

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Trauma-Informed
Practice for Children
Experiencing
Multiple Moves in
Foster Care

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OUR RATIONALE

The Ripple Effect Cluster was developed in response to a critical shortage of foster homes, which has led to frequent moves for children in care. These transitions create instability and stress for children and increase vicarious trauma exposure for practitioners.



Our aim:

To create a concrete resource that highlights, recognises, and addresses the needs of children and workers during difficult transitions, reducing stress and promoting resilience.



Key outputs:.

- Highlight current challenges when children experience multiple moves in care.
- Recognise the lived experience of children and workers during waiting and moving periods.
- Create resources to support colleagues in making sense of these experiences, developing practice skills, and building resilience.
- Make recommendations for future work.



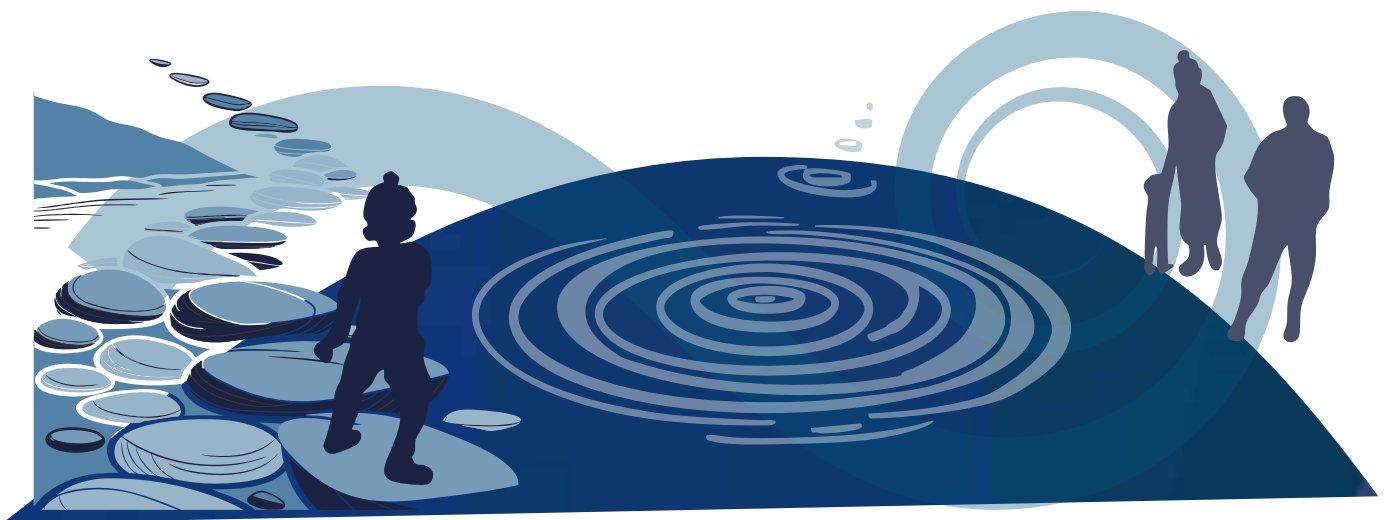
Key outputs:

- 6 animated videos illustrating lived experiences.
- Accompanying learning resource for reflection and discussion.
- Comfort packs for children during transitions.
- Improved spaces within buildings used by young people.



Recommendations for using The Ripple Effect initiative:

- Expand comfort packs to include sensory and grounding tools for trauma regulation.
- Develop training modules for foster carers on trauma-informed transitions.
- Create a feedback loop with children and practitioners to refine resources.
- Embed reflective practice sessions using Ripple Effect videos in team meetings.
- Research impact of Ripple Effect on reducing placement breakdowns and practitioner burnout.



THE RIPPLE EFFECT AND TARA



The Ripple Effect is a TARA based initiative and demonstrates how trauma-informed practices are integrated into current best practice to improve the experience of children and practitioners working in difficult spaces. TARA defines trauma-informed practice as a:

"holistic therapeutic practice approach that reflects a mindset and skillset that promotes empowerment and growth for both the service user with lived and /or living experience of trauma and for the practitioner working with trauma".

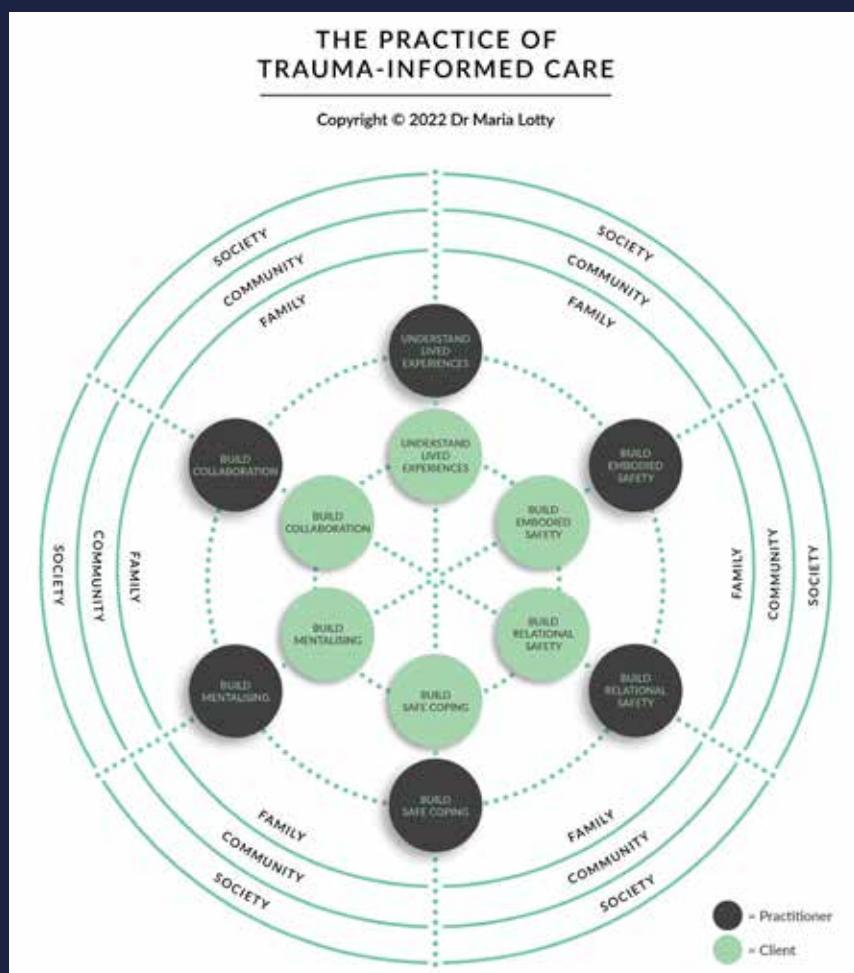
[Lotty, 2023, p. 9]

TARA has 6 practice dimensions to support practice wisdom, theory and research into concrete practice changes: **TARA Practice Model (Trauma, Attachment, Resilience into Action)**

Through the Ripple Effect initiative, we can explore how TARA phased practice dimensions were applied. The initiative focused on:

- **understanding lived experience,**
- **building embodied safety,**
- **relational safety,**
- **building safe coping,**
- **building mentalising,**
- **building collaboration**

which all have been illuminated through the parallel journey.



THE PARALLEL JOURNEY OF TARA

TARA emphasises that trauma-informed practice is not only about supporting those we work with, it also involves awareness of the practitioner's own experience. This is called the parallel journey. When we work with trauma, we are often in the presence of trauma ourselves. This requires an understanding of how:



Our personal trauma history intersects with the work.



Exposure to acute and/or vicarious trauma shapes our responses.

This is not easy. It means bringing awareness to how our own experiences influence our practice. However, when these shared experiences are acknowledged and understood between practitioners and those they support, and among colleagues, managers, and other professionals, we respond:



More effectively.



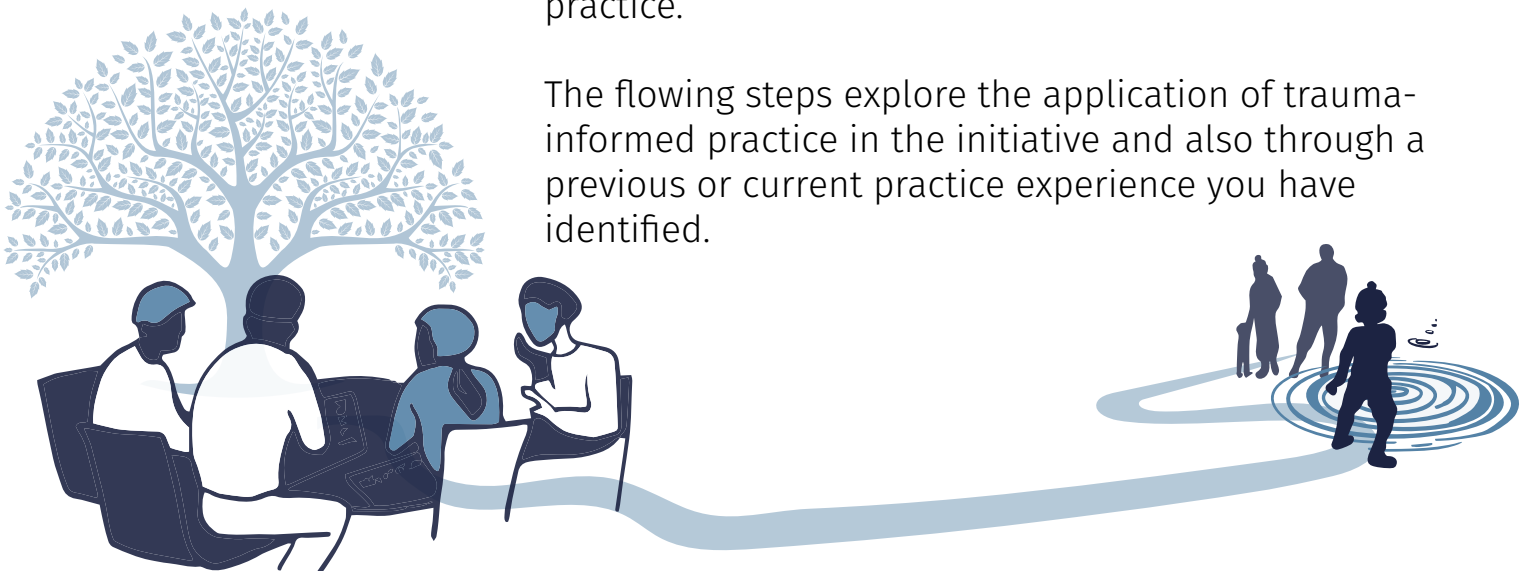
In a trauma-informed way.



Thoughtfully, rather than reactively or defensively.

Recognizing the parallel journey strengthens resilience, deepens empathy, and promotes safer, more reflective practice.

The flowing steps explore the application of trauma-informed practice in the initiative and also through a previous or current practice experience you have identified.



TARA APPLIED TO PRACTICE

SIX STEPS TO EXPLORE TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE (1-3)



Step 1: Understanding Lived Experience

- Reflect on the experiences of Louise and the worker in the Ripple Effect videos.
- Consider the experiences of children you work with.
- Use TARA - [Understanding the Drivers of Behaviour: Trauma-informed Practice Tool](#)



Step 2: Building Embodied Safety

The Ripple Effect initiative prioritised embodied safety by:

- Enhancing physical environments with soothing colours and comfortable furniture.
- Introducing sensory aids (fidget spinners, weighted blankets) and refreshments to support regulation.
- Creating spaces where children can feel calm and nurtured during transitions.

Reflections:

- How could you make your building feel safe?
- What would you include in a “Comfort Bag”?

Explore TARA tools:

- [TARA - The Thermometer of Regulation](#)
- [TARA - Regulating Activities;](#)
- [TARA - Toolkit of Regulation;](#)
- [TARA - Embodiment & Breathing Practices](#)



Step 3: Building Relational Safety

The Ripple Effect focused on:

- Providing narratives for children about where they are going, what to expect, and who will meet them.
- Speaking openly during uncertainty, reassuring children while acknowledging limitations.
- Being mindful of rupture and repair in relationships caused by systemic challenges.

Reflections:

- How do you build trust and containment during uncertainty?

Explore TARA tools:

- [TARA - Our Language Reconsidered](#)
- [TARA - The 3Rs of Building Resilience](#)



TARA APPLIED TO PRACTICE

SIX STEPS TO EXPLORE TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE (4-6)



Step 4: Building Safe Coping

Examples from Ripple Effect:

- Supporting play (e.g., ball games) to foster mastery.
- Offering choices to give children a sense of control.
- Using white noise to help children sleep in new environments.

Reflections:

- What coping strategies can you offer in similar situations?

Explore TARA tools:

- [TARA - The 3Rs of Building Resilience](#)



Step 5: Building Mentalising

Mentalising involves understanding both the child's and practitioner's perspectives—the parallel journey.

- Recognise shared and differing experiences.
- Respond thoughtfully rather than reactively.

Reflections:

- How do you notice the parallel journey in your work?

Explore TARA tools:

- [TARA - Build Mentalising Tool](#)
- [TARA - Mindfulness Practices](#)



Step 6: Building Collaboration

Collaboration strengthens resilience and reduces isolation for both children and practitioners.

- How can you involve children, carers, and colleagues in decision-making?
- What systems can you create for shared problem-solving?



Links to TARA Practice Tools

Lotty, M. (2023). TARA Practice Model (Trauma, Attachment, Resilience into Action). Zenodo. Available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/11395102>

Lotty, M. (2024). The Thermometer of Regulation. Zenodo. Available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/11394136>

Lotty, M. (2024). Understanding the Drivers of Behaviour: Trauma-informed Practice Tool. Zenodo. Available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/11395217>

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O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Bodily Sensations Vocabulary Tool. Zenodo. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344826>

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O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Embodiment & Breathing Practices. Zenodo. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344934>

O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Mindfulness Practices. Zenodo. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344963>

Supporting Documentation

Lotty, M. (2023) 'Supporting child welfare practice through an integrated practice model: Trauma, attachment and resilience into action', The Irish Social Worker, pp. 11-20. Available at: <https://cora.ucc.ie/server/api/core/bitstreams/ee25dae7-2fd0-4198-8010-0671a33a44a6/content>

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