

# INTRODUCTION TO TRAUMA-INFORMED SUPPORT



Safe  
Families



Home  
for Good

# TRAUMA: AN INTRODUCTION

## THIS HANDBOOK WILL COVER

- An introduction to trauma
- A basic understanding of the impact of trauma
- How to use a trauma informed approach



## WHAT IS TRAUMA?

**'Distressing events that overwhelm a person's ability to cope, resulting in lasting negative impact, often beyond their control'**

UK Trauma Council

**'Trauma is not what happens to you, it's what happens inside you as a result of what happens to you'**

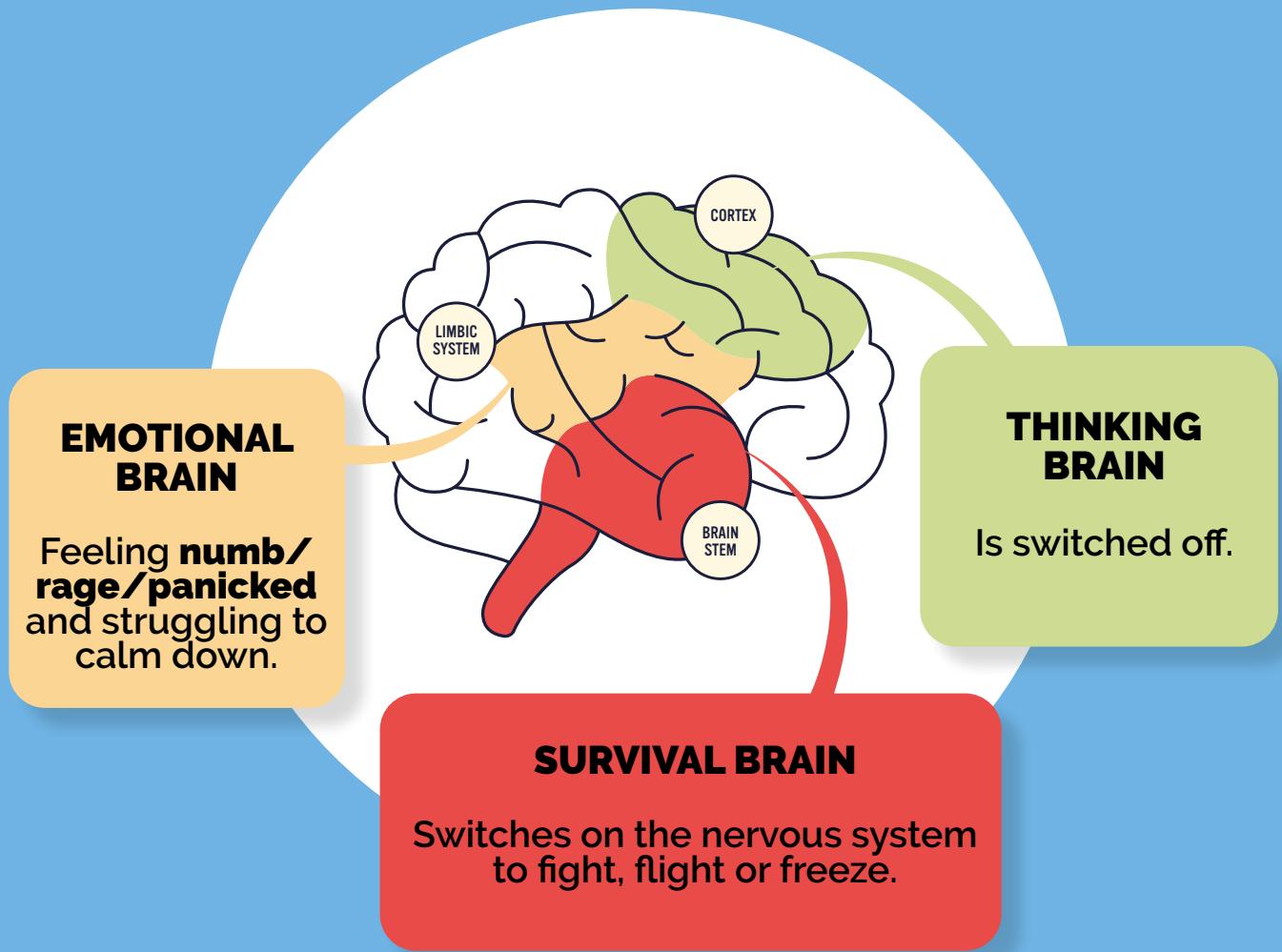
Gabor Mate

### IMPORTANT NOTE

**For some neurodivergent individuals, living in a neurotypical world can be traumatic in itself. There is a lot of overlap between trauma and neurodivergence.**



# TRAUMA: THE IMPACT



## FIGHT, FLIGHT AND FREEZE RESPONSE

The part of our brain that is responsible for this response is called the amygdala. It is always scanning the environment for **threat or danger**, and it is constantly at work. We don't know what is happening - it just does this **automatically**.

This part is designed to **keep us safe**; it looks out for danger and helps us take action if we need to. This is also part of the brain that helped our cave men ancestors stay safe from wild animals. This is why we sometimes call this part our **survival brain**.

**When our brain detects threat or danger our amygdala is triggered and releases the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol.**

**These stress hormones do several important things:**

**1.** They flood the brain and trigger the fight flight freeze response which **gets us ready to survive**. If a tiger was coming towards us, we would get ready to either fight the tiger, run from the tiger or freeze.

**2.** The stress hormones also tell the body to pump blood to the heart and major organs and away from our hands and feet. It makes our heartbeat faster and **gets us ready to run or fight**. This is why we can feel faint, or our hands can feel clammy. We become very jumpy and ready to move at a moment's notice.

**3.** The other function the stress hormones have, is to **switch off access to the thinking part of the brain**. This is the part of the brain we need to think about how fast the tiger is moving, or whether we are strong enough to beat it, or even if it might think we are dead. It is a very important part of the process, because if we stop to think these things, it slows our reactions, and we may not survive.



**When someone is experiencing high levels of stress, it can feel like there is a tiger in the room.**



# CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN YOU HAVE FELT LIKE THIS?

When people are in survival mode, they only think of staying alive. This is a vital response if they were in a life-threatening situation. But what we now know, is that for people who have experienced significant trauma, or who are Autistic, or have ADHD or high anxiety for any reason, their **fight, flight, freeze** response may become **oversensitive**.

This means they can be triggered much more readily, even though their survival isn't under genuine threat.

It is helpful to remember this process of the fight, flight, freeze response when we are **supporting others** so that we can concentrate on helping them to feel **calm**.

## NOTES:

# TRAUMA: THE IMPACT

This is a simple version of something called **The Hand Model** by Dr Dan Siegal that explains our **fight, flight, freeze response**.



# Imagine your hand represents your brain.

Your wrist is the spinal cord leading up to your palm which is the base part of your brain.

Some people call this our primitive brain and it is where our automatic functions happen such as breathing, swallowing and blinking.



**If you tuck your thumb across your palm, this represents the amygdala which acts as our threat detection system.**

We can think of it as a **danger alarm**, looking out for any threats so we can respond, to stay safe.

## NOTES:



**Then if you fold your fingers over your thumb, this represents our thinking brain, sitting behind our forehead.**

This is where we can think logically, listen to reason, and rationalise.

When our amygdala detects threat or danger, it floods our brain with the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol, and blocks access to our thinking brain.

This gets us immediately into our survival response, our fight, flight or freeze. This is so we can fight, flight (that means run away from) or freeze from the danger in order to stay alive.



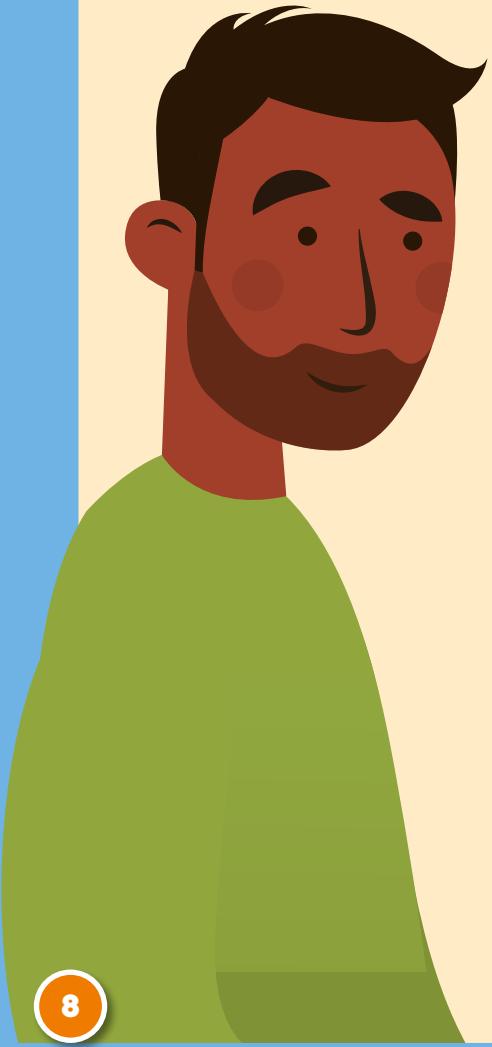
If you imagine your fingers uncurling from your palm and standing straight upright.

## NOTES:

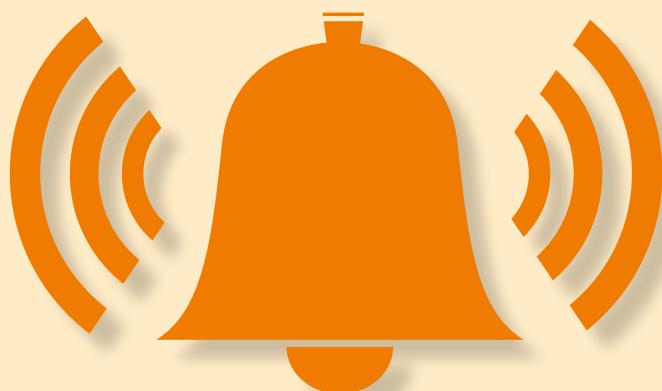
# DANGER ALARM

For individuals who have experienced trauma or are neurodivergent or have high anxiety for any reason, **their danger alarm becomes oversensitive**, a bit like a faulty smoke alarm, going off because someone's making toast rather than because there's an actual fire.

Those with an oversensitive danger alarm might be triggered into this response because something is different, or because someone said no, or because they're tired or hungry rather than because their life is under genuine threat.



Knowing that they don't have access to their thinking brain when they are triggered into this response is so helpful as **we can understand what is going on underneath the behaviour** and concentrate on helping them to feel safe and calm again.



# IT'S HELPFUL TO THINK:

## What is the feeling behind the behaviour?

# Has their thinking brain gone offline?

## Has their danger alarm been triggered?

## NOTES:



# TRAUMA RESPONSES

## IN ADULTS

Not answering phone

Poor sense of identity or self worth

Hyper vigilant and have difficulty concentrating

Doesn't open curtains during the day

Takes things personally

Struggles to leave the house

Health issues across a lifetime

Withdrawn

Blows hot and cold

Struggles with personal boundaries

Easily frustrated with their children

Finding it difficult to keep up with day-to-day tasks

## IN CHILDREN

Over familiar or affectionate towards strangers

Poor sense of identity or self-worth

Hyper vigilant and have difficulty concentrating

Easily angered and quick to become aggressive

Fascination with death and violence

Preoccupied with food

Over excited very easily

Have a habit of running away

Under or over reaction to pain

Developmental age differs to actual age

Inability to describe their feelings

Friendship difficulties – no 'theory of mind'



# TRIGGERS

When we are **parenting or supporting** someone who has experienced trauma, or who has high anxiety for any reason, it is important to remember that there are many and **varied triggers** that are often **specific** to the individual.

## ANYTHING CAN BE A TRIGGER



## THERE IS HOPE

Protective shields against the impact of trauma

- Good friends or neighbours
- A predictable home routine
- A caregiver whom the child feels safe with
- Opportunities to have fun
- Beliefs that provide comfort



# COMPASSION FATIGUE



The **stress of caring** for someone who has experienced trauma or who is highly anxious, **can be exhausting**. It can make people feel defensive, stressed, angry, burnt out and isolated.

People need to **feel safe, understood** and not criticised for the feelings they have. It's good to talk to someone who can listen without judgment.

## WHAT DOES COMPASSION FATIGUE LOOK LIKE?

(Not an exhaustive list)

Lack of empathy

Takes the child's behaviour personally

Low energy and no motivation

Exhausted and no joy in parenting

Feels that there is no point and nothing good in life

Sense of disconnection

Easily angry and frustrated

# SELF-CARE IS IMPORTANT AND KEY TO RECOVERY



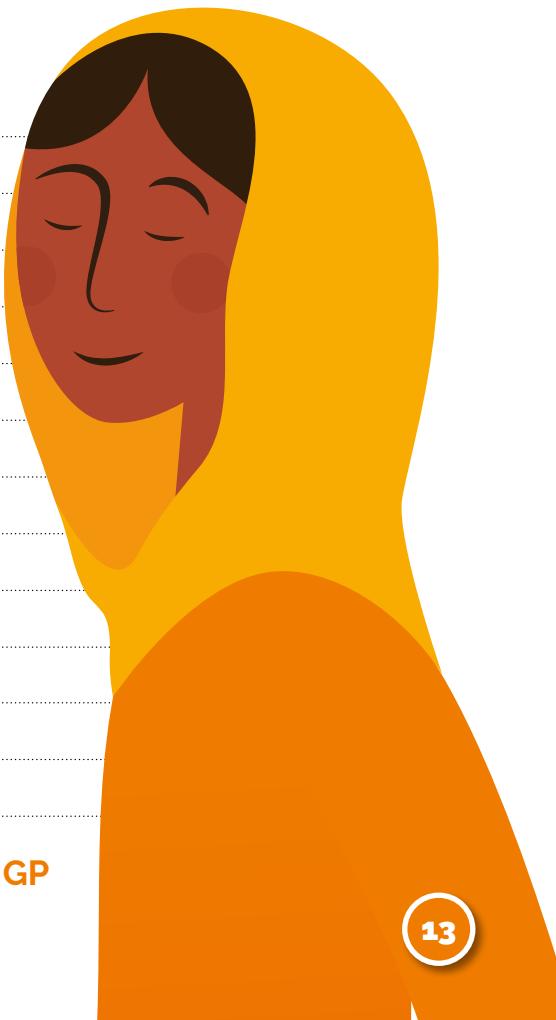
## Breathing and mindfulness

## Time with trusted friends or family

## Time to do hobbies and things that bring joy

## Healthy diet and regular exercise

## NOTES:



We would always recommend that you speak to your GP if you feel you are struggling to cope.

# SIX PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED SUPPORT

This is from the government guidance for Trauma Informed Practice



**SAFETY**



**COLLABORATION**



**TRUSTWORTHINESS**



**EMPOWERMENT**



**CHOICE**



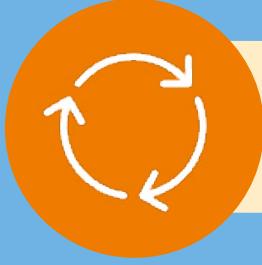
**CULTURAL  
CONSIDERATION**



Trauma can affect individuals, groups and communities



Recognise the signs, symptoms and widespread impact of trauma



Prevent re-traumatisation

# SAFETY

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- People who have experienced trauma might find it harder to **trust** others to keep them safe
- Physical safety doesn't always equal feeling safe
- They are more **easily triggered** into their survival response



## HOW DO WE DO THIS?

- **Empathy**
- **Situational awareness**
- **Non-judgmental listening**
- **Clear plan and boundaries**
- **Not trauma-digging**
- **Safeguarding**
- **Low demand approach**

## NOTES:

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# TRUSTWORTHINESS

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- May find it **hard to trust** others
- Difficult experiences with services
- May have been **let down** by others in the past
- Relationship struggles



## HOW DO WE DO THIS?

- **Consistency**
- **Clear communication**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Time**

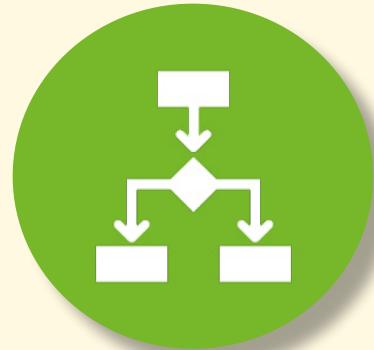
### NOTES:



# CHOICE

# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

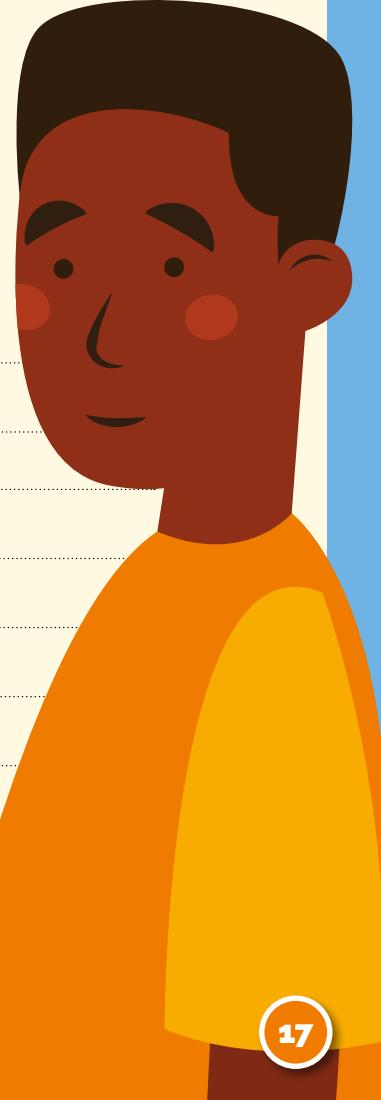
- Offering choice can support individuals to **feel safe**
- Models positive and healthy relationships
- Reduces triggers
- Encourages regulation



# HOW DO WE DO THIS?

- Giving options
- Wondering aloud
- Non-judgmental
- Being realistic
- Low pressure

## NOTES:



# COLLABORATION

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Working together models **healthy relationships**
- Promotes psychological safety
- Creates a window into their needs
- Shifts power balance



## HOW DO WE DO THIS?

- **Including everyone in decisions**
- **Low demand approach**
- **Being curious**

## NOTES:



# EMPOWERMENT

# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Builds **self esteem**
- Helps people to make their own decisions
- Strengthens **confidence** in moving forward



# HOW DO WE DO THIS?

- Access to information needed to make informed decision
- Flexibility
- Patience

## NOTES:



# CULTURAL CONSIDERATION

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Being aware of how our **unconscious bias** might impact the relationship
- It demonstrates **respect**
- Helps people to **feel seen**



## HOW DO WE DO THIS?

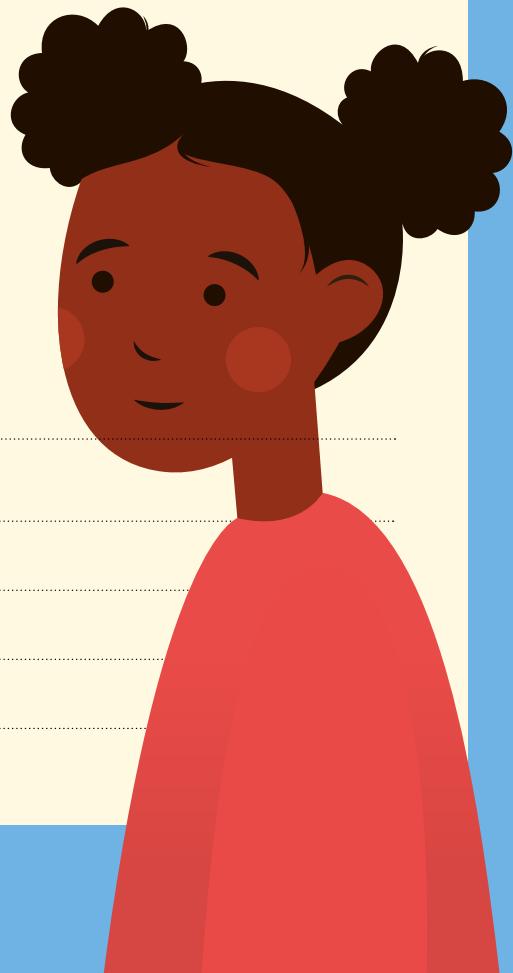
- Not stereotyping
- Non-judgmental listening
- Accepting their experience and understanding
- Recognising unconscious bias
- Appropriate curiosity

## NOTES:

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# IT ISN'T OUR JOB TO:

- Trauma dig
- Provide therapy
- 'Fix' everything



# IT IS OUR JOB TO:

- Be non-judgmental
- Love, care and signpost
- Follow safeguarding protocols

## NOTES:

## OTHER TRAINING:

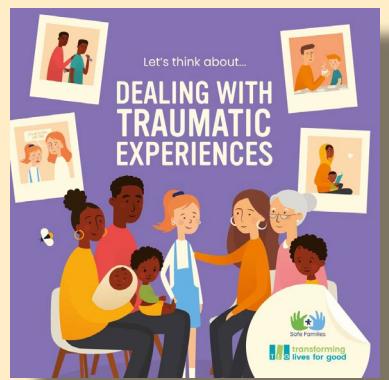
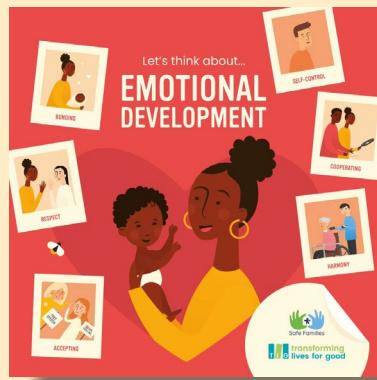
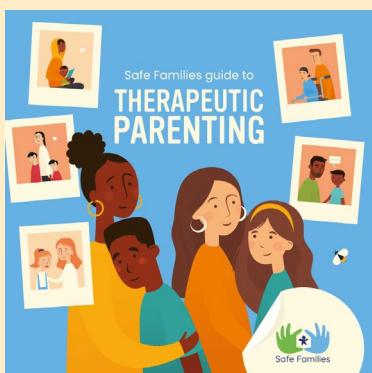


- Mental Health Awareness
- Understanding Young People
- Autism Awareness Training
- Risks Outside the Home
- Introduction to Therapeutic Parenting
- Understanding Secondary Trauma

**FIND OUT MORE**



## RESOURCES



# HELPLINES:

## MIND HELPLINE

**Call 0300 123 3393**

(9am - 6pm weekdays except bank holidays)

## SAMARITANS

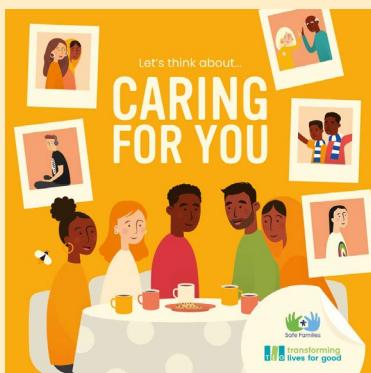
**Call 116 123**

(24 hours a day)

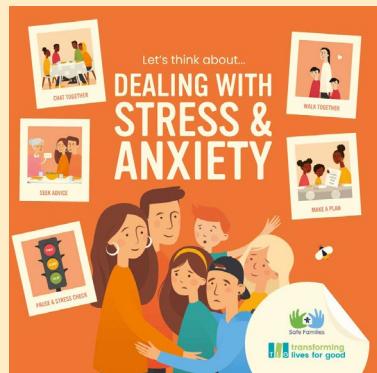
## CALM

**Call 0800 58 58 58**

(5pm - midnight)



**More information and support can be found in our booklets made in partnership with TLG. Booklets can be accessed via their website.**



**FIND OUT MORE**



[tlg.org.uk/get-involved/tlg-resource-shop](http://tlg.org.uk/get-involved/tlg-resource-shop)

## NOTES:

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[safefamilies.uk](http://safefamilies.uk) [homeforgood.org.uk](http://homeforgood.org.uk)

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