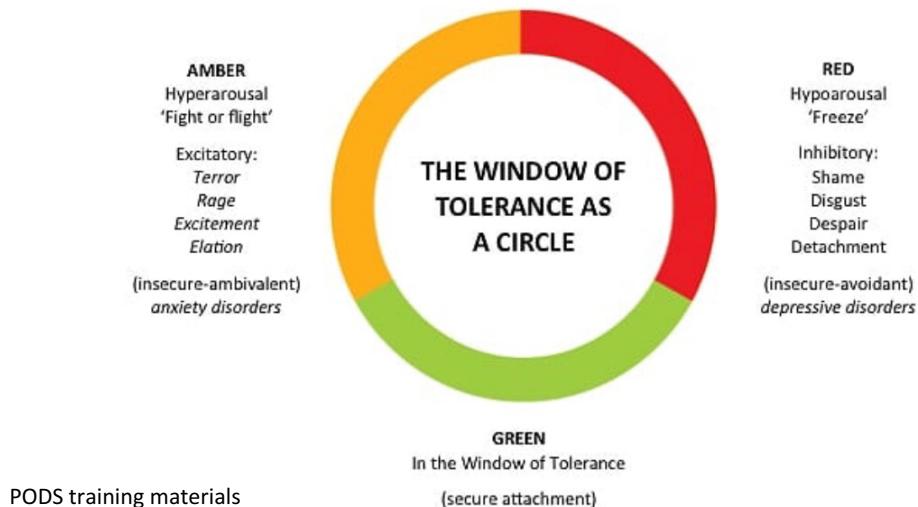


Working with young people affected by Complex Trauma

Everyone working with young people affected by Complex Trauma, either through education or therapeutically, and any one supporting the families, needs to have a common understanding of the way Complex Trauma (repeated trauma in the developing years usually before age 3 but up to age 6) affects a young person's perception of their environment, physical, emotional and social.

Complex Trauma means that the young person lives with triggers that can create severe anxiety disorder symptoms. These triggers can be quite minor and not noticed by other people.

The young person can move between different parts of their window of tolerance (see diagram) depending on how stressed or anxious he feels. There are times when the young person feels secure and other times when anxiety is triggered and he moves into Amber or Red. The young person can move round the circle from Amber to Red before moving into Green.



Different parts of the personality emerge to protect the young person when trauma is triggered. So one part may not know what happened in a previous session when a different part was engaged. Triggers of rejection or shame are particularly toxic. So if someone comes to work with a young person and he is not in the mind-set for that work, if that worker then moves away or lets him know he hasn't done the work needed for the session, an immature part of him will hear rejection or shame and take him into Amber or Red. This can then lead to irritation or depression and shutdown.

The tutor or therapeutic worker may then feel rejected by the young person because feelings are transferred. This needs understanding so that a cycle of rejection and counter-rejection does not take over. If Trust is to be built this may mean staying with him in whatever mode he is in.

To work with a young person who is affected by Complex Trauma requires:

1. Acceptance acceptance acceptance – to build trust that he won't be rejected. This may mean letting go of hoped for plans for a session and sharing in whatever way the young person feels safe.
2. Plan to be flexible. This means that the young person may not be in the same place each session. Sometimes able to engage positively, (Green) sometimes agitated and impatient (Amber) and sometimes hypo-aroused, shut down and probably unable to comprehend what is being said (Red)
3. Being Positive, Patient and Present. And very much aware of the need for self-care. Working closely with Complex Trauma causes secondary trauma which needs recognition.