of expression — this is often true for youths, as well. Play with your children or youth. Allocate time during the week for family, solitary and peer to-peer play. Although often mistakenly considered less important than chores, homework or other task-oriented experiences, play is a vital part of healthy development. Play also provides a forum for socialization and skill building.
Chores	Performing chores helps to build a sense of responsibility and self-efficacy. Of course, chores should be age-appropriate, but it is OK for even very young children to have expectations about their areas of responsibility. This conveys the idea that all family or community members, including the child or youth, make important contributions. Work to develop child- or youth appropriate, realistic daily expectations.
Homework	School achievement and success is an important area of competency for children. You can contribute by emphasizing the importance of homework, providing an appropriate environment that supports homework completion, being available to provide help or encouragement and emphasizing effort over success.
Family together time	Build into daily family routines a time for caregivers and children or youths to come together, formally or informally, to share experiences. For instance, some families may consider holding a weekly family meeting to share significant events. It may be incorporated into mealtime, bedtime, etc. Regardless of the forum, it is important that there be opportunities for family members to routinely share their experiences.

Bedtime Routine Examples

Story time or reading	Read a story; encourage an older child to read to you or have a youth read independently.
Music or soothing sounds	Encourage a child or youth to listen to soothing music or sounds while settling for bed.
Tuck in	Tuck the child or youth in for the night. This can be literal or figurative, depending on the needs of the child or youth.
Singing	Sing a preferred song(s) (for younger child) to or with your child before bed.
Bathing	Have child take a bath or shower about an hour before bed. This may help with calming. Pay attention to privacy, boundaries and the possibility of these activities being a trigger.
Safety check	Help children and youths feel safe. Leave on a nightlight, hang a dream catcher, check under beds or in closets, rub on “no-monster” lotion, etc. Or, for an older child, review your safety plan
Movement	Allow time for rocking, stretching, yoga or some other type of preferred movement to ease a child or youth into a state of arousal conducive for sleep.
Checkout	Create a checkout ritual or a routine approach to ending the day (such as saying a prayer, smudging sharing high/low for the day, making a plan for the morning, etc.).

Modulation Activities

Naturally modulating activities:

- Play
- Sports
- Expressive arts and theater
- Drumming
- Indigenous Dancing
- Yoga
- Reading
- Listening to music
- Crafts

Sensory strategies:

- **Sound:** Listen to music, use headphones or noise machines to drown out noise
- **Touch:** Provide hugs, weighted blankets, soft pillows, stuffed animals, cool stones, things to fiddle with, chewable jewelry
- **Smell:** Smudging, provide lotions, use air fresheners, scent of cooking
- **Taste:** Share a favorite food, think about important cultural foods,
- **Sight:** Provide pictures of safe people and favorite places. Minimize visual stimulation

Gross Motor Strategies

- Small trampolines
- Opportunities to run, jump and play
- Exercise balls or yoga balls
- Balance beams
- After school dance parties

Create a Quiet/Comfort Zone

- Make it in a safe place, preferably just for the child or youth
- Fill it with materials that are safe, comforting and sensory
- Have the child or youth practice using it when they are calm
- Have a calming box

Additional activities to support modulation include:

Breathing activities:

- *Deep breathing with movement and sounds.* You be the model. Say, “We are going to practice deep breathing with movement and sounds. When I raise my arms up [demonstrate], I am going to take a deep breath in. When I bring my arms down, I am going to exhale, making a sound, like this: ooooooooooooooh. You can make any sound that you wish to make. OK, on the count of three, let’s practice together…”
- *Bubble breathing:* You be the model. Use a jar of bubble mixture and a wand. Breathe slowly into the wand, emphasizing breathing slowly to make a large bubble.
- *Deep breathing with a straw.* Remind your child or youth that deep breathing is the fastest way to send a message to the brain that everything is OK. Give them a straw and a small piece of paper. On the count of three, ask the child or youth to take a deep breath in (expanding the belly out so that it looks and feels like it is filling with air). The goal is to hold the small paper on the end of the straw. After a count to four, prompt the child or youth to exhale, allowing the paper to fall to the floor.
- *Pillow breathing.* Have child or youth lie on floor with pillow or stuffed animal on stomach. Teach them to breathe so that pillow or animal rises and falls with each breath.
- *London Bridge breathing.* Have children or youths raise their arms (like in game London Bridge). Breathe in as arms go up; breathe out as arms come down. See how slowly they can move their arms up and down.
- *Breathing with imagery.* Have children or youths imagine taking a deep breath and blowing out birthday candles. Or have them try to paint the opposite wall with their breath, or smell flowers, then blow a dandelion puff.

Focus Activities,

- *Focus bell.* Explain that you will be ringing a bell. Encourage the child or youth to focus on the sensory experience of sound. Encourage them to practice their deep breathing while listening. Notice the change in sound as time passes. Say, “Raise your hand when you no longer hear the sound.”
- *Memory game.* Ask the child or youth to be mindful of their environment and study all the things in the room. Then ask, “Please close your eyes. Now recall an item in the room that is white.” You can modify this by selecting a few items (toys, pens, objects, etc.) and placing them in the middle of the table. Have the child or youth focus on the items for one minute. Then say, “Close your eyes,” while you remove one item. The final step is to give the child or you than opportunity to guess the missing item.

- Grounding. Have children tune in to their senses, using concrete, easy-to-hold stimuli, such as:

Magic wands, Magic rocks, worry stones, piece of velvet cloth
Small stuffed animal, glitter cream, pleasurable smells, stress balls.

Movement activities or games,

- *Dice game.* The goal is to practice breathing or light movement. You roll the dice. Then choose a movement for you and the child and youth to sustain to the count indicated on the die. For example, roll your shoulders to the count of 10. Or wiggle your nose to the count of seven.
- *Stretching.* Lead the child or youth in gentle movement and stretches.
- *Simon says.* Review the rules to Simon says. Remember that in Simon says, there is a leader (Simon) and followers. The follower is to follow the leader's actions — but only when the leader says "Simon says."
- *Head, shoulders, knees and toes.* Play this game with younger children to expose them to music and movement at the same time.

Music activities

- *Relaxation with music.* Play some relaxing music and have the child or youth listen to it mindfully. Remind the child or youth to breathe while listening.
- *You've got the beat.* "We are going to create music together today. Each of us is going to have a turn creating a beat using our hands and body. We will take turns being the leader or creator of the beat. The rest of us will follow the leader." You can do this exercise with movement, too.
- *Musical instruments.* Gather several types of musical instruments. Demonstrate the sound of each. Say, "Close your eyes or turn your back (if comfortable)." Ask the child or youth to identify the sound and link it to a specific instrument.

Session 5:
Respond, Don’t React

CHILDREN'S SERVICES
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) reflections module: session five

Respond, don't react

Participant manual

Alberta

Children's Services, Regulatory, Compliance, Quality Assurance, and Business Supports Division
Government of Alberta
April 2021
Respond, Don't React, An ARC Reflection Framework

For more information regarding this content visit: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/3e4bccf4-6758-4e4a-bfb9-f7f063b83962/resource/d3739e94-9dd4-4514-8ba3-67ca1ebff81b/download/GoA-Publications-Guideline.pdf

An ARC Reflection Module: Session five- Respond, Don't React | Children's Services

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An ARC Reflection Frame Work

ARC, or Attachment, Regulation and Competency, is a framework for working with children and youth who have experienced trauma. Developed by Margaret Blaustein and Kristine Kinniburgh of the Justice Resource Institute, ARC builds on the resilience of children, youth and families.

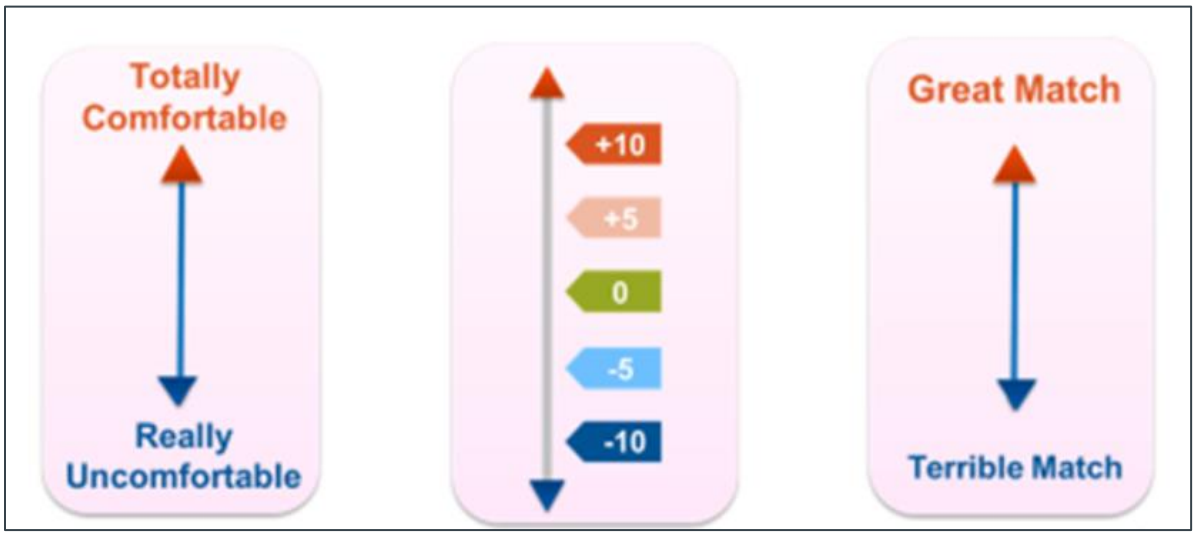
ARC Reflections — an ARC-informed caregiver training curriculum for foster parents, kin and other caregivers — was written by Blaustein and Kinniburgh with support and consultation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The model was piloted in six child welfare agencies in 2015 and evaluated by Child Trends, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center with a focus on child welfare.

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize how a caregiver's reaction will influence a child or youths behaviour.
2. Caregiver will identify the importance of being proactive rather than reactive in responding to behaviour.
3. Caregivers will recognize how to identify the need behind the child or youth's behaviour.
4. Caregiver will explore tools that can support them in responding to a child or youth's behaviour and recognize the implications of using them.

Energy Level Exercise



Take a moment to check in with yourself. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

If your energy is comfortable and a good match, great. If not, what can you do to get it there?

Identify one strategy or skill you can use to feel more comfortable and effective.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Warm Up

Instructions for the group activity:

Look around and see how many people are in the room? Your goal as a group is to cooperatively count to that number, out loud, as a group. The catch is that you are not allowed to plan or discuss a strategy for how this will be done in advance. Any person can start the count; any person can say the next number — but only one person can say a number at a time. If more than one person says a number, you must start over.

Review and Report Back

Important points from Calm, Cool, Connected:

Infants and young children learn to regulate largely through the support of those around them. Over time, they develop strategies to manage their experience and learn to seek comfort from trusted caregivers. When children or youth have not had enough comfort or soothing, their bodies can become more easily dysregulated and they may lack the strategies needed to manage their experience. You can support regulation:

- **Lay a good foundation.** Use routines and other ongoing, soothing strategies. Connect with the child or youth and learn their patterns
- **Respond in the moment.** Read clues, use your self-care tools, support the child using their tools, offer opportunities for control and reconnection

How did your practice at home go?

Last session you were asked to take a look around your home. Identify what daily practices or tools you have available to support regulation in all members of your family. Think about what you might need to add to your routines or tools?

What went well?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What was challenging for you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What was something you noticed?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Respond, Don't React

Perhaps the most common thing that all caregivers struggle with is how to respond effectively to a child or youth's challenging behavioural response. Many caregivers spend time thinking about and planning for what they don't want to do. Rather than planning how to respond, Caregivers will react to the behavioural response. They might have some strategies that work well some of the time. But, in fact, there is no one strategy that will work for every child or youth, every time and in every situation. For children and youth who have experienced trauma and loss, their behavioural responses can be much more difficult; more intense, more frequent and more difficult to shift. The challenge of determining the best way to respond to behavioural responses for caregivers is deepened by the fact that you may be interacting with several different children or youth at a time, often with little history or an established relationship to build on. As you try different strategies to deal with the child or youth's behavioural responses, you may find that what works with one child, may be less effective with another. This can cause you to feel frustrated, overwhelmed, burned out or hopeless.

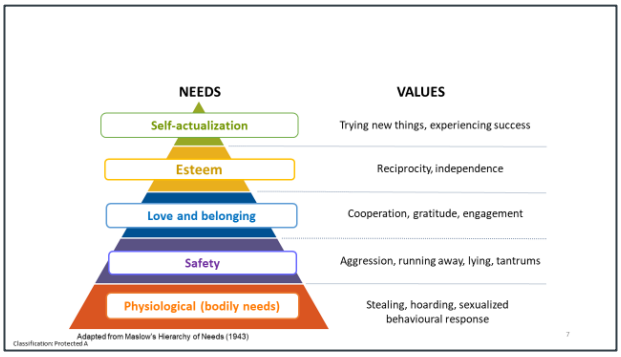
Why are some behaviours so challenging for caregivers?

Remember the sequence the drives behavioural response from session one? It is important to think about and remember the child's or youth's lens or perspective. Children and youth who have experienced the trauma of abuse or neglect may not have experienced the world as a safe place. Rather they may see the world as a dangerous and chaotic place and react accordingly. When children and youth perceive danger, they jump to action, often with a goal of self-protection or of getting important needs met. Because so many children and youth who come to live with you from Children's Services have limited internal coping strategies or external supports (people they feel they can trust), they may have a much harder time calming down or regrouping once a difficult behavioural response has started.

Of course, it's not just hard to shift child or youths' behavioural response. The caregivers behaviour response can be hard to change, too. And a caregivers reactions can influence a child's or youth's behaviour. What affects the caregivers behaviour? It is their core beliefs that can influence their reactions to children's or youth's behaviour. Depending on what the caregiver thinks is important, or what matters to them, they may find some behaviours easier or harder to deal with. Behavioural responses from children and youth can feel very personal. Even if a caregiver can understand why a child or youth struggles logically and emotionally, their behaviour may feel like a rejection of the caregivers values, their relationships or their actions. When a caregiver feels this way, they may react from an emotional place to children or youth's behavioural response.

The Hierarchy of Values

Many years ago, a psychologist named Abraham Maslow visited the Siksika Nation of Alberta and it had a powerful impact on him. It completely overturned his socially conditioned views of Indigenous people and inspired him to think in terms of a new kind of psychology that dealt with fundamental aspects of human nature. He proposed a new theory where certain needs drive behavioural responses. It is founded on a Siksika belief that conceives of reality in the form of a tipi that is made up of different levels that converge into each other and go up to the sky. The Siksika beliefs start with Self-Actualization and circles around the Tipi until it attain Cultural Perpetuity. It is easy to see the similarity with Maslow's model where people are driven to get their needs met in a hierarchy. However he conceptualized his as a triangle. According to Maslow's theory, people are driven to get their needs met in a hierarchy — and that we must have our basic, or lower level, needs met first, before we think about higher-level needs. In that sense, lower-level needs always win. Meeting basic survival needs, for example, will always trump our need for things like achievement. For instance, if a person is cold, hungry and has inadequate shelter (physiological needs), those needs will drive a behavioural response more strongly than the need for connection or approval (love and belonging needs). Similarly, if a person believes that they are in danger, the need for safety will drive the behavioural response more strongly than the need for respect from others (esteem needs).



What we consider to be core values may follow a similar hierarchy. We may value, for instance, community, relationships and respect. But those values are likely to fall by the wayside when a person feels their survival is endangered. This may be one reason why children or youth in your care may seem in some moments to share your values, but in others to lose sight of them. This is because the values and needs that drive our behavioural responses may vary depending on our emotional state and situation at the moment.

As behavioural responses are designed to meet a need, the behavioural responses you observe will tell you something about the needs and drives a child or youth is experiencing most prominently in a given moment. Therefore it is one of the clues that you can observe and think about in deciding how best to respond to a behavioral response. But remember the iceberg analogy, how the child is reacting to you is only an indicator of the challenges that child or youth is facing. There is likely much more going on below the surface. For instance, if you see aggression or tantrums, it may suggest that there is an underlying survival need driving behaviour. It could be that the child's or youth's brain is responding to their perception of danger *(remember, the child's or youth's lens will drive perception)*. Behaviour and particularly sudden changes in behaviour are good clues that a child or youth may be shifting into safety seeking mode.

Approaches to Behavioural Responses

Most of the children and youth who come into your home will have a number of different challenging behavioural responses. Some of these behavioural responses you may see over and over and others may be unexpected or unpredictable. When there are many challenging behavioural responses or interactions, you can get caught up in a cycle of reacting - responding quickly to manage or stop behaviour responses without really thinking about what is going on. This quick reaction can leave you feeling burned out, helpless and ineffective, particularly when your actions don't have the desired effect. A starting point in dealing with challenging behavioural responses is to try to get in front of the child or youth's behavioural response - to become purposeful and active in planning your response as a caregiver, even knowing you are not going to get it perfect on the first try.

Checking in with Olivia

Olivia is 7 years old. She continues to steal small items and hoard food in her new foster home. She can be affectionate with her Dan and Jennifer, but gets overwhelmed, clingy and demanding when asked to do small tasks. At times, her anger increases and she throws things at her caregiver. She appears to be settling into her new bedtime routine but has a hard time separating at lights out and her anxiety can escalate, which can spur a lengthy tantrum.

Be Proactive

- Identify a limited number of behavioural responses (no more than three) to focus on;
- Consider positive behaviour responses — those you want to see more of — not just those you want to reduce.

Thinking about Olivia:

In our example Olivia's caregivers decide that they want to focus on these behavioural responses:

- Hoarding
- Bedtime separation
- Throwing Objects

Identify Patterns

- **Triggers:** what factors make this behavioural responses more likely to happen? These may include something going on inside the child or youth, in their environment, or it could be situational.
- **Needs:** Remember all behavioural responses meet a need. *(survival or need fulfillment)* Try to identify what the young person is trying to do with their behavioural response. When you know the function or need, you can address the behavioural response better.

Given what we know about Olivia at this point and the behavioural responses chosen by her caregivers:

- Hoarding
- Bedtime separation anxiety
- Throwing objects

What do think is triggering or leading to some of these behavioural responses?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What do you think the function of these behavioural responses might be? What might she be trying to do?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Using your Go-Tos to meet the child or youth's needs.

Meet the needs.

Try to identify some healthy ways that a caregiver might be able to meet the need they have identified in the child or youth thereby making the behavioural response unneeded. Don't forget that the needs driving these behaviour responses are often intense and laid down by years of trauma and can be the most difficult behavioural responses to change. As well it can happen that as caregivers try different responses to meet the needs, the behavioural responses can escalate as they reinforce the underlying fear. Sometimes the best strategies can be counterintuitive to a caregivers typically used strategies, but meets the need for the child or

youth. For example, withdrawing attention from connection-seeking behaviours may reinforce that no one cares about the child or youth and will not meet their needs, so they start to work harder to elicit the response from the caregiver that they are looking for.

Once you are meeting the need in a counterintuitive way, another challenge that caregivers may face is feedback from other people around you. When people not understand the needs behind the behavioural responses and they have not developed an understanding of meeting needs this way, they may respond by judging your response as ineffective. For example, they may not understand the difference between attention seeking and connection seeking. As caregivers, you may need to educate others (family, friends, teachers etc.) about this difference. However it is important to ensure that these discussions about different understandings do not occur in front of the child or youth as they could perceive it a judgment on whether they deserve to have their needs met

Meeting Olivia's Needs

Every time Olivia's and her caregivers cleaned her room, they found old, uneaten, often rotten food in drawers and behind the bed. Establishing consequences had not been effective. Working with Olivia's therapist, her caregivers:

- Identified a kitchen drawer and filled it with healthy snacks. They made it Olivia's drawer; only she could take food from it. They regularly made sure it was full.
- Put a food-safe garbage can in her room for any food-related products.
- Stopped talking about the issue.

The biggest challenge that Olivia's caregivers had was around Olivia's completion of simple chores and self-care strategies. When she escalated to the point of throwing objects, the caregivers often found themselves escalating as well.

Olivia's therapist suggested that when Olivia is throwing things, it may actually be a request for support rather than a distancing strategy. As an experiment, Olivia's caregiver began to do simple chores with Olivia. For instance, Jennifer would say, "Olivia, let's pick up these toys. Which ones should we pick up first?" When Jennifer engaged with Olivia, she found the opposition decreased dramatically and Olivia was able to actively participate. Eventually, Olivia was able to complete many tasks independently when Jennifer was in the room and available.

Thinking about Olivia and her caregivers:

How do you think the suggestions of the therapist and the responses of the caregivers are meeting Olivia's needs?

What might feel hard about meeting Olivia's needs this way for her caregivers?

What do you think Olivia's caregivers might struggle with?

Support Regulation.

It is not always easy to identify what needs are driving child or youth's behavioural responses. However, dysregulation (feelings, body states or behaviours that seem disorganized or out of control) often acts as a clue that a child or youth has an unmet need; it can be the first sign of challenging behavioural responses to come. Caregivers can work to get better at reading a particular child's or youth's dysregulation clues. For instance, one child might show distress by

shouting or screaming, another by getting silly and a third by withdrawing. When a behaviour response is out of control, before anything else can happen a caregiver needs safe, effective strategies to support regulation, de-escalate arousal and manage crisis. Pay attention to strategies for managing your own and the child's or youth's emotional responses.

Purposeful Use of Strategies

As caregivers, the goal is to create an environment where children and youth are learning. They are allowed to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. Therefore in choosing strategies a caregivers focus should be on discipline versus punishment in responding to challenging situations. Discipline assumes that behaviour is a form of communication. It focuses strategies on changing future behaviour by putting children and youth in control of their responses and decisions by teaching new skills such as self-control and self-regulation. Punishment is merely a penalty for doing something wrong. Although it may handle the situation in the moment, it puts the caregiver in control of the child or youth's behaviour and for deciding the outcome of the child or youth's decision. It provides little help to the child or youth in figuring out how to behave differently in the future.

Encouragement and Reinforcement

Encouragement is a powerful tool when used purposefully and consistently. Children and youth are often responsive to positive attention and encouragement which in turn directly influences the shaping of their behavioural responses.

- **Why?**
    - To build children's and youths' awareness of their successes and positive capacities
    - To shift the adult frame of reference from the negative (focused on bad behavioural responses) to positive (focused on strengths and successes of the child or youth)

- **When?**
  - Any time a child or youth is engaging in a behavioural response a caregiver wants to continue using.
  - When working toward reducing or ending an undesired behavioural response.

- **How?**
  - Provide verbally (with words), nonverbally (showing pride and appreciation) and/or concretely (using reinforcement charts or tangible rewards)
  - Be specific. Label the behavioural response:
    "I'm so proud of you for trying to use your tools and calm down"
    "You just did such a good job listening when I asked you to clean up"

Trauma Considerations:

There are many reasons that children and youth who have experienced trauma may have difficulty with, or be triggered by, encouragement. Given how our brains develop, the pathways that process and accept encouragement may not be well formed or have been used enough. As a caregiver you may be supporting the development of new pathways. As well, children or youth may have been hurt or abused by people who said nice things to them. They may not believe a caregiver's encouragement is genuine. Or they may shy away from forming a good relationship with a caregiver since they may be afraid of losing them.

Do not stop saying positive things altogether. As a caregiver, you are supporting the building of these new pathways in the brain. Be thoughtful about how you encourage a child or youth who seems to mistrust or be upset by it. Consider the following:

- ✓ Remember not to take it personally if a child or youth rejects your praise. If you say, "Great job!" and they respond by saying, "It wasn't great, it was terrible, you don't know anything!" — try to remember where this might be coming from. You could be building new pathways in the brain, which takes time and repetition. It is generally not a rejection of you.
- ✓ It is very important to not turn it into a power struggle ("Yes, it was great!" "No, it wasn't!" "Yes, it was!"). It is OK for you and the child or youth to have different opinions. You might say, for instance, "It's OK for you and I to feel differently about it. I'm sorry you felt like things didn't go well. I was proud of how you did."
- ✓ Try focusing on concrete behaviours or actions rather than on the whole child or youth. This may lessen their discomfort with and need to reject the statement.

Finally, keep trying. It can take time for them to build solid pathways and to accept what you are saying.

Problem Solving.

Supporting children and youth in solving problems is important. As a caregiver, not only are you supporting them to build these pathways in their brain, you are also developing the child or youth's awareness of their choices, helping them feel empowered and giving them a voice in their lives. This skill is complicated and one that typically develops over the course of childhood and into early adulthood. It requires a fair amount of support from the adults around them to develop. Part of the challenge is that both trauma and prenatal exposures can compromise the brains capacity to learn this skill. It is a skill you will want to talk about, teach or apply to situations when both you and the child or youth are feeling regulated and calm. Because this is something that is so complicated for children and youth to develop, it is important that caregiver's look for opportunities for the child or youth to practice making decisions about less intense or less vulnerable things, so that they feel more powerful when they have to tackle the harder decisions.

- **Why?**
  - To build and reinforce these pathways in children and youth's brains
  - To help children and youth build awareness of having and making choices, and the ability to get in front of challenges, instead of just reacting some challenges
  - To help children and youth feel more in control of and powerful over their lives

- **When?**
  - In calm states, in anticipation of or following distress, challenges or other problem situations
  - When the child or youth is asking you for help
  - Regularly, through building skills by practicing and addressing the many small challenges that arise daily

- **How?**

Communicate your willingness to support the child or youth and your belief in a solution (*lets figure this out*)

1. Identify the problem.
   (What is it that you are trying to solve?)

2. Identify the goal.
   (What do we want to happen?)

3. Brainstorm ideas and ways to meet the youth's goal.
   (What kinds of things might we be able to do?)

4. Think through and discuss all possible consequences of the ideas and ways to meet the goal.
   (What might happen if we do that?)

5. Develop the plan – Be concrete
   (Make a plan and troubleshoot it – be sure to pay attention to the adult support role)

Trauma Considerations:

There are many trauma considerations when you are attempting to teach this skill to children and youth. Both toxic stress and prenatal exposures can impact a child's capacity to build the pathways necessary for this skill. Remember this is a skill that is built by repeated use of brain pathways over time. Therefore it is important to remember that a child could be delayed in their ability to use these skills. Take time to get to know the child or youth and their capacity to problem solve. If you need to start with less complicated decisions to build their skills, do this then progress at the child or youth's pace to more difficult ones.

Children and youth who have experienced trauma can also feel powerless and may reject attempts to identify solutions (think of the child who says, "It doesn't matter what I do!" or "I can't do anything!"). This can be from a lack of capacity but also from repeated frustration. We all lose ability to solve problems when we are upset. This means that this skill will be especially hard when the child or youth is upset or when the caregiver is upset. The parts of the brain that support this skill cannot be accessed when they are dysregulated. They need your support to regulate first. Children and youth who are frequently dysregulated will likely struggle with this more than ones who are generally calm. Even for well-regulated children, the ability to solve problems develops over time, and young children — or adolescents who are developmentally young — will struggle with this and need your support to build these skills.

The adult's calm approach, appropriate timing and ongoing support are crucial to using problem-solving approaches with children and youth. Very few can problem solve on their own in a challenging situation.

Limit Setting:

Setting limits is an important part of caring for a child or youth. When we set limits, we communicate important information about boundaries, expectations and consequences for behaviour. Over time, appropriate limits will help some children and youth learn to independently manage their own behaviour. However some children and youth will not be able to master these skills on their own. They will need frequent support and reminders.

Think of limits as consequences rather than punishment. For instance, a consequence of leaving a belonging out in the rain is that it might get ruined. A punishment is would be taking the child's belonging away as they left it out in the rain. It does not help the child to learn how to care for the item or ensure it does not get ruined.

As caregivers, it is also important to think about our reaction to the behaviour before setting a limit. When we experience the child's behaviour through our emotions (frustration, embarrassment or disappointment), we may set limits too quickly, too powerfully and with little planning. Although this may stop a behaviour in the short term, it may not necessarily lead to learning and, therefore, to the child's or youth's ability to stop the behaviour independently in the future.

- **Why?**
  - To establish an understanding of boundaries, expectations and understanding of what happens in a safe world
  - To help children and youths contain and shift undesired behavioural responses and identify positive alternatives
  - To help children and youth learn about their impact on others and make more appropriate choices.

- **When?**
  - When behavioural responses cross established boundaries for safety, harm to others or harm to self
  - Thoughtfully — and not for every behaviour

- **How?**
  - In a calm state, whenever possible
  - Thoughtfully: Work to identify appropriate limits in advance of behaviours occurring and identify positive alternatives.
  - Make limits that are developmentally appropriate as well as age appropriate.
  - If naming consequences, do so when child or youth is reasonably calm, after regulation tools have been used
  - Less is more. Be concise and clear in naming consequences. Link them to the behaviour responses, not the child or youth.

- Move on. Allow space for the child's or youth's distressed affect (it's OK for a child or youth to be angry about a consequence), but also create space for repair. Be aware of and let go of your own feelings about the behaviour. This is the caregivers opportunity to use the tools they have learned and demonstrate them to the child or youth.

Trauma Considerations:

Many children and youth in the care of Children's Services have a wide range of experiences that make limits challenging. They may have had previous experience with intense shaming or abusive or frightening limits. They have been in different homes, with different rules, consequences and styles of parenting, some of them may have experienced neglectful parenting. Children and youth may fear loss of control and be uncertain whether a caregiver will follow through. When choosing specific limits, it is important to be conscious of the child's or youth's history (if known), any challenges as a result of brain development or mental health and particular triggers. Think about your previous experience with them. The process or sequence of how you apply limits is as important as the limit itself. Remember, from the child or youth's perspective, their behaviour response made sense to them. Acknowledge the affect ("It makes sense that you were angry") and separate it from the action ("We use our words, not our hands, when we are mad").

Limits become less meaningful when they are used too often and can unintentionally send a message to a child or youth that there is something wrong with them, rather than sending a message about specific behavioural responses.

Thinking about Olivia and her Caregivers:

An Example of Proactive Response to Olivia's throwing things at her caregiver when overwhelmed completing tasks.

Problem Solving:

Dan and Jennifer sat with Olivia when she was calm during their evening chat time. They talked about how everyone in the home is an important part of the family and contributes to keeping the house running smoothly

Dan noted that chores were hard for Olivia and asked if they could figure out a way to help Olivia feel more successful at doing them

When Olivia had a hard time generating ideas, Jennifer suggested that the two of them practice doing some chores together. She also talked about ways Olivia could tell her she was feeling overwhelmed.

Dan and Jennifer felt that a cultural coping mechanism may help with her behavior. Olivia's caregivers reached out to the local Friendship center, and some Elders, to learn about smudging. They have introduced smudging into Olivia's self-care strategies as a way to cleanse and balance herself when she was feeling upset and angry. They have created a special box for Olivia to keep her medicines for smudging which when she needed she knew where to get and to ask for help in use.

Encouragement and Reinforcement:

Dan and Jennifer worked hard to notice when Olivia helped around the house (cleaned up her toys, put clothes in the laundry, did age-appropriate self-care such as brushing teeth) and made sure to comment on it. They also began to tune into and name moments when Olivia got upset but didn't become aggressive, praising her for using her smudging and her new regulation tools. Sometimes the caregivers also smudged with her so that they could both become balanced and centered together

Limit Setting:

Whenever Olivia escalated to throwing things, Jennifer immediately stopped the activity and mirrored Olivia's affect or energy ("I see you are upset," or "Your energy just got really big") and suggested a break

If that didn't work, Jennifer would guide Olivia to the calm-down corner (a special corner set up with blankets, pillows and comfort objects) and either sit with Olivia in their lap or wrap her in a blanket. They remained in the corner until it was clear that Olivia was calmer. They also smudged with her as a way to model getting centered. Once she was calm, they talked about what happened, reminded Olivia that it was OK to be angry but not to throw things and put any thrown toys in "toy time-out" for 10 minutes.

Seeing Success

Using problem solving

- During the evening chat time, Dan and Jennifer would talk with her about any incidents, their observations of Olivia's behaviors and her feelings. They would discuss ways to handle things differently the next time. Over time, they were able to identify early warning clues that Olivia was having a hard time and used a special silly code phrase ("purple-spotted dinosaurs") to cue Olivia to use her regulation corner. They also made chore times predictable.

Using encouragement and reinforcement

- Whenever Olivia went to her corner when cued, used coping skills or completed chores successfully, the adults gave her a high-five or verbal praise

Wrap Up

The child or youth's behavioural responses are driven by needs. Needs are hierarchical and vary depending on the state the child or youth is in at the moment

To be successful, **Respond, Don't React**

- Be proactive
- Identify the child or youth's needs
- Use your go-tos
- Identify your other strategies purposefully

Self-Reflection

Take time to think about a challenging situation you have been struggling with at home:

_____

_____

_____

_____

What approaches have you been trying?

Based on today's discussion, what do you think you will do differently?

Practice at Home

Think about challenging situation that you are experiencing with a child or youth at home. Think about what the child or youth's patterns are showing you in their behavioural responses. What would you like to see increase? What would you would like to see decrease? Work through the questions, try to identify that child's pattern and needs, and then develop a plan to manage it.

1. What challenging situation do you want to address?

Challenging Situation: _____

What would you like to see increase:_____

What would you like to see decrease:_____

2. Identify patterns: What do you think leads to this challenging situation? What are some triggers (situational, environmental, internal)?

3. Go-to strategies to work through this situation toward a mutually beneficial outcome with the child or youth:

How else might you be able to meet the needs identified in question 2? Be specific: when, how, who?

What regulation/de-escalation strategies can you support in the moment if the child appears to be dysregulated?

4. Additional behaviour response strategies. Which of these do you think might work?

- **Encouragement and reinforcement.** Use to achieve an identified mutually benefit outcome.

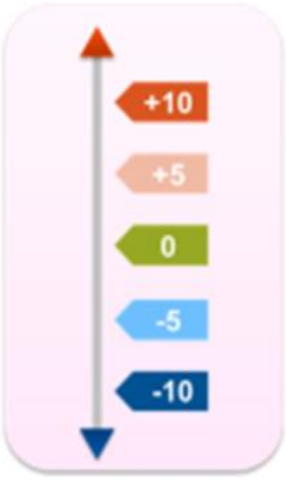
- **Problem Solving.** Use when a child is in a regulated state, to support control/choice and identify alternatives.
- **Limit Setting.** Use to contain and improve challenging situations.

5. After the challenging situation, how might you and the child continue to learn from it? Consider timing, method and approach to revisiting situation, with a goal of shifting the outcome the next time. What can you plan to do? Be Specific:

With the child or youth, I can (When? How?)

By myself or with my caregiving partner, I can (When? How?)

Closing check in



Take a moment to check in with yourself before you go. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

Session 6:
All About Identity

CHILDREN'S SERVICES
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) reflections module: session six

All about identity

Participant manual

Alberta

Children's Services, Regulatory, Compliance, Quality Assurance, and Business Supports Division
Government of Alberta
April 2021
All About Identity, An ARC Reflection Framework

For more information regarding this content visit: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/3e4bccf4-6758-4e4a-bfb9-f7f063b83962/resource/d3739e94-9dd4-4514-8ba3-67ca1ebff81b/download/GoA-Publications-Guideline.pdf

An ARC Reflection Module: Session six- All About Identity | Children's Services

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An ARC Reflection Frame Work

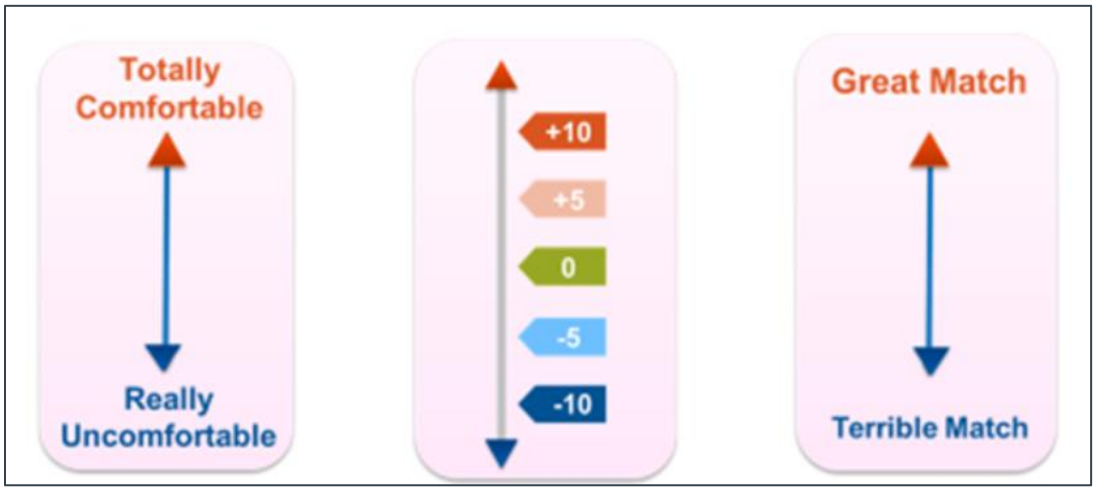
ARC, or Attachment, Regulation and Competency, is a framework for working with children and youth who have experienced trauma. Developed by Margaret Blaustein and Kristine Kinniburgh of the Justice Resource Institute, ARC builds on the resilience of children, youth and families.

ARC Reflections — an ARC-informed caregiver training curriculum for foster parents, kin and other caregivers — was written by Blaustein and Kinniburgh with support and consultation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The model was piloted in six child welfare agencies in 2015 and evaluated by Child Trends, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center with a focus on child welfare.

Learning Outcomes

1. Caregivers will identify how identity is formed in each developmental stage.
2. Caregiver will recognize how our “lens for self” is created and becomes the filter a child or youth uses to interpret their experiences.
3. Caregivers will understand how children and youth who have experienced trauma can create a negative lens and its effect on behaviour.
4. Caregivers will identity their role in supporting a child to create a more powerful and positive self which will support them in building resilience.

Energy Level Exercise



Take a moment to check in with yourself. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

If your energy is comfortable and a good match, great. If not, what can you do to get it there?

Identify one strategy or skill you can use to feel more comfortable and effective.

_____

_____

_____

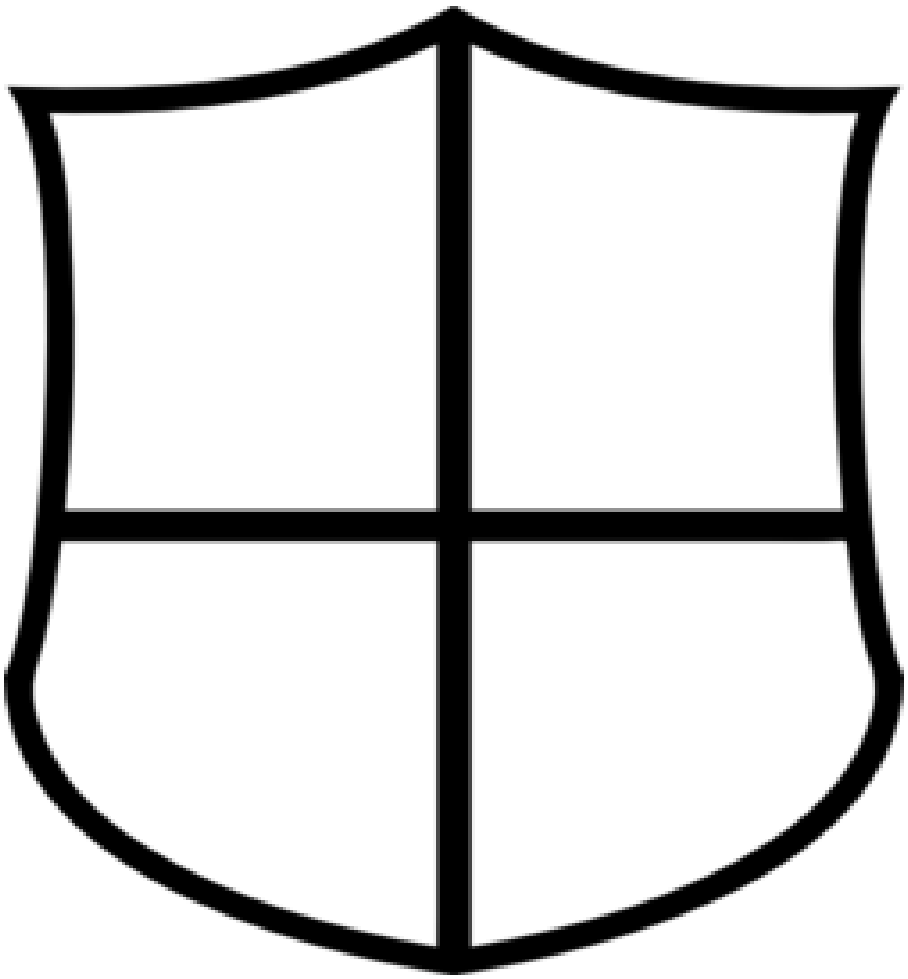
_____

_____

Warm Up

Take time to reflect who you are as person. Create a shield for yourself. This shield will be a symbolic representation of who you are. You do not have to be an artist to complete this exercise and your images can just be stick figures. Within the four spaces provided on this shield in the four spaces provided.

1. Draw an image that reminds you of where you come from
2. Draw a symbol that represents your current values and beliefs
3. Draw an image of something you relate to in nature
4. Draw an image that represents a significant connection or relationship in your life



Review and Report Back

Important points from Respond, Don't React:

Behavioural responses are designed to meet a need. The behavioural responses you observe will tell you something about the needs and drives that are most prominent in a given moment for a child or youth in your care. To be successful it is important to remember not to react but to respond to behavioural responses:

- Be proactive
- Identify the child's or youth's needs
- Use your go-tos
- Identify your other strategies purposefully

How did your practice from at home go?

Last session you were asked to think about a challenging situation that you are experiencing with a child or youth in your home. Think about what the child or youth's patterns are showing you in their behavioural responses? What would you like to see increase? What would you like to see decrease? After identifying the patterns and needs, you were then to develop a plan to manage it.

What went well?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What was challenging for you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What was something you learned?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Who are you? All about Identity

Many of our other caregiver courses discuss development in a general way. However, in this session the focus will be on a key part of development; how our identity is developed over time and through all stages of life. How as people we create our sense of our self, our individuality and eventually the formation of a coherent identity separate from our caregivers.

Within traditional Indigenous teachings, this identity formation is understood as a balance of mind, body, emotion and spirit. A person's identity has roots in your language, what your nation calls themselves, your connection to the land, teachings and stories, ancestors, elders, family and the spiritual name you are given as an individual. As caregivers, you appreciate that each child or youth is a gift from the Creator; each stage of life is a celebration and is your opportunity to interact with a child in a loving, caring and nurturing way. Your role is to guide a child to grow and become a strong, confident and proud person who knows their strengths and gives back to their community by using their gifts.

One way of looking at development is by using the Seven Turtle Lodge teachings as an example. However this is merely one Indigenous example and as a caregiver it is important to learn the teaching associated with the nation of the child or youth you caring for. It is important also to understand that the Turtle Lodge teachings are not linear like westernized understanding of development stages. Children, youth and adults reach these teachings at their own pace as each of us are on our own journey. It is expected that each person will progress to different "stages" at different times. Colonization, residential schools and the 60s scoop have made a major disruption to these stages so reclaiming the teachings that align with each stage is important and crucial for everyone especially Indigenous children, parents and grandparents.

How a child forms their identity

Identity is complex, evolves over time and depends on the environment that it is built in. There are many factors that combine to build a person's identity and it is important to be aware of all of them.

Infancy

Infants' primary task is establishing trust in their environments and the people around them

Within traditional Indigenous teachings, children are a gift of the creator and loaned to us by the Creator. The role of their caregivers is to provide care, protection and love. The development needs and tasks of infancy parallel the happy stage of the turtle lodge teachings. The Happy Stage, also called singing into the world as babies arrive in this world with their own song. At the birth of a baby, they were sang into the world and, their family in ceremony, invited the child's spiritual grandmother and grandfather to protect them. The child's spiritual

grandmother and grandfather's role is to nurture the gift the infant brought with them into this world and to ensure that trusted people in their life shared teachings and lessons that will help guide you to fulfill your purpose.

The care, protection and love an infant receive facilitates their ability to establish trust in their environment and the people around them. Trust is learned when infants create attachments with caregivers who consistently respond to their distress, meet their needs, and they develop comfort in interacting with caregivers. Infants make their basic needs (thirst, hunger, sleep, stimulation and soothing) known by crying or sending other nonverbal signals to their caregiver.

This earliest understanding of self comes within their community of caregivers. The infant becomes aware of themselves as separate individuals by feeling their needs. Then they become aware of the role of caregivers as the source of basic need fulfillment. The emerging sense of self develops and grows through the infant's experience of their caregivers who respond in predictable ways to actions, behavioural responses and interactions.

Toddlerhood

Toddlers have a growing sense of self-awareness and independence. During this phase, they experience increasing agency over their world. They begin to explore their environment and see the effect they have on their world.

Secure attachments with their caregivers provide children the safety to explore their worlds and, by extension, different aspects of themselves. Within traditional Indigenous teachings such as the Turtle Lodge Teachings, this is the Fast Stage where toddlers are taught about how their actions affect their environment. This happens as toddlers become aware of the responses of the people around them to their actions, behavioural responses and their interactions. They notice whether adults appear to be happy or angry/approve or disapprove of their actions. They notice whether and how the adults respond to them. Toddlers will see themselves as others see and react to them. This lens is incorporated into their early understanding of self.

For Indigenous children it is important that their lens is learned within their cultural beliefs, and shared teachings. Even the youngest children benefit from being surrounded by their culture as a means to build a healthy lens. It was not unusual for the child to have many caregivers and by surrounded by extended family, Elders and their community listening to their language spoken, seeing role models who shared their beliefs with them. Taking them to their community, to be surrounded by their community and participate in ceremonies or events also helps them grow to understand their unique role within their community. As a caregiver you can continue this development by filling your home with toys, pictures and books that reflect their cultural beliefs as they are an important influence on their early understanding of self.

Children who have experienced trauma often stop exploring to create safety in their environment. They rely instead on rigid control and repetition. Without exploration, children are limited to what immediately is, rather than the possibilities of what could be. This limitation on imagination cuts off potential sides of themselves, both in the present and future.

Early Childhood

Within the Turtle Lodge teachings, the development needs and tasks of Early childhood and Elementary years can also parallel the Wondering and Wandering Stage. While the child is wondering and wandering, they are taught to be respectful to everybody and everything. An important teaching in this stage is that you always respect yourself and others. The other important teaching that is shared, is that if your actions cross a boundary and you cause problems for yourself, your family or your community, it is called "pastahowin" (in Cree). The child is expected to correct their actions, if they cause someone to be hurt and they hurt someone, they must apologize and understand that they cannot continue to do this.

As young children gain a better sense of their uniqueness and independence, they become curious about their worlds and have an increasing ability to fantasize and imagine. It is important for caregivers to create an environment where they can explore preferences, their growing individuality and uniqueness without bias. The child's preferences also become more evident as favorite foods, activities, colors, books, clothing, soothing objects, etc., are identified and explored and begin to be incorporated into their sense of self. Dressing may be one area that this shows up. It is common during this stage to hear the words "me do" as the young

Young children have a growing sense of independence. Their preferences become more evident as favourite foods, activities, colours, books, clothing, objects etc. are identified and explored.

child increases capacity for completing daily tasks independently. It can be a challenging time for the caregiver, who has to balance their own bias/preferences (such as having a child who wears seasonally appropriate clothing to school), values and needs (such as getting to work on time) with their child's growing need for independence.

Children may also increasingly notice group preferences (for instance, what other children in preschool are doing and wearing) and compare themselves in concrete ways ("I like green and they like green"). Therefore, it is important for caregivers to ensure that they have access to groups that are inclusive and where they can feel a part of and not different from the larger group. Supporting Indigenous children in in having exposure to their communities is part of creating a culturally based identity. It is the caregiver's role to take them and spend time with their extended family, Elders, spiritual mentors and their community, so they can wonder and wander while creating this identity in relationship to their, community, within their language and shared customs.

Elementary Years

Children's concept of self-starts focusing on concrete attributes and outcomes: "I am strong [or weak]," "I am short or [tall]." These attributes are often understood in contradictions, with shades of gray developing over the course of this stage. As caregivers, it is important to support the child in exploring these shades of gray. Over time, the child's sense of self grows to encompass personal attributes, likes and dislikes and individual values.

Interactions with caregivers continue to be important to self-concept, although the responses of peers, teachers and other key figures play a role, too. It continues to be important to support children in this exploration without bias and assumptions. Their exploration can include their gender and sexual orientation. Never make assumptions about a child's gender identity or sexual orientation based on their dress, behaviour, or other forms of gender expression, even if these can sometimes give clues to their identity. Listen for and create a safe space for self-disclosure, then take their lead on when they are ready to talk about their identity. Creating a safe space includes having visual reminders such as posters and telling the child your preferred pronouns and using the name and pronouns (he/she/they) your child identifies with. If unclear, ask them how they prefer to be addressed – Continue to check with the child to make sure. It may change and this is ok.

During this phase, children's understanding of self expands to incorporate experiences from multiple domains such as their home, school and activities.

For Indigenous children, it remains important to continue their relationships with their extended family, community and culture through their

wondering and wandering. They need these important people to support them in their exploration of their likes, dislikes and their values within their cultural context. As part of this exploration, the child will start to discover their strengths and giftings and will need the support of their important people to see how their gifts connect them within their community and the world. Through this stage, and as they begin to understand the differences they see in themselves in a new way, access to their community and culture also supports them in understanding the social stigma and racism that they encounter in the larger society.

Children who have experienced trauma may cope by disconnecting from their experiences. As such, children may have multiple senses of self and have difficulty integrating them to form one complete sense of self across experiences and emotional states. This becomes more challenging as the lens expands and different thinking influences self.

Early Adolescence

During the early stage of adolescence, youth continue the process of establishing their identity and self-worth. Through this process, and with guidance from their caregivers, they establish a sense of self in relationship to societal rules and expectations.

During this stage, youth advance their academic and extracurricular skills, make and sustain friendships, continue the process of gender identification and begin to explore intimate relationships. Ask respectful questions and be clear that you want to understand their perspectives, wishes and experiences, and that you will accept and support them in the identity that feels most comfortable for them. Talk about relationships and sex in inclusive ways. For example, you could say, “Is there anyone you’re interested in romantically?” instead of “Do you have a crush on any boys?” If you have rules about sleepovers or about doors staying open when friends are over, apply them to everyone rather than making different rules for different genders or sexual orientations. A lack of safe spaces in which they can discuss and understand their sexual orientation and gender identity puts SGD children and youth at increased risk for sexual exploitation and abuse. It is important to create that safe space within your home as a caregiver.

Those youth in the beginning of adolescence begin the process of separating from caregivers as they strive for an increased sense of independence. This can be a difficult time to build a relationship with youth given their need for an increased sense of independence. It takes time and a genuine non-judgmental interest in who they are becoming. Identification with a group often begins to emerge at this stage as the peer group has a growing influence on a youth’s self-concept. Younger youth may try on different attributes in an attempt to crystallize a sense of self. This may include choosing attributes that are conflictual with the caregiver’s values,

however through all these different choices youth are learning something about themselves and their world.

Even as Indigenous youth are pulled to mainstream pop culture, it does not change their need for connection with their nation and cultural teachings. Even as the youth are testing their beliefs and may not show interest in their traditions at the time it remains important for them to have access to their Elders, spiritual mentors, community and ceremony. This allows them to learn their community history and have a better understanding of their customs, values and their Indigenous ways of knowing. During adolescence these connections allow them to build pride in their heritage and a positive self-concept. It is also a time when many First Nations communities have rites of passage that are important for their youth to participate in. These rites of passage allow the youth to honour the changes that are happening and to support them with their transition to adulthood. This is an important time of learning about how they fit themselves and their unique gifts into their community.

Late Adolescence

During this phase, there is increasing independence as older youth go to school, get vocational training or enter the workforce.

Identity in this phase integrates past and current experience with future goals. The challenge is that older youth often struggle to connect current actions, behaviours and interactions to future outcomes. Older youth also experience significant changes in their brains capacity to think. In changing from concrete to abstract thought, they are increasingly able to understand abstract ideas, think about possibilities, think ahead and empathize with others. Abstract concepts and ideas are now incorporated into their broader sense of self.

This is a time when older youths experience a growing awareness of self. Their peer group may have increasing influence on them. This can result in increased sensitivity and, at times, negative self-evaluation. This is all part of the Truth stage for Indigenous youth. They can feel it is unsafe to identify as Indigenous youth, due to racism, negative cultural stereotypes and social stigma as part of their work to an integrated identity. Their access to their extended family, community, spiritual mentors, Elders become an important part of their journey of understanding and integrating their identity. As they increase their understanding of their culture, they can create roots and reconnect to their identities as an Indigenous person. These connections support a better understanding of the life of their families, community members and ancestors. They also create a spiritual understanding and connection to the land, community, ancestors and the creator on a deeper level, which supports them in the integration in their identity.

As Sexually and Gender Diverse youth enter adolescence they need a supportive environment as they have different experiences and have specialized needs. SGD youth do not always experience affirmation and support of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and this can leave them unable to communicate their needs, concerns or experiences as well as struggling with negative feelings of self-worth. They need caregivers who are curious and genuinely want to get to know them. Caregivers who will initiate non-judgmental conversations about their experiences and specialized needs as these can be difficult conversations to initiate. It is important as a caregiver to seek information about appropriate SGD services and supports (e.g., health care, mental health, and education) to support their growing awareness of themselves, their development and self-esteem. SGD youth face discrimination and as a result are often hesitant to seek help from professionals, police, hospitals, educational and mental health supports. It is important that caregivers support them through these encounters and ensure that their needs are met.

The effect of trauma on identity development

Layers of Self exercise

Take a moment and reflect on your past.

Identify one person from your childhood who made you feel worthy, loveable and/or cared for.

Think about an early experience that made you feel capable, powerful and/or successful.

Think about a goal that you had for yourself as a young child or adolescent that you the opportunity to work toward/achieve.

Layers of Self

Identity development rests on the foundation of trust and care provided by the primary attachment system. The reflected lens for self is grounded in the actions, behavioural responses and interactions that children have with their earliest caregiver(s). Over time, these experiences are internalized and become our earliest representations of self. For example, a child may think, if I am punished, then I must be bad. If no one cares for me, then I must be unlovable/unworthy of caring. A child's early attachments and internalized model for self will influence their level of engagement with the world. Children and youth who have experienced trauma often self-protect by disconnecting or disengaging. If engagement is sacrificed for survival, then there are fewer opportunities to experience the self as capable or powerful. This may make them more likely to experience themselves as incapable, weak and unsuccessful. Disengagement, disconnection and inconsistency in the caregiving environment prevent children or youth who have experienced trauma from being exposed to the same range of opportunities experienced by peers who have not had such experiences of trauma. The growing sense of self as incapable, weak and unsuccessful impedes curiosity, vision and belief in future possibilities. For Indigenous children, the Historical Trauma that they have experienced and has been internalized by the generations before them further complicates the child's layers of self. Examples of what an Indigenous Youth faces include systemic racism and a generalized message from Canadian society that they are incapable, weak and unsuccessful. All of the sources of trauma have cumulatively added to the attachment disruptions and resulting difficulties in coping that are unintentionally passed down to them. It only leads to further layers of disconnection from their communities, shame and hopelessness.

What are your filters?

Are there areas of your life where you feel really successful, confident and/or competent? This is likely a positive filter. Describe one of two examples.

Are there areas in your life where you feel somewhat unsuccessful, uncertain and/or incompetent? This may be a not-so-positive filter. Describe one or two examples.

Do these filters influence actions, behavioural responses and interactions? If so, in what ways?

Positive Filter:

Not-so-positive Filter:

How filters work

Over time, our lens of self becomes the filter through which we interpret our experiences. Our sense of self is based on our early experiences, our successes and failures, our ability to influence our world around us, as well as the labels we have internalized. Our filter helps us interpret an experience for example a test, if you see yourself as smart and fail a test, you will think the test is too hard. However, in the same situation if you see yourself as stupid and pass the test, you believe you got lucky or that the test was easy. As a result, each new experience reinforces our filter. As time passes it becomes harder and harder to change to change our sense of self over time.

Outside influences can significantly impact our lens as well. For example Indigenous people are influenced by their ways of knowing, their language, and teachings by their Elders. Historical Trauma has also significantly affected the lens of Indigenous children and youth. They can feel unsafe to identify as Indigenous given the long history of racism, negative cultural stereotypes and social stigma in the broader community. Add to this, the child's family may also have a conflicted relationship with their Indigenous identity given their own experiences of the historical trauma that has occurred. The child internalizes a lens that includes all of these negative stereotypes, internalized racism and negative messages. However positive identity created from knowing their language and culture as well as connection to their community acts as a shield to the negative messages, stereotypes and interactions with society.

Another group who can find their filter being heavily influenced by societal norms are our Sexually and Gender Diverse (SGD) children and youth. There are many challenges living in a society that has not been inclusive, and has many stereotypical and incorrect beliefs about SGD people. A child or youth's lens can be heavily influenced by bullying, social stigma and negative stereotypes that cause them to feel unsafe to openly identify as SGD. It can feel safer to remain "closeted", to withdraw, and thereby reinforce their belief that they are not truly known or accepted by others.

The Role of the Caregiver

Relationships have a powerful influence on children's or youths' developing sense of self. The key is in their lens of self. A caregiver can either reinforce or challenge their filter of shame, vulnerability and damage.

The Unique Self

As a caregiver, your role is to support children and youth in exploring, identifying and celebrating the many qualities that make them who they are. Below are some ways to support a child or youth to understand what makes them unique:

- Provide self-expression opportunities. Let them pick their clothes, style their hair, decorate a room in their favorite colors, etc. Pick your battles. Particularly for youth, self-expression is key. Hair, clothes and music? Only go there if it is crucial.

- Never make assumptions about a child's gender identity or sexual orientation. Use the name and pronouns (he/she/they) the child identifies with. If unclear, ask how them how they prefer to be addressed – Continue to check with the child to make sure.

- Children and youth need visible signs of culture in your home and everyday life. They need their caregivers to take them to their communities to visit with their extended family, knowledge keepers, Elders and participate in ceremonies with them.

- Learn how to drum, sing, and powwow dancing. However be cautious about the songs that are sung. Some are sacred and should only be sung in ceremony. It is important to consult with an Elder about this to ensure that you are following protocols.

- There is also drum making and rattle making. In addition, there is beading, ribbon skirt and ribbon shirt making.

- Learn the Indigenous child's spirit name.

- Be curious: Try to learn what influences the children or youth.

- Identify and name your child's patterns ("You pick up new ideas quickly!"). This may help them gain self-awareness and challenge their filters.

- Support opportunities to identify and explore new interests regardless of whether they are stereotypically "male or female"

- Allow space for things important to the child or youth (values, religion, rituals and holidays)

- Create a space for their unique contributions.

Build Positive Self

As a caregiver, your role is to help young people become more aware of their positive attributes and feel successful. Below are some examples of ways to support your child or youth to feel successful:

- Allow kids to identify and try out new interests.
- Be aware of your own biases, do not be critical, and be mindful of the language you use and how it may impact the child or youth especially those who are SGD.
- Caregivers can help the child or youth find appropriate SGD organizations and can also attend events and activities at to support them at their request.
- When referring to the child or youth, use their preferred name and pronoun that they identify with
- Redefine success for the child or youth. What does it mean for this child or youth to have a good moment, hour or day? Look for moments of success on the hardest days, not just the best ones.
- Notice small moments of success, even for behavioural responses that are expected ("I really like how cooperative you are being." "Thank you for being such a great helper.")
- A positive sense of self comes from knowing who you are, based on where you are from and your history. Caregivers can support this by taking the children and youth to visit extended family, their community, and to participate in activities and ceremonies.
- Hang things up — artwork, homework, etc.
- Foster success by engaging in activities with the child or youth that they are interested in and find fun
- Support, don't criticize (for every negative children or youth hear, make sure they hear 10 positives)

Vulnerable Self

Even though we want to support children and youth in developing and sustaining a positive sense of self, the reality is that children in your care have experienced and continue to experience many hard moments. Supporting vulnerability can be hard for anyone, including caregivers, and disconnecting from these vulnerable experiences may be a coping strategy for youth or caregivers. Caregivers play an important role in supporting children and youth in learning to tolerate these harder, more vulnerable parts of who they are and see them as only one aspect of their identity. As a caregiver, this can be hard for you to do. Remember to use your toolbox (prepare yourself, in-your-pocket tools, recovery tools, ongoing self-care) to regulate your responses to a child's or youth's emotional expression. This will help send the message that all emotions make sense and are accepted in your home.

> **Mirroring.** Mirroring is an important tool for helping children and youth to tolerate vulnerability. You can use language to mirror, validate and normalize challenges they are experiencing in emotion, relationships, interactions and situations.
>
> **Regulation.** Support children and youth in using their regulation toolbox when vulnerability causes internal distress or discomfort.
>
> **Avoid labels.** Children or youth who have experienced trauma have internalized many labels over the course of their lives. Many of these labels are incorporated into their definition of self. Avoid labelling at all costs. Once again, separate behavioural responses from the individual.
>
> **Be the holder of hope.** Individuals are resilient and have the capacity to grow and change when in the right environment. Convey your belief that they can grow and change and that anything and everything is possible. Balance the need for imagination (dreams) with realistic goals.

Below are some examples of way that you can challenge or build a child or youth's filters:

- Acknowledge and normalize challenges ("Everyone makes mistakes. I'm sorry we had such a hard day.")
- Try to support their feelings, even if you don't agree or understand them. This lets children or youth know feelings are acceptable
- Mirror and support before trying to shift or change a child's or youth's feelings. Even painful feelings are part of our experience of life

- Talk about their behavioural responses, not them as people (“I am frustrated with that behavioural response” not “You are such a pain”)
- Don’t label your child or youth; labels will become internalized as self-definition (the hoarder, the cutter, etc.)
- Don’t limit their possibilities. Be realistic and supportive but don’t assume a child’s or youth’s past challenges will define their future

Honour their Past

A child or youth’s past experiences have a significant role in their development. Remember that part of what makes children or youth unique may be grounded in their past experiences (cultural influences, values, etc.). It is important for children and youth to have the opportunity to reflect on, honor and share those past experiences with their current caregiver. Caregivers can support this process by being actively curious about a child or youth’s past, including their relationships, schools and family experience.

Past experience is likely to include both positive and challenging memories, particularly about family relationships. It will be important to invite both into conversations and work with the child or youth’s team to determine the best approach to supporting traumatic content. Identity development is significantly affected by fragmentation that occurs when children or youth have experienced multiple changes in their caregiving system. Much of this work is about supporting continuity, cohesion and integration of experiences (both positive and not-so-positive) across time and context.

For Indigenous children there are many cultural influences that need to be integrated. An important part of this is coming to understand the history that continues to impact Indigenous people today. Caregivers can support the child or youth by finding opportunities to spend time with extended family, spiritual mentors and Elders to learn about how their history affects them and their family. As well, it is important to find ways to incorporate their learning about their identity into the everyday as much as possible. It is important for Indigenous children to read books by Indigenous authors, see themselves on TV and social media in a positive way. It is essential for them to have regular visits with family who share similar physical characteristics. If a child or youth in your home has a different racial, ethnic, religious, sexual or gender identity

than your family, provide them with opportunities to explore and integrate that aspect of their identity through community activities, groups at a local church/mosque/synagogue, etc.

Here are some examples of how you can support a child or youth to honour their history as part of their story:

- Be curious (at the child's or youth's pace) about their story (important relationships, schools, family, experiences)
- Work to accept positive feelings and statements the child or youth makes about previous relationships, even if it is hard for you to see them as positive
- As appropriate, support children and youth in maintaining relationships with important people in their lives. Connections matter
- If children or youth have pictures or other keepsakes, display them or keep them safe. Allow their lives to be part of your family culture
- Actively support them in exploring and integrating cultural influence.
- When children or youth share stories about their past, write them down and save them. Captured history will last beyond their placement with you

Capture the Present

It is common for children and youth who have experienced trauma to miss out on the refrigerator display, keepsake box or photo album experience. Caregivers are expected to maintain a keepsake boxes of their child or youth's artwork, report cards and other milestones, as well as a memory album of photos from various developmental stages. Children and youth enjoy taking time to review these items periodically as a means of remembering and integrating their experiences. Children and youth who spend a period of time in foster care often receive a goodbye book when transitioning from that setting, but the book typically only captures a small part of their experience. The goal is to provide children and youth with the normative

experience of having their accomplishments on display in the present moment and to be available later to support holding on to past experiences as we discussed previously.

Don't let parts of kids' lives disappear

Whether a child or youth is with you for two days or two years, you are holding a piece of their history. Capture it in whatever way makes sense: take pictures, save schoolwork, frame artwork, keep a height chart, and make a keepsake box.

Build the Future

A caregiver's role is to help young people explore, imagine and build toward the many possible paths that lie ahead. This can be difficult for children and youth who have struggled with having hope for the future. Here are some examples of how you can support a child or youth look to the future:

- With young children, allow and support creative and dramatic play. **Exploration and imagination are the foundation of the future self.** Whenever you can, engage with them
- Help children and youth identify goals, both short and long term, and ways to follow through. Support and celebrate success at every step. Remember this should start when the child is young, this is not just for adolescence.
- Support Indigenous youth in participating in their rites of passage and other ceremonies in their communities so that their gifts are fully discovered and they can take their place in their community. Move at their pace.
- Be aware of your own biases, do not be critical, and be mindful of the language you use and how it may impact the child or youth especially those who are SGD.

- Connect SGD youth with caring adults who provide them with emotional support, guidance, and assistance in this time of change. Ensure SGD youth transitioning out of care have connections with appropriate organizations, resources, and services, and help them build community that includes other SGD peers and mentors.

- SGD youth have different experiences and have specialized needs. Make sure they are informed about appropriate SGD services and supports (e.g., health care, mental health, and education) to promote healthy development and self-esteem.

- Look at what extracurricular activities match the strengths of the youth in your care. Help them explore those interests. Examples include: Volunteering at community organizations, find camps and classes such as painting, computer coding or drama.

- Help youth explore vocational and academic interests. Act as a cheerleader and support team. Do not expect independence too soon

- Build real-world skills in adolescence. Teach your youth how to access services by taking them to get ID, apply for part time jobs, and become more independent in talking to their support people.

- Help children and youth visualize the future. Think beyond jobs and school. Ask where they want to live, what kind of relationships they want, where they would like to live.

- Balance imagination and reality. Allow them to dream, but also identify how they can gain needed skills and develop talents and interests.

Olivia

Olivia is 9 years old now and has been living with Dan and Jennifer for almost three years. Her caregivers have learned a lot about her. For example, she loves to dance and sing and has a dramatic flair. She shines when engaged with her favourite activities. Her caregivers worked with the school to find an arts-based after-school program that has regular cultural activities for her to participate in. She often brings home special projects. Her caregivers have set up a wall in the kitchen to display her artwork. They also made a keepsake box for special crafts, photos, assignments and other mementos.

Olivia is developing a relationship with a maternal great aunt, Doreen. They had little contact before Olivia entered foster care, but after the caseworker gathered her family together to have a family group conference, Doreen started to have regular contact with Olivia. Her aunt is now bringing her to Ceremony such as sweats, and women's pipe and cultural activities such as powwows and introducing her to extended family members.

Dan and Jennifer struggled to support this relationship at first, because the visits often left Olivia feeling confused and emotional. Over time, the caregivers have begun to recognize the importance of Olivia being connected to her family & community. They feel grateful that Olivia is developing strong connections to family members and learning about her cultural roots.

As visits with Doreen have increased, Olivia has begun to share positive memories of her parents, with whom she no longer has contact, and is expressing a profound sense of grief. This brings up many feelings for Olivia's caregivers, who feel angry at Olivia's parents for all they did to her and for their inconsistency in visiting over the years. Despite this, they work hard to listen and to acknowledge Olivia's wishes and sadness

Olivia's coping mechanisms have improved greatly over the years. She still has some hard days. But she seems more confident, is mostly able to be independent in an age-appropriate way and can generally tolerate her caregivers' feedback when she makes mistakes. Dan and Jennifer have gone from having to look for opportunities to tell her they are proud to genuinely feeling proud of all she has accomplished. They feel much more confident in their own ability to get through hard days.

What do you notice changing for Olivia?

Do you identify with the shift you see in both Olivia and her caregivers?

Self-Reflection

Take time to think about your own identity. Reflect and try to identify

1. One thing that you feel defines you – for example a value, cultural influence or role

2. One thing in which you take pride.

3. One thing about yourself that challenges you or creates a sense of vulnerability.

4. One thing from your past that you have held on to, that continues to feel important to you.

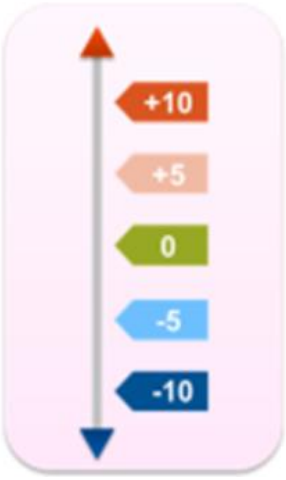
5. One goal you have for the future

Practice at Home

Positive and Unique Self

Review the ideas for developing a positive and unique sense of self and think about a child or youth in your home. Identify at least one way that you would like to actively support the child or youth's development of a positive or unique sense of self. Describe.

Closing check in



Take a moment to check in with yourself before you go. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

Session 7:
Endings and Beginnings

CHILDREN'S SERVICES
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) reflections module: session seven

Endings and beginnings

Participant manual

Alberta

Children's Services, Regulatory, Compliance, Quality Assurance, and Business Supports Division
Government of Alberta
April 2021
Endings and Beginnings, An ARC Reflection Framework

For more information regarding this content visit: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/3e4bccf4-6758-4e4a-bfb9-f7f063b83962/resource/d3739e94-9dd4-4514-8ba3-67ca1ebff81b/download/GoA-Publications-Guideline.pdf

An ARC Reflection Module: Session seven- Endings and Beginnings | Children's Services

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An ARC Reflection Frame Work

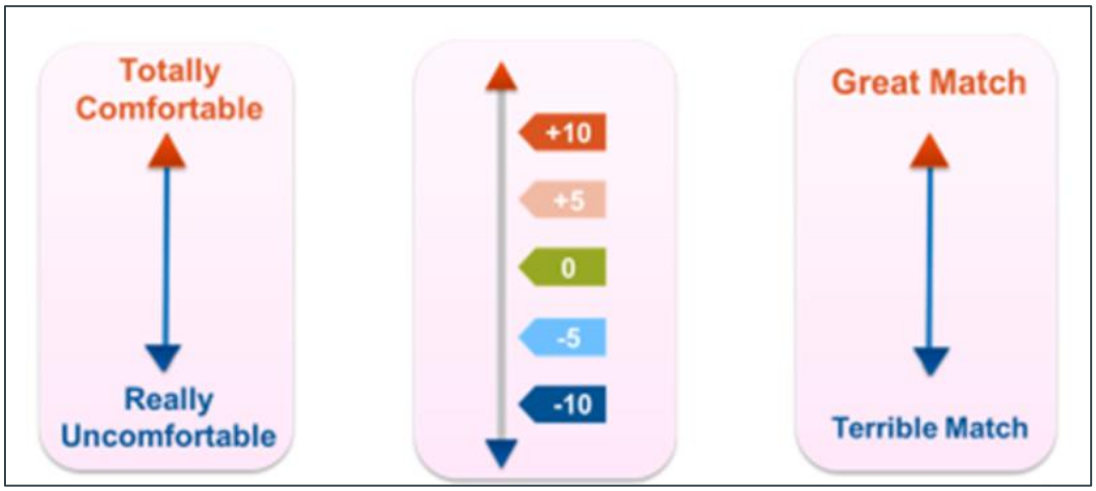
ARC, or Attachment, Regulation and Competency, is a framework for working with children and youth who have experienced trauma. Developed by Margaret Blaustein and Kristine Kinniburgh of the Justice Resource Institute, ARC builds on the resilience of children, youth and families.

ARC Reflections — an ARC-informed caregiver training curriculum for foster parents, kin and other caregivers — was written by Blaustein and Kinniburgh with support and consultation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The model was piloted in six child welfare agencies in 2015 and evaluated by Child Trends, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center with a focus on child welfare.

Learning Outcomes

1. Caregivers will identify how theirs and their family's experience of transitions affects their ability to support a transition.
2. Caregivers will recognize how the child or youth's previous experience with transitions and their lens for self will influence how they perceive a transition.
3. Caregivers will understand how a child or youth cope with transitions.
4. Caregivers will recognize how they can better support transitions for the children and youth in their care.

Energy Level Exercise



Take a moment to check in with yourself. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?

If your energy is comfortable and a good match, great. If not, what can you do to get it there?

Identify one strategy or skill you can use to feel more comfortable and effective.

Warm Up

Pick a card from the pile of cards. Think about the word you picked. How does it apply to?

- You, in your role as a caregiver
- The child or youth who now or will care for.

Review and Report Back

Important points from Who Are You? It's All About Identity:

Over time, our understanding of self, who we are, what we are capable of and the ways others see us develops and changes. It may grow from a very basic and concrete understanding to one that is very sophisticated and nuanced. The experience of adversity, stress and loss are powerful shapers of the lens through which we understand ourselves. Children and youth who have been through many overwhelming experiences often see themselves as helpless, incapable, damaged, bad, unlovable or unwanted. This negative understanding of self in turn affects how children and youth approach new experiences. Someone who believes they are unlovable, for instance, may refuse to enter into a new relationship for fear of being rejected again. Someone who believes they are incapable or helpless may refuse to join in activities or try new things because they are sure they will fail.

As a caregiver, you play a very important role in supporting repair and ongoing healthy development of self and identity in the children and youth you care for. You can do this by helping your children or youth to:

- Explore who they are and what makes them special, what has influenced them and what is important to them.
- Explore their culture identity, if they are Indigenous go to their communities, participate with them in ceremonies and events. It is important that caregivers support their spiritual development.
- Experience success and have moments of positive experience, mastery and connection.
- Learn to tolerate and manage hard times, without glossing over them or making them bigger than they need to be.
- Build a cohesive story of self that remembers and honors their past, captures their current experience and anticipates and builds toward the future.

How did your practice from at home go?

Assignment from session six: To review the concept of positive and unique self, identify one idea for supporting positive and unique self for a child or youth in your home and try it out.

What went well?

What was challenging for you?

What was something you noticed?

Endings and Beginnings

Children and youth in the care of Children's Services experience many different types of transitions. In this session, the focus will be on how to make endings positive for the children and youth in your home.

Checking in on Olivia

Olivia has just turned 10 and in three months, she will be transitioning full time to her aunt's home. After a year of increasing contact, her aunt Doreen has committed to becoming her legal guardian. For Cree people, aunt means little mother and for Olivia's aunt, she is preparing to take on this role. It was natural and common before European contact for aunts and other relatives or close friends to step in and care for a child as their own when it was needed.

Olivia has said that she is excited and nervous and her behavioural responses have become more challenging as the time has gotten closer. She is clingier with Jennifer, struggling with bedtime separation for the first time in a year, but also sometimes seeming quieter and more remote at times.

Olivia's Caregivers

Dan and Jennifer have mixed feelings about her upcoming transition. Dan feels positive about the change. He likes Doreen and though he is sure he will miss Olivia, he believes she has come a long way and he supports her kinship placement.

Jennifer has been surprised by how much sadness she is feeling. Although she always thought of this as a short-term placement, she feels very attached to Olivia and she is finding herself feeling angry at Doreen without reason and believes their home is as good as the kinship home with her aunt is. She is concerned that everything will fall apart again and that Olivia will be hurt more than she already has been.

Olivia's Aunt

Doreen is committed but anxious. Her own children are grown and out of the house and it feels like a long time since she's had a child in the home. Her relationship with Olivia's mother, her niece, was always strained and they disconnected years ago. She was surprised when Children's Services approached her about Olivia, but has grown to really care about this child and believes she can provide her with a safe nurturing home.

Understanding Endings

Remembering Endings, Part 1

All of us have experienced endings in our lives: such as leaving your parents home, moving to a new community or changing our jobs. Some endings are generally positive (such as getting married or going away to school) and others are harder. Take a moment and think of two transitions you have experienced in your life that had a strong effect on you. What two endings come to mind for you?

For each ending, take a moment to reflect on your experience. What are the first words that come to mind when describing the way this ending or transition affected you?

Transition 1 (briefly describe):

If you had to capture this transition in a few words, what would they be? How did this transition affect you?

Transition 2 (briefly describe):

If you had to capture this transition in a few words, what would they be? How did this transition affect you?

Types of Transitions for children and youth

Where have some of the children and youth transitioned to when leaving your home?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Factors that Influence the experience of transitions:

Transitions may feel manageable if……	Transitions may feel challenging if……..

How a child or youth's history of trauma can influence their experience of transitioning?

How might children or youth's history influence their experience transitioning from your home?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Transitions are more complicated for children and youth who have experienced trauma:

They may struggle with:

- A history of multiple losses
- A negative lens of self ("Will everyone reject me?")
- A negative lens of others ("Will my next person be safe?")
- Fears about the future
- Coping with stress and big feelings
- Easy activation of the Express Road
- Reaching out for help
- Managing change and unpredictability

Strategies for coping with change and loss

All behavioural responses have a function. Our behavioural responses are how we respond to our experience of our world. Therefore, it is important to remember to understand a child or youth's behavioural responses are their coping strategies. When children and youth know they are getting ready to transition from your home, difficult behavioural responses may emerge. These may be the child or youth's attempt to cope. Even when the change is perceived as generally positive, past experiences of abandonment, rejection and loss may be re-traumatizing and trigger self-protective strategies.

Some common coping strategies that children and youth with histories of loss show when they are approaching a new relationship change:

- Indifference ("Whatever")
- A pre-emptive strike ("I don't care about you")
- Denial and disconnection from fears, sadness or worry ("Everything will be great")

- A return to challenging behavioural responses
- Signs of giving up (“I’m never going to get what I want anyway”)
- Separation fears and clinginess
- Signs of shutting down

Different children and youth will cope in different ways, and one child or youth may show more than one these behavioural responses at different times throughout the transition process.

Remembering Endings Part 2

Our early experience with transitions often influences our later experience. Take a moment to think about the transitions you experienced in childhood. List some of them here. *(Note: the categories are provided to help you think, but list whatever transitions come to mind):*

Moves:

_____
_____
_____

New Schools:

_____
_____
_____

Changes in friends/peer groups:

_____
_____
_____

Losses:

_____
_____
_____

Life transition (college, marriage, etc.):

_____
_____
_____

Other:

_____
_____
_____

Now think of major transitions you have experienced in adulthood (new jobs, new homes, new relationships, new children, etc.). What have you learned about your own reactions to change? Think about the ways that change affects your:

Emotions and reactions: (i.e. Are you moodier? Quick tempered? Calm?)

Behavioural responses and coping strategies (What do you like to do when things are stressful?)

Relationships (Do you want to be with people? Do you need more space?)

Take a moment to look at your responses. Do you see any link between the two? Are there ways in which your childhood experiences may have affected how you respond to change now?

How a caregiver's family is affected by a transition

Most caseworkers plan a transition that focuses on the child or youth in your home with their needs and experiences in mind. However, as a caregiver it is important you don't forget that more than one person is experiencing a relationship change. Whether the change is perceived as a loss, a relief or a complicated mix, everyone in the family is undergoing a change in their relationships. It is important to pay attention to the reactions and responses of every member of the family system. Are you finding yourself detaching from the child and checking out of the process?

How does a child or youth transitioning from your home affect the members of your family? (Consider your partner, other children, extended family, neighbours or close community members, pets)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Supporting a transition

How do you as a caregiver support a positive transition for children and youth in your care?

Start Early

It is important to start the transition process early - often, from the beginning. Throughout their placement, you need to anticipate that children or youth may at some point be moving into a more permanent placement, whether with the child or youth's family or to a legal permanency placement.

One way to support transition is to help children and youth build and maintain connections to their larger world. Particularly those relationships you and the caseworker believe will continue beyond their placement in your home. For example, relationships with siblings, extended family members, their community (cultural, spiritual, religious), or a school. All of these may all be points of continuity for a child or youth. By investing in this broader web of connections for the child or youth, we can prevent each placement change from being a complete rewriting of the child's world. Even if you know a child's or youth's stay with you is likely to be brief, it is important to value your contribution as a caregiver and let yourself build a genuine, nurturing relationship with them. The research is clear that one of the strongest predictors of positive outcomes in adulthood is building positive relationships in childhood.

Although we do not want to build anxiety by constantly talking about a transition, we also do not want to build false hope or an illusion that does not match the reality of their circumstances. Acknowledging in an age-appropriate way that your home is not forever is something you can build into conversation over time.

Ideas for Starting Early:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Helping a child or youth prepare for a transition

The importance of Information

It is very important for a child or youth to feel like they know what to expect in a transition. It can greatly reduce their fears and decrease their stress response. Remember nothing puts a child or youth who has experienced trauma onto the Express Road faster than feeling as if they do not know what to expect. However, it is important that you share only as much information that the child or youth wants and at an age appropriate level.

Often, caregivers can shy away from conversations about upcoming changes because they worry about a child or youth's ability to handle the information. It is important to pay attention to your own fears as a caregiver: for instance, you may have a concern that the child or youth will become very upset, act out and affect our own emotional responses. Be aware of what you are afraid of and have a plan in place for yourself (use your toolbox for managing stressful situations), however, do not let that prevent you from having conversations that a child or youth in your care might need to have.

One way you can make sure you are providing the right amount of information (enough, without being overwhelming) is to invite questions from them. Ask the child or youth what they might be wondering. Answer what you can and try to learn the answers you do not know. If a child or youth says that he or she does not have any questions, keep in mind that this may be a self-protective strategy ("I don't care!"). Provide basic information and make sure the child or youth knows whom they can bring questions to. As a caregiver, it is also important to pay attention to what you and your family may need to know as well.

When thinking about the type of information that will be important for children or youth, consider the W's — who, where, what, when and how.

- **Who.** Who will be in the new home? What are they like? Are there animals? Will I still be able to speak to you and my family?
- **Where.** Where is the home? Where will I sleep? How far is it from here? Will I still see my friends, my pet, my teachers, my therapist?
- **What.** What do new places (house, school, and neighborhood) look like? Will this be permanent? What can I take with me?
- **When.** What is the timing? Will someone tell me when it's going to happen?
- **How.** Can I visit first? How long will I stay here? How will I get there and who will go with me? How will I pack my stuff? Do I have any choice? Do I have to stay there?

Particularly for younger children, concrete information (pictures, maps) may be important to support them in understanding and preparing for the change.

Ideas for sharing information with children and youth experiencing a transition:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Reflect on your time together with the child or youth

Although the relationship you have had with a child or youth in your home may have been temporary, it is still a meaningful piece of the child or youth's history as well as your family's. For most children and youth, their history is held by their parents and caregivers (in shared stories, memories that are told, pictures) until they are old enough to hold it themselves. For children and youth in foster care, too often this history is often lost. They may experience years of their lives for which there are no pictures, no captured memories, no stories or mementos to take forward with them. You can counter this by being very conscious of capturing this history and sending it forward with the child or youth.

During your final days together, reviewing this history (looking at photo albums, creating a scrapbook, putting important items in a keepsake box) may be a powerful way to reflect with a child or youth on the time spent in your home. Communicate to the child or youth how they have affected you and your family. It is very meaningful for children or youth who have had multiple relationship changes, losses and transitions, to be shown or told that they matter. You are an important role model of how to manage the feelings they may have about transitioning.

Ideas for capturing and reflecting on your time with the child or youth:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Ongoing Connection

A common question for children or youth in care (and for those who are caring for them) is about the rules around further communication with a child or youth who has left and their family.

There are many factors that will influence whether there is ongoing communication:

- your own boundaries,
- their family's wishes (should the child or youth be returning home)
- legal constraints,
- who the child or youth is going to live with,
- the nature of your relationship with the child or youth and their new family/placement,
- the child's or youth's age
- the length of their stay with you,

There is no one right answer to the question "What will happen next?" However, it is important to discuss this with the caseworkers involved. When speaking about this with the child or youth, it is important to be up front about what they can expect after they leave your home. Don't make promises that you are not able to keep. This may be a difficult conversation for you. Depending on what the message is and your comfort level with the message, you may find it helpful to pull in other people to help you communicate about this (for instance, the child's therapist or caseworker) so that it can be done in a way that feels supportive and not shaming/rejecting.

Ideas for supporting ongoing connection:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Pay it forward

Unless a child or youth has been in your home a very short time, you are likely to have learned important information about them. This includes basic information (favorite colors, music, hobbies, etc.), as well as information about what helps the child or youth navigate their world (for instance, what helps them calm down, what they looks like when they need help, what works well for them while in the school environment, etc.). It is important to capture this information in some way and communicate it to key individuals who will continue to be involved in the child or youth's life. If the child or youth is old enough and willing, talk with them. What is important for other people to know? What do they want to make sure does not get lost in the change (for instance, a favorite recipe you make or a new game they have learned)? Think about ways to send these with the child or youth. If a child or youth have become very attached to an object in your home, consider either allowing them to take the object or creating some memento that is symbolic of or a replica of the object.

Ideas of how to capture and share important information with the next caregivers:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Checking in with Olivia and her transition

The time has been drawing closer for Olivia to transition to her Aunt Doreen's home and Dan and Jennifer have been helping her sort through her belongings. Together, they have gone through her keepsake box and created a scrapbook of her favorite artwork from the past three years. Olivia picked three pictures to leave behind and she and her caregiver framed them together.

Although Olivia has had a fair amount of time to get to know Doreen, many questions keep coming up. Her caregivers gave her a shoebox to use as a Question Box, along with a pad of paper. Every time she thinks of a new question, she writes it down. During their evening chat time, they go through her questions and anything Dan or Jennifer can't answer. They make a plan with her for how to find out.

Olivia has been worried about how to pack her things. She still has strong memories of her clothes and toys being placed in garbage bags and remembers a teddy bear being left behind when she was small. The week before she is due to move into her aunt's home, Dan takes her to a department store and lets her pick out two large purple duffel bags and a smaller one to carry her special dolls and animals. At home, they make a list of important things she wants to be sure not to leave behind.

In the weeks before the transition, Olivia, Dan and Jennifer as well as Doreen have had several meetings, talking about: Olivia's favorite meals, where her friends live and their phone numbers, her bedtime routine and many other things. Although her aunt already knew a lot of this, Olivia has felt better hearing them repeated and watching her aunt write things down.

One thing they have been talking about is whether Olivia can still speak to Dan and Jennifer. Her aunt has said that she can call whenever she wants and her caregivers have made a plan to speak to her once a week in the beginning.

The day comes and Olivia's bags are packed. Her aunt arrives to take her to her new home. Doreen, Dan, Jennifer and Olivia smudge and pray together before she leaves to ask for good thoughts and prayers as she moves to her Aunts.

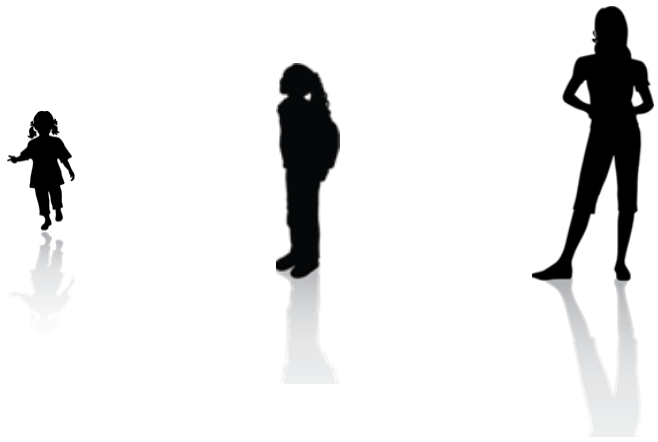
How do you think you would be feeling if you were Olivia's caregivers? What would you want or need to do on the day of transition to manage your feelings?

Checking in with Olivia one last time

Olivia is 17 and will graduate from high school next month. She and her Aunt Doreen have formed a strong, loving relationship over the years. Recently, Olivia has cautiously reconnected with her mother, Debrah, who is newly clean and sober and living in her community. Olivia has kept in touch with Dan and Jennifer over the years although the communications have been less frequent.

Olivia's aunt has kept her involved in traditional dancing throughout high school since Olivia still loves the arts and performing. Olivia was recently accepted to university. Next year, she will live at home, attend school part-time and continue her job teaching young children traditional dancing at the community center.

Olivia's story did not begin when she was placed in foster care and it did not end when she left it. However, her time there influenced the path she took. Never underestimate the role you play with all the Olivia's out there.



Self-Reflection

Think about your time in the sessions of the ARC Reflections Framework. If you had to pick one sentence that will stick with you, changed your thinking, resonated or will influence how you care for children and youth in the future, what would it be? Write it down:

Practice at Home

This week, I will work on:

_____Identifying patterns and understanding my child or youth

_____Managing my emotions

_____Building a positive relationship with my child or youth in my care

_____Mirroring/reflecting

_____Supporting my child or youth's emotions

_____Supporting positive identity

_____Supporting a positive transition

_____Other

My goal this week (keep it simple and concrete). I will work on my skill by:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Support I may need to reach this goal:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Notes: How did it go?

_____
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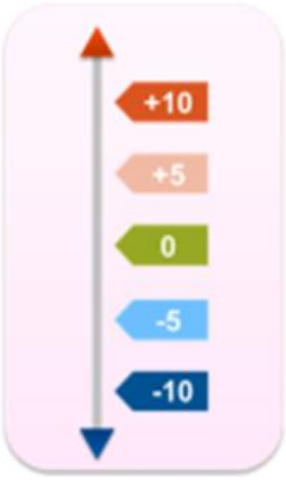
_____
_____

Closing check in



Take a moment to check in with yourself before you go. Mark answers on the scales below:

1. Where is your energy? How high or low?
2. How comfortable does that energy feel in your body?
3. How good of a match is your energy for what you are doing right now?