



## What's the purpose of this resource?

This resource is for people who have completed some form of Five to Thrive/ Trauma informed training to:

- Provide a short overview of Five to Thrive;
- Summarise key concepts in Five to Thrive and trauma informed training; and
- Remind us how we can use Five to Thrive.

Increasingly, there is a move towards relational approaches to working with people in our communities across all stages of life due to learning from brain science (neuroscience) on relationships and human connection.

Five to Thrive provides 'the why' to relational approaches, (such as restorative practice, positive behaviour support, **Making Every Contact Count (MECC)**), and supports us to embed them in practice. It helps us recognise the links between attachment, trauma, and resilience. Attuned (Five to Thrive) connections are fundamental for secure attachment and to support recovery from trauma.

Understanding 'the why' enables us to notice, value and promote attuned 'Five to Thrive' connections which is key to building resilience.

**Noticing, valuing, and promoting attuned (Five to Thrive) connections is key to building resilient, compassionate communities.**



## What is Five to Thrive?

### Five to Thrive:

- Describes the brain science of human connection.
- Represents a sequence that happens in the blink of an eye when one person connects with another person to meet an **attachment need (see page 3)**.
- Is necessary for our brains and nervous systems to be healthy. Five to Thrive connections happen a lot in our day to day lives and are vital to:
  - Build healthy brains.
  - Enable us to manage our emotions and self-regulate.
  - Maintain healthy brain function and wellbeing throughout life.
  - Support recovery from **trauma (see page 4)**.
  - Build resilient and compassionate individuals and communities.
- Is a model that when applied consciously enables us to notice and value the impact our everyday interactions have on our lives and the lives of people around us.
- Is a **strengths-based model (see page 9)**.
- Underpins other relational based approaches by explaining the science behind these approaches.

**Five to Thrive provides emotional nurture that is as important in feeding the brain as physical nurture is in feeding the body**





It's important to stress that an interaction is only attuned (Five to Thrive) if the sequence is complete.



## What are the 'Five to Thrive' blocks?

Five to Thrive happens in the brain and nervous system of the person responding first and then in the brain and nervous system of the person to whom they are responding.



Block

What's happening in the person responding (**person A**)

What's happening and the importance for the person being responded to (**person B**)

### RESPOND

= noticing stress or a need for connection in someone else and being emotionally available.

**In the moment:** Person B feels a sense of safety and mattering.

**Over time:** Develops patterns in the brain for feeling a sense of safety and belonging.

### ENGAGE

= engaging in a way that is comfortable for person B (e.g. proximity, posture, tone of voice) to enable brain and nervous systems to connect.

**In the moment:** Signals connections.

**Over time:** Develops patterns in the brain for connecting with and trusting others.

### RELAX

= self-regulating and transforming the stress of person A so they can become calmer (co-regulation).

**In the moment:** Enables the thinking brain to come back online.

**Over time:** Develops patterns in the brain for managing emotions (self-regulation).

### PLAY

= processing the activity using authentic non-verbal communication that signals safety and appropriately reflects the emotions of the other person.

**In the moment:** Helps to process the emotions associated with the experience.

**Over time:** Develops patterns in the brain for understanding and managing feelings.

### TALK

= creating a shared narrative through listening and talking and activating the rational left brain.

**In the moment:** Helps make sense of the experience.

**Over time:** Develops patterns in the brain for making sense of experience using words and narrative.

## What are attachment needs?

Attachment is fundamental to our existence and relates to our inherent need to feel safe, secure and that we matter and belong.

**Feeling safe and a sense of mattering and belonging are essential for a healthy functioning nervous system and our overall wellbeing.**

Our need for attachment is most often associated with our earliest years when we simply cannot survive without adult care. Humans are not born able to self-soothe or regulate their emotions and only develop this through attuned (Five to Thrive) interactions with self-regulating, responsive adults. Human connection in the first 1001 days of a child's life (conception to 2 years) lays the foundation for future cognitive, emotional, and behavioural development. However, we all experience attachment needs throughout our life.

**The brain science teaches us that people need people.**

## When attachment needs are being met...

.... in children and young people, it supports healthy brain development and enables them to form a strong sense of identity, to develop their ability to self-regulate and to build resilience. In turn, this enables them to form positive relationships and to integrate well into community.

... in adulthood, it supports us to maintain healthy brains and nervous systems and improves our overall wellbeing.

## When attachment needs are not being met...

.... it triggers attachment behaviours.

For babies, attachment behaviours include: crying, screaming, back-arching (aversive attachment behaviours) or smiling, gurgling, cooing (attractive attachment behaviours). Attractive attachment behaviours stop if there is no response.

In later childhood or adulthood, unregulated stress can trigger aversive attachment behaviours associated with fight, flight, or freeze.

When a person is consistently displaying aversive attachment behaviours this may indicate that they are not experiencing enough attuned (Five to Thrive) connections. For children and young people, whose brains are still maturing, it's critical that these connections are from a calm, supportive adult.

## Taking action: what you can do

- Remember attachment needs trigger attachment behaviours that may come across as challenging to others; we all experience attachment needs throughout our life
- Connect in a Five to Thrive way when you notice someone is displaying attachment behaviours to support healthy brain development and healthy brain function

## What is stress and trauma?

Trauma, in the context of brain science, means brain 'injury'. Trauma is not an event or experience itself, but rather what happens inside of us because of an overwhelmingly stressful event or experience.

Stress can be:

- **Healthy** – good for us, enables us to function at our best.
- **Tolerable** – manageable prolonged and/or excessive stress, which drains us of energy.
- **Toxic** – unregulated, overwhelming stress that triggers our survival response and can result in brain trauma if we are unable to recover spontaneously.

'Toxic stress' may be triggered by an extreme one-off event (e.g. a car accident, unexpected bereavement), or by exposure to a sustained stressful situation or environment (e.g. a child exposed to ongoing parental conflict). Everyone's stress tolerance is different and our ability to process overwhelming stress will depend on how vulnerable or resilient we are in that moment, which is often linked to our access to social support.

Children and young people essentially need attuned (Five to Thrive) interactions with self-regulating, responsive adults to support recovery from trauma. Adults can also experience overwhelming levels of stress and will need the support of other caring adults to recover. If the stress is complex and has been affecting their emotions and behaviour since childhood, the support they will need is likely to be intensive and lengthy.



## What do trauma/ stress driven behaviours look like?

Most people recover spontaneously from traumatic life events however, some are left traumatised. Until they recover people affected by toxic stress often struggle to: self-regulate; make sense of the world; and make sense of social interaction. Examples are shown below. It's important to consider these behaviours in the context of childhood development – e.g. it's natural for young children to struggle to manage their impulses.

### People affected by toxic stress often...

### How might that show up?

Struggle to self-regulate

Challenging behaviour:

- Hyperarousal: panic, rage, aggression, impaired memory
- Dissociation: switched off, avoidant, controlling

Difficulty managing impulses:

- Difficulties managing behaviour, forgetting or denying behaviour
- Unable to benefit from rewards or sanctions

Shame:

- Hypersensitive to criticism or praise
- Apparent lack of remorse

Struggle to make sense of the world

Impaired understanding of the world around them:

- Difficulty making sense of sensory information (hot or cold, hungry or full, tired or energetic, comfort or pain)
- Misunderstanding or misrepresenting everyday events or experiences

Not understanding their inner world:

- Difficulty making sense of their own or others feelings
- Unable to put feelings into words

Struggle to make sense of social interaction

Difficulty understanding others:

- Difficulty with empathy, processing information about the emotional state of others
- Reduced motivation and ability to engage positively with others

- Lack of capacity for joy
- Reduced ability to remember joyful experiences

Feelings of worthlessness:

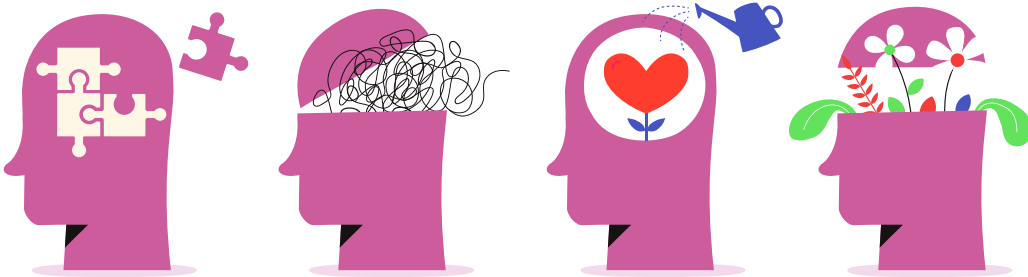
- Difficulties with self-esteem
- Global sense of shame triggered by minor events

**Behaviour is the communication of a need, often driven by stress or trauma – no matter what age we are!**

## What is trauma informed practice?

Trauma informed practice is:

- Understanding what is meant by toxic stress and trauma.
- Recognising signs and/or behaviours (see page 6) that may indicate that someone is experiencing unresolved trauma/ brain injury.
- Reframing how we view people demonstrating stress/ trauma driven behaviours – by thinking **what's happened to you?** NOT **what's wrong with you?**
- Understanding the critical importance of attuned human connections to support recovery from trauma and build resilience.
- Responding to stress/trauma driven behaviours in a way that helps people manage their stress and emotions, in the knowledge that this builds resilience and supports recovery from trauma.



## How does Five to Thrive support recovery from trauma?

Five to Thrive is an easily accessible model that can be woven into everyday interactions to support recovery from trauma. It is not a replacement for intensive therapy that some people may need, but it is supportive and accessible to all. The Five to Thrive sequence reflects a process of co-regulation, guidance and support needed for families, children, and young people in this situation.

## Taking action: what you can do

- Notice and recognise behaviours and/or challenges among children and families that may indicate the need for more support.
- Try to manage your response when confronted by behaviours that challenge you.
- Be Five to Thrive in your response when you can.
- Reach out for support to manage your emotions if needed.

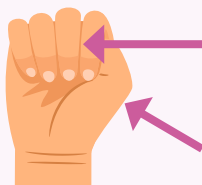
## How the hand-brain model can help?

The hand-brain model helps us understand what happens in the brain when people experience overwhelming stress and the importance of others to help us manage our emotions in these moments.

The model simplifies the brain into 3 parts which can be imagined using your hand as shown below.

- Spinal cord with brain stem (lower brain) – wrist and base of palm
- Limbic system (emotional brain) – thumb folded in and tucked into the middle of the palm
- Cerebral cortex (thinking brain) – four fingers

- ▶ Our brain works best when the thinking brain and emotional brain are connected and working together – represented by the fingers being curled over and touching the thumb

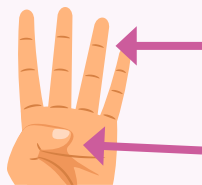


**Thinking**

= integrated,  
connected brain

**Emotional**

- ▶ When we're overwhelmed, we 'flip our lid' and our thinking brain goes offline.



**Thinking**

= flipped lid state;  
the emotional  
brain is in charge

**Emotional**

- ▶ If we can't bring our own lid down, we need support from a calm, responsive adult to help us.



- ▶ When our lid is down, our thinking brain is back 'online' and we can manage our emotions



= integrated, connected brain;  
able to manage our emotions

**Hand-brain model:** <https://youtu.be/Kx7PCzg0CGE>

## Taking action: what you can do

- Use the hand-brain model to remind yourself what happens in our brains when we're overwhelmed by stress
- Use the hand-brain model to help others understand:
  - what happens in our brains when we're overwhelmed by stress
  - why attuned Five to Thrive connections are so important

## Strengths-based model

Five to Thrive is to be used as a model that empowers people and builds on their strengths. It enables practitioners to:

- Recognise the positive impact of an attuned ('Five to Thrive') interaction when working with children, young people, and families.
- Support parents to notice when positive attuned ('Five to Thrive') interactions are happening, and to share the knowledge that this interaction is promoting healthy brain development and/or supporting healthy brain function and promoting self-regulation and resilience.
- Support young people to understand the basic principles of healthy human interaction and how this can help them and others.

This strengths-based approach is encouraging and empowering for practitioners and parents and motivates them to repeat this style of interacting.

## Taking action: what you can do

- Recognise and reflect on the positive impact of your own Five to Thrive interactions with children and families.
- Let parents know when you notice positive Five to Thrive interactions and help them understand the benefits.
- Support young people to understand the science of Five to Thrive and introduce the hand-brain model.

## Normalising, not stigmatising

Five to Thrive is a model that can be used when working with anyone to promote healthy brain development and in a targeted way with those who need more support. It is relevant to people at all stages of life, from birth to old age and is equally applicable to those with special educational needs including neurodiversity and social, emotional and mental health needs.

**We are all vulnerable at times** - we all have attachment needs when we feel unsafe. At such times we may struggle being Five to Thrive with others while we meet our own needs.

**We are all resilient at times** - we can all contribute to meeting the attachment needs of other people.

**People need people; human connection and relationships** - Five to Thrive interactions are vital throughout life to develop and maintain healthy brains.

**People need people; human connection and relationships are vital for us to develop and maintain healthy brains.**



## Five to Thrive and trauma informed key messages:

- Noticing, valuing, and promoting attuned (Five to Thrive) connections are key to building resilient, compassionate communities.
- Calm, adult responses are vital for children and young people to develop self-regulation.
- People need people; human connection and relationships are vital for us to develop and maintain healthy brains.
- We are all vulnerable and all resilient at times.
- Behaviour is the communication of a need, often driven by stress or trauma – no matter what age we are!
- Every interaction is an opportunity to make a positive difference.

## For more information and resources

Go here [KCA: Reg form: Download - Wiltshire Five to Thrive](#) to access to a range of resources and information developed by [Knowledge Change Action \(KCA\)](#), who developed Five to Thrive



Every interaction is an opportunity to make a positive difference



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A white graphic element consisting of two curved lines that sweep upwards from the center and then downwards towards the ends, resembling a stylized wave or a bridge.

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