



TCI – Module Five Knowing the Young Person



What does the young person need to feel safe, cared for and understood?

In order to respond therapeutically to a young person, an understanding of what is driving the young person's emotions and behaviours is essential. To respond in a way that helps young people grow and develop life skills, adults need to know the young people – their setting conditions and triggers, life experiences, their coping strategies, strengths and their relationship with adults.

The Effects of Trauma in Young People's Behaviour

When children experience early adversity and trauma, it can directly affect the developmental functioning of the brain. A simple way of understanding how the brain works is the Triune Brain Model proposed by neuroscientist Paul McLean. Mclean described three basic brain processing regions referred to as the Survival, Emotional and Thinking brains.

1. **The Survival Brain** – This system of the brain (brain stem) also known as the reptilian brain, is responsible for survival functions such as breathing, heart rate, circulation and most bodily functions that do not require any conscious thought.
2. **The Emotional Brain** – This part of the brain is also called the limbic system and is the centre for emotions, emotional behaviour and motivation. Within this part of the brain is the amygdala, also known as the sentry. The role of the amygdala is to determine whether or not something is a threat.
3. **The Thinking Brain** – This is the neocortex and is responsible for higher functions such as reasoning, language, creativity, and abstract thought.



The Thinking Brain.
This is the **neocortex**, responsible for higher functions such as reasoning, language, creativity, and abstract thought.

The Emotional Brain.
This part of the brain is also called the **limbic system** and is the center for emotions, emotional behavior, and motivation. Within this part of the brain is the **amygdala**, also known as the **sentry**. The role of the amygdala is to determine whether or not something is a threat.

The Survival Brain.
This system of the brain (the **brain stem**) also known as the **reptilian brain**, is responsible for survival functions such as breathing, heart rate, circulation, and most bodily (autonomic) functions that do not require conscious thought.



All Behaviour Has Meaning

Behaviour is an expression of need or an attempt to meet a need. All behaviour has meaning. It is important to find out what that meaning is behind the behaviour, what emotional pain or need is being expressed. For example a young person might threaten in order to feel safe; someone who runs away may be afraid of something and be in survival mode. Whatever behaviour young people exhibit, it is closely related to a need and the feelings associated with trying to meet that need.

The more that adults know about the young people in their care, the better prepared they will be to respond in a way that helps soothe and comfort young people experiencing anxiety and stress.

Children and young people who have experienced trauma and adversity, especially when those experiences were with a caregiver or a trusted adult, have an emotional brain that is always on guard. Even when there is not “real danger”, the amygdala will send survival messages and the survival brain takes over. Young people who have grown up in stressful environments tend to overreact to situations, to re-enact traumatic events and re-enact traumatic relationships. When this occurs, it is often expressed through behaviour that puts the young person and others at risk. This behaviour is referred to as ‘Pain Based Behaviour’.



Pain-Based Behavior

Behaviors that are the result of emotional and psychological pain

- Inability to regulate emotions
- Overreaction to situations
- Impulsive outbursts
- Trauma re-enactment
- Defiance
- Inflexibility
- Running away through anger or fear
- Self-Injury
- Withdrawal



Details of this topic are covered in the **Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) Student Workbook 7th Edition**. Refer to **Module Two pages S16 – S18**.