



6 STEPS OF

TRAUMA-SENSITIVE CONNECTION

Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson outline the model of the "Downstairs Brain" (which acts before thinking) and the "Upstairs Brain" (which thinks before acting). Under times of stress, our Downstairs Brain can take over and prepare us for fight or flight. This defensive survival mode is switched on regularly during experiences of trauma and loss; the amygdala's "baby gate" snapping on so often that the steps to the Upstairs Brain are not well trodden.

Kristin Souers and Pete Hall recommend 6 steps for communicating during times of crisis and conflict. These allow for open and honest connection with a young person (or adult!) and prioritise emotional regulation before more logical and reflective thinking.

In other words...

"Connect and Redirect"

1. Listen

Using verbal and non-verbal cues to help the young person feel heard.

"Tell me more about..."

2. Reassure

Showing that the young person's perspective is important.

"I can see how you feel that way. This means a lot to you"

3. Validate

Accepting the young person's inner experience without judgement.

"No wonder you were so upset. I'm just realising that you were scared at that moment and that's why you..."

4. Respond

Offering the young person insight and an alternative perspective.

"I didn't notice how you were feeling. It probably seemed as if I was ignoring you and didn't care, but I was helping someone else at the time"

5. Repair

Healing the rupture in the relationship and acknowledging our contribution to a stressful situation.

"I didn't take time to prepare you for the situation. I'm sorry that I didn't see what was happening and couldn't help you to handle this"

6. Resolve

Helping the young person to consider better ways of handling a similar situation in the future.

"Let's make a plan. Next time you feel this way, what if you..."

"I'll be checking in with you to see how it's going"

"In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers" - Fred Rogers