



# **The Green House: Support after sexual abuse**

# Evidence-based creative arts specialist support services

- Charity support for children, young people and families who have experienced sexual abuse (Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset, and Bath)
- Evolved beyond just being a therapy service in response to demand; lack of specialist services; need for broader conversation and understanding of sexual abuse; and with input from research and survivor voice

*“The service has been a lifeline for [X] and for us as a family – we have been able to deal with this because of [The Green House]. I don’t know what we would have done otherwise!!*

*We are not sure our journey is over but we are in a better place knowing we have [The Green House]’s support. Thank you.”*

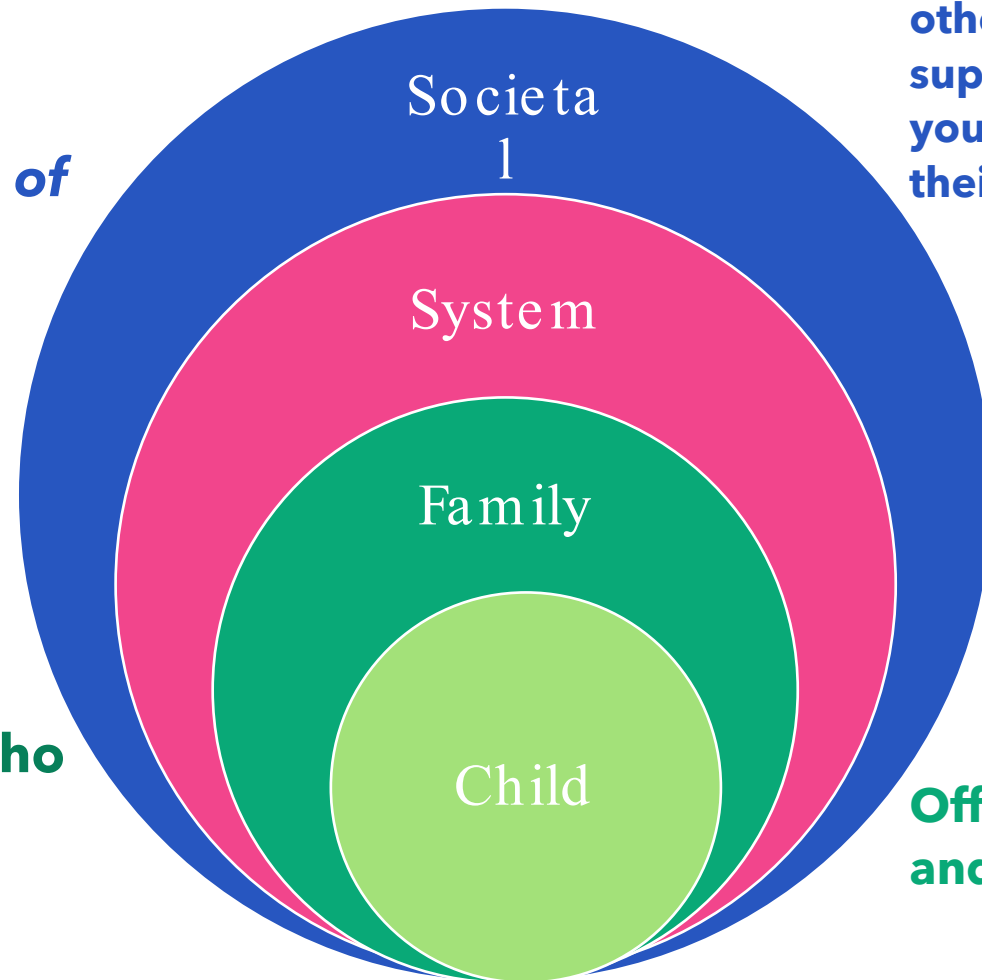


# Our Vision

*'To end the social silence, stigma, and shame of child sexual abuse so that children, young people, and families can build thriving relationships and communities'.*

## **How:**

- **Support for children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse, their families and support networks**
- **Focus on safety, hope and healing, whilst offering choice, voice and fostering connections**



**Support other services and support children, young people and their families.**

**Create supportive connected systems**

**Offer safety, hope, and healing**



# Beyond Therapy: Importance of the whole network:

- The impact of sexual abuse does not stop after a child is safe from the abuse – need for psychological and physiological sense of safety as well as safeguarding
- Even if there's no obvious immediate impact on a child's mental health and relationships, we need to have a lifelong approach to supporting young people after sexual trauma.
- Teicher et al (2009) study showed on average young people developed depression 11 years after the onset of the abuse

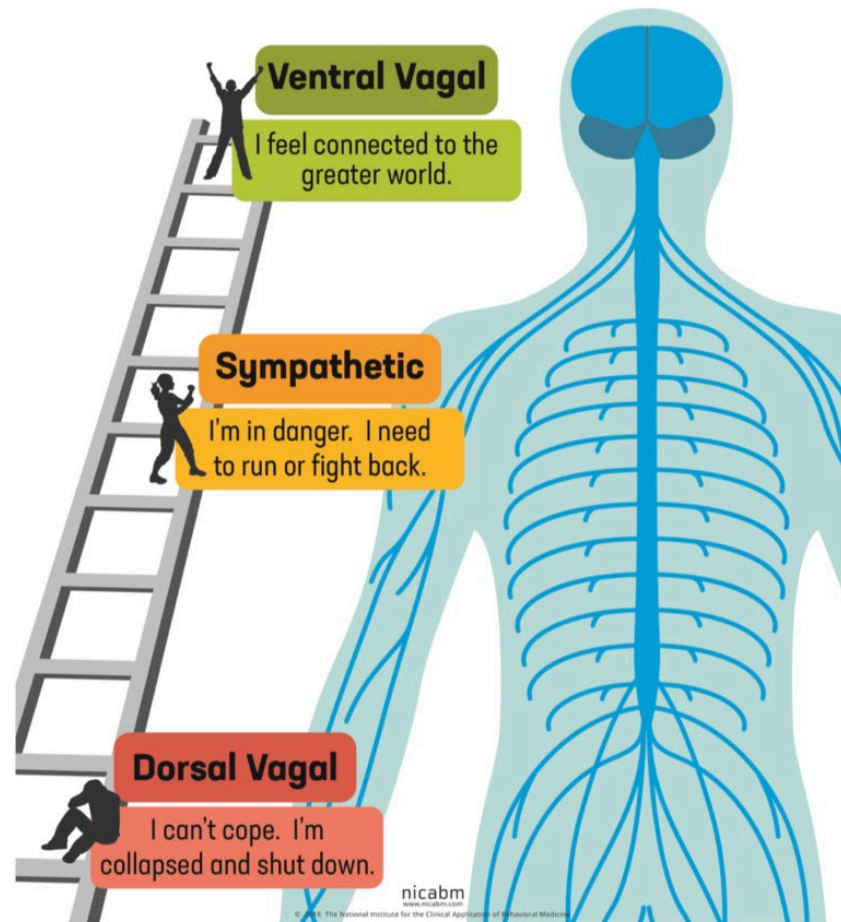


# Polyvagal Theory and the Nervous System

NICABM

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## Polyvagal Theory: The Autonomic Ladder Understanding the Nervous System Adapted from Deb Dana, LCSW



- Vagus Nerve with several branches linking brain and internal organs and face
- From birth out autonomic nervous system, without us thinking about is constantly scanning for signs of safety or danger (neuroception)
- If something happens to alert us to this e.g. hearing a police car, we go into a sympathetic state of mobilisation
- Down the ladder, extreme danger sense, dorsal vagal immobilisation
- We all seek out relationship and connection as our first way to feel safe / trusted others (ventral vagal place)
- If that doesn't work we turn to fight /flight; then in severe danger to collapse (freeze/flop)




# Behaviour relating to survival responses



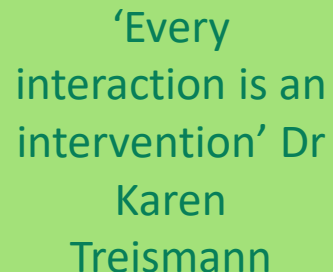
# What polyvagal theory tells us?

## Key learning:

- Sexual abuse from a key attachment figure can increase the impact of trauma in a young person's life
- When we *keep* experiencing connections as unsafe, we are more likely to become stuck in responding from a place of survival (e.g. fight/flight/freeze/flop/fawn) to protect ourselves
- **Strong attachment figures and relational repair are essential to help overcome trauma**



**The good news is that through positive connections, and not just through therapy, we can retrain the nervous system to be able to help.**



**'Every interaction is an intervention'** Dr Karen Treisman



**"Our capacity to destroy one another is matched by our capacity to heal one another"**  
Bessel van der Kolk, 201

# Importance of Relational support

- **The three Rs:** regulate, relate and reason (links with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs)
- **Co-regulation:** It is the interactive process of regulatory support between a caring adult and a child.
- **The cascade effect:** These are skills that you can learn and pass on as resource to other professional; families and young people; parents to other parent; parent to family

**Co-regulation** is the process of one nervous system responding to the state of another nervous system.

It's *unconscious* and *automatic*

It's a *survival necessity*

It goes *both* ways

It's how children learn to *self-regulate*

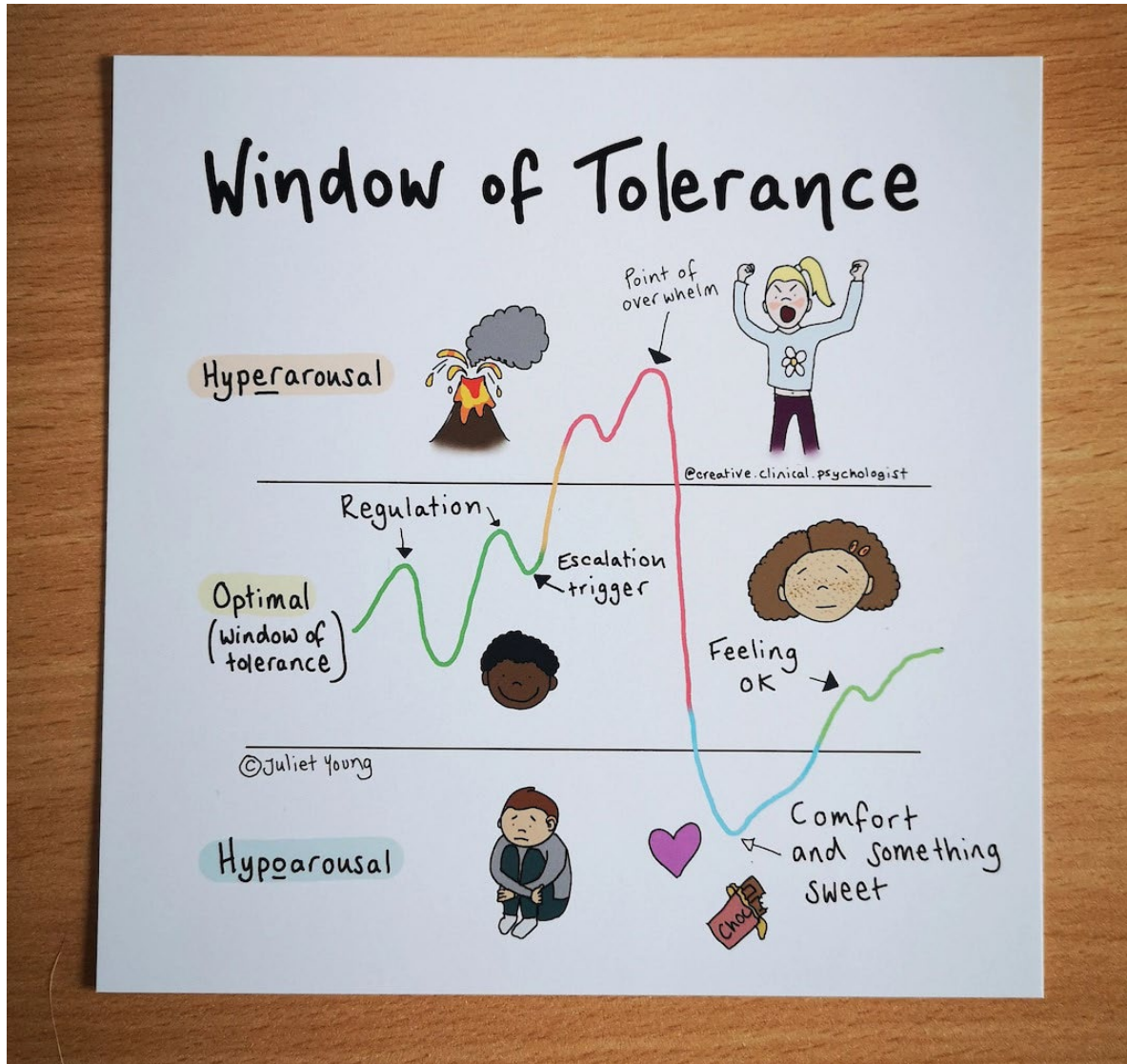


#ParentingWithTheNervousSystemInMind

**MAMAMANON**  
Trauma-informed Parenting Support



# Example of Dual Resource: Window of Tolerance



Think about this in relation to the Window of Tolerance.

This is a useful resource to understand for yourself and use with young people/parents/carers

What might happen to shift you (a trigger) from emotional regulation to hyper or hypoarousal?

And what helps to move you back and forth between states?

Calming and energising activities.

# Dynamics specific to sexual abuse

(Based on understanding of Traumagenic dynamics from: Finkelhor and Browne (1985) the Traumatic Impact of Child Sexual Abuse)

## TRUST (Betrayal)

- Building trust, honesty, acting to keep them safe, belief when they disclosed. Honesty about what will happen next e.g. with police and withing school
- Normalising survival behaviour to build trust in self.

## Choice, voice and collaboration (Powerlessness)

- giving them age-appropriate control – reporting their own narrative, telling family (who and how) or in school.

## Belief and understanding (Stigmatisation)

- Belief, avoiding silence, normalising of their survival behaviour, placing blame with perpetrator, where appropriate treating them the same as before – have the same ambitions for them, see them as a whole person not just their abuse.
- Empathy and connection reduces shame

## Empowerment and positive relationship boundaries (The body's reaction / traumatic sexualisation)

- Engage in positive sex education; boundaries re sexual behaviour and language, PANTS rule/positive language around sexual contact in healthy relationships
- Building physical resources e.g. exercise / movement. .
- Getting to know the young person and understand what might help to build their self esteem

# What professionals are asking for:

Space to reflect on the support they give, confidence in the support they are offering, how to talk to the young person about what happened, resources to support them in this work:

We also see the need for:

- Confidence building in the relationship as a resource
- Self-care and understanding as a necessity to prevent vicarious trauma and as a resource for co-regulation
- Deepening understanding of how being trauma informed integrates into practice
- How traumagenic dynamics of sexual abuse can inform their approach
- Keeping open dialogue about sexual abuse and having difficult conversations



# Sample Professional Consultations

## Associate Psychologist:

- Increasing young person voice and trauma informed work
- Thinking about power dynamics in the room
- Focus away from alignment with parent
- What do they want? What helps?

## Pastoral Support Worker:

- Building confidence in existing relational skills
- Thinking about ways to let the young person know that they know what happened
- Helping the young person understand that they were there to support if needed.
- Use of creative materials

## School Safeguarding :

- Increasing understand in school team of behaviour as symptom of sexual abuse
- How to adapt existing systems to support attendance

*“Most importantly, I was given advice on how to make therapeutic interaction trauma-informed. This involved paying attention to power dynamics within the room in close detail.”*

*“...extremely helpful providing space and facilitation to help me reflect from a trauma informed, child centred perspective what was working, what wasn't helpful to them or what could be tried in terms of our school support”.*



**The GREEN HOUSE**

# Sexual Abuse, Schools, Safety & Support

## Guidance for Education Staff from people with lived experiences

Download guidance

Scan here

How to better support young people

Active involvement of young people

Whole school approaches to sexism, misogyny & harassment

Remember: Give choice, voice and control. Use a trauma lens.

House is the specialist support service for children, young people and Somerset. We offer individual therapies, family support and professional training to build their confidence and skills working with...

greenhouse.org.uk

## We see:

- The key importance of school support to add relationship, consistency and felt sense of safety in addition to safeguarding
- A marked number of young people who struggle to attend school due to feelings of overwhelm
- Schools as connected, supportive systems.



# What young people and parents say:

## School Environment a 'whole school approach'

- Model respect and consent in all relationships
- Cultivate space for difference and acceptance
- Actively invite discussion and educate about consent in sex and relationships
- Build a whole school approach to sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment

Modelling respect and healthy relationships is fundamental. Challenging sexist and misogynistic comments needs to happen by adults and not be left to children

All staff should have the same training and standards on this – it feels like some teachers take it seriously and others don't – there should be consistency." – Young Person

Not what's wrong, but what's happened to you: "I feel like if someone had asked me that question the whole shape of my life might have been different." - Parent and adult survivor

"I stopped going to school because I didn't know who knew. I didn't want to be in maths not knowing whether my maths teacher knew."

## Disclosure and 'Exposure'

- Availability
- Language
- Sharing information
- Being the 'chosen one'
- Concerns with no disclosure

## Next Steps for immediate safety

- Next Steps for Support in School
- Key named adult
- Make a plan
- Be Pro-active in following up
- Communicating with the wider school
- Language

“I really needed to feel there was someone who was there for me, who would listen and not judge. It made such a difference when I finally found that person I could go talk to if I needed or if I was just having a bad day.”  
- Young Person

My teacher showed me the email she sent to my teachers and we talked about the wording together until I was happy with it”- Young Person

It made such a difference when someone checked in with me – even if things were going ok it made me feel I could tell someone if they weren’t - Young Person

## Support Strategies in class

- Behavioural response vs relational responses
- Give warnings for triggering content
- Build confidence in learning
- Plan, Do, Review 2

“When making a support plan, work with parents – they can provide insight into what works at home and where the flash points might be. We know our kids best.” - Parent

A reduced timetable helped our child focus on her key subjects. She had so much fatigue that removing ‘noise’ from other subjects meant she could focus energy on core subjects and the ones she most enjoyed - Parent

