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What brings about therapeutic change for traumatised parents and their teens?

From entrenched conflict to new relational patterns

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The Cairnmillar Institute

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we are meeting today. We pay our respect to their Elders; past, present, and emerging. We also extend these respects to any First Nations peoples engaging with these materials, and our services.



Ash Thomas Yorta Yorta/Wiradjuri people There's a Lot Goin' On, 2025, acrylic on canvas

the torch

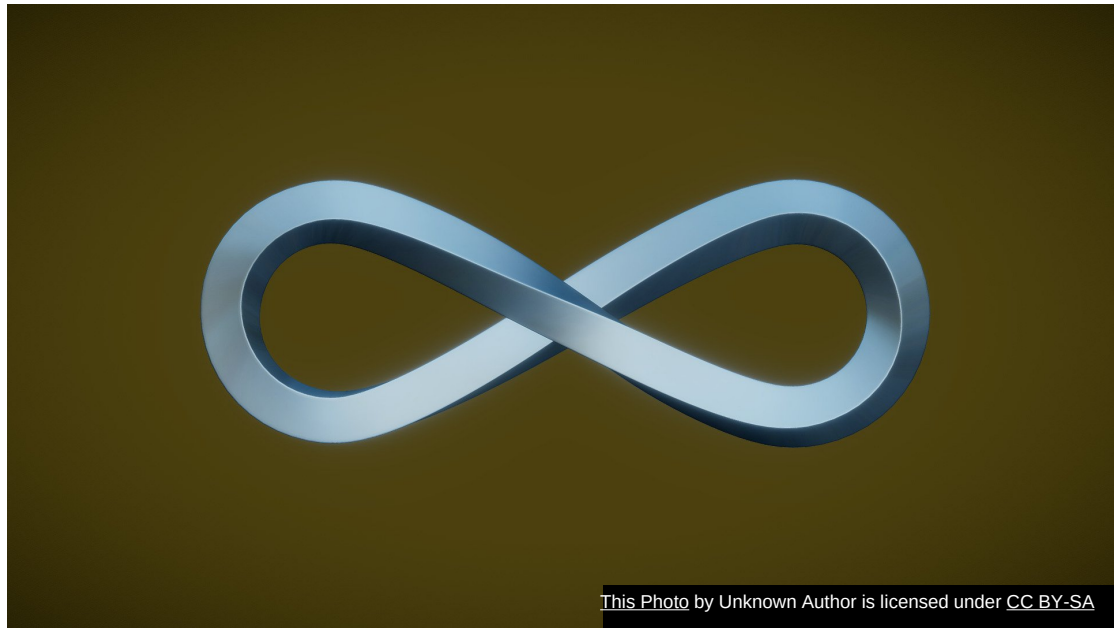
This artwork was created through The Torch, a not-for-profit organisation that provides art, cultural and arts industry support to First Nations people currently in, or recently released, from Victorian prisons.





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When conflict becomes entrenched, it becomes a relational cycle



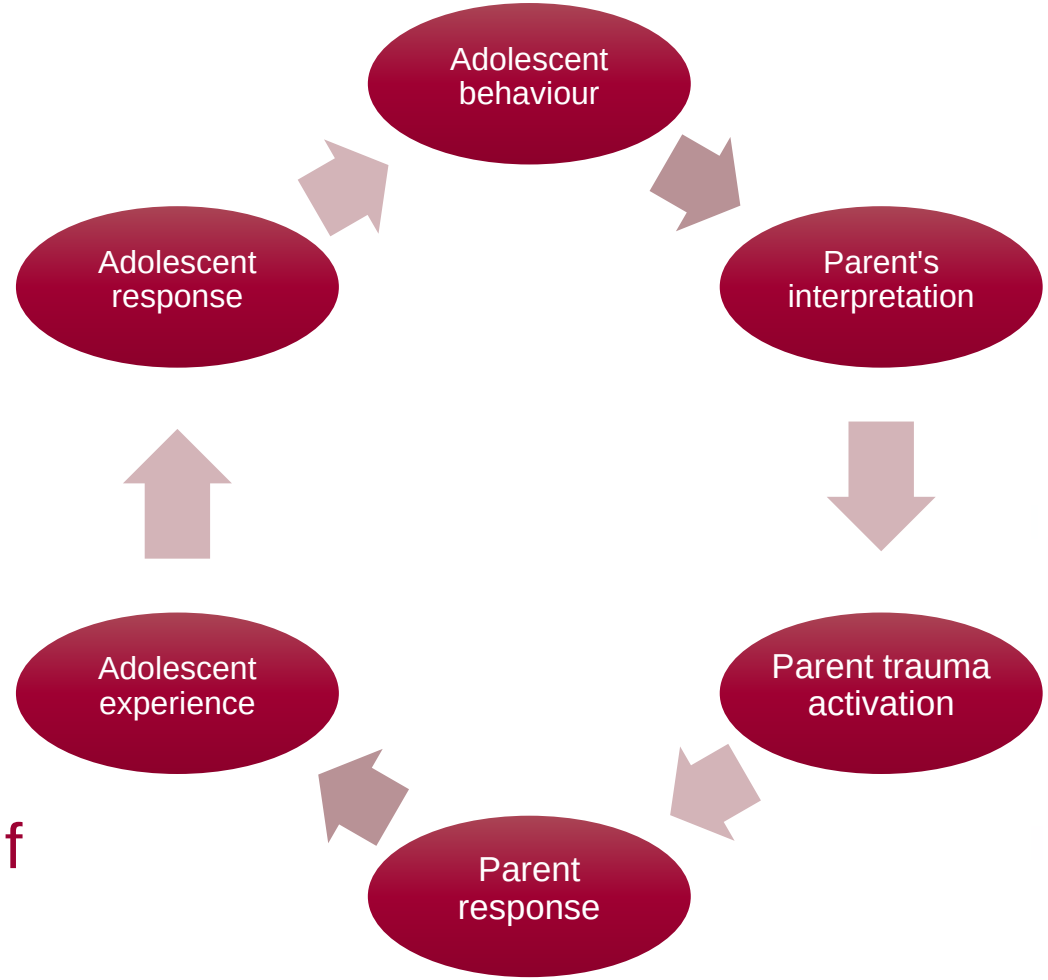
Parent

- Trauma activation
- Threat perception
- Reactivity
- Reduced responsiveness

Adolescent

- Emotional activation
- Defensive responses
- Withdrawal
- Expecting conflict

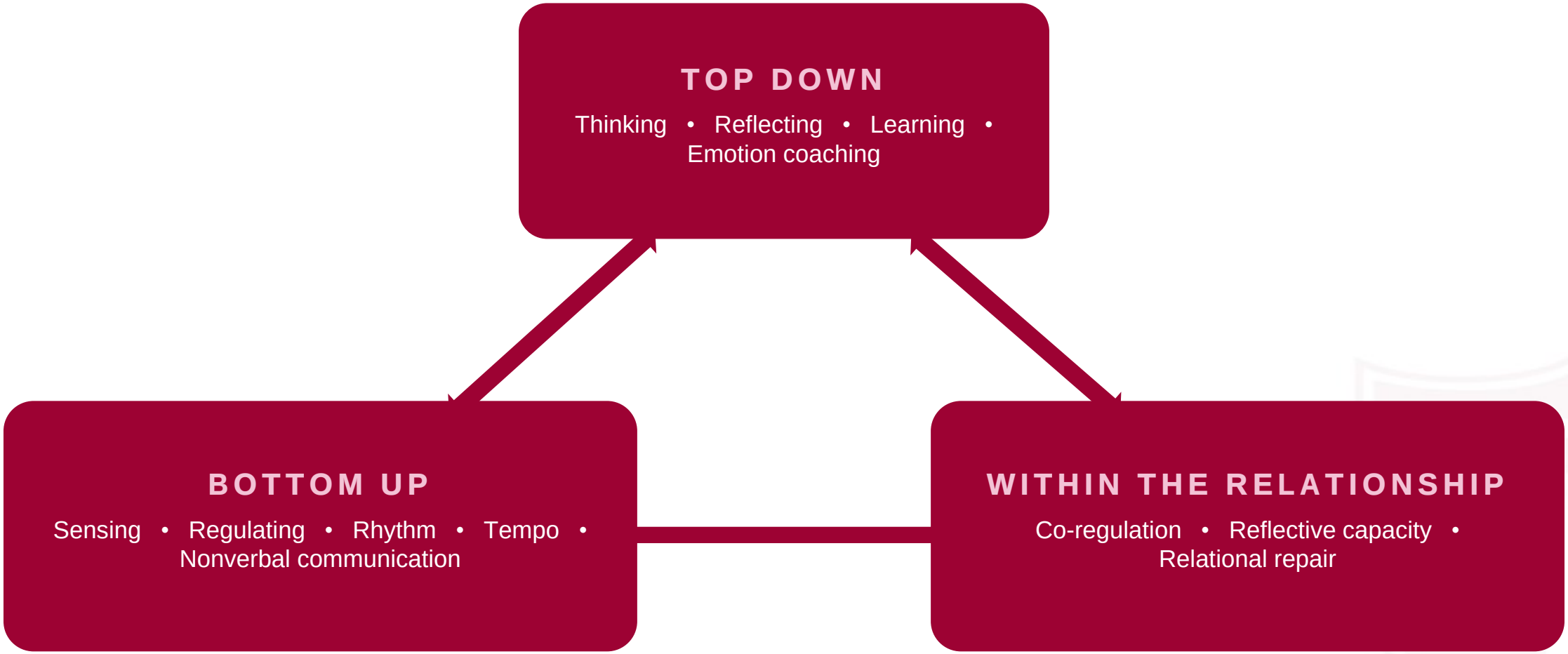
Trauma can shape the way the present moment is experienced



The cycle reinforces itself

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Therapeutic change needs more than insight



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Co-regulation

BEFORE

"Let's talk about the problem."

FIRST

"Can *we stay connected while something difficult is* happening?"

REGULATION CREATES SPACE FOR

- Responsiveness
- Curiosity
- Reflection
- Repair

Music makes the relationship audible

Tempo – how quickly are we moving?

Volume – how intense is the communication?

Turn-taking – is there space for the other?

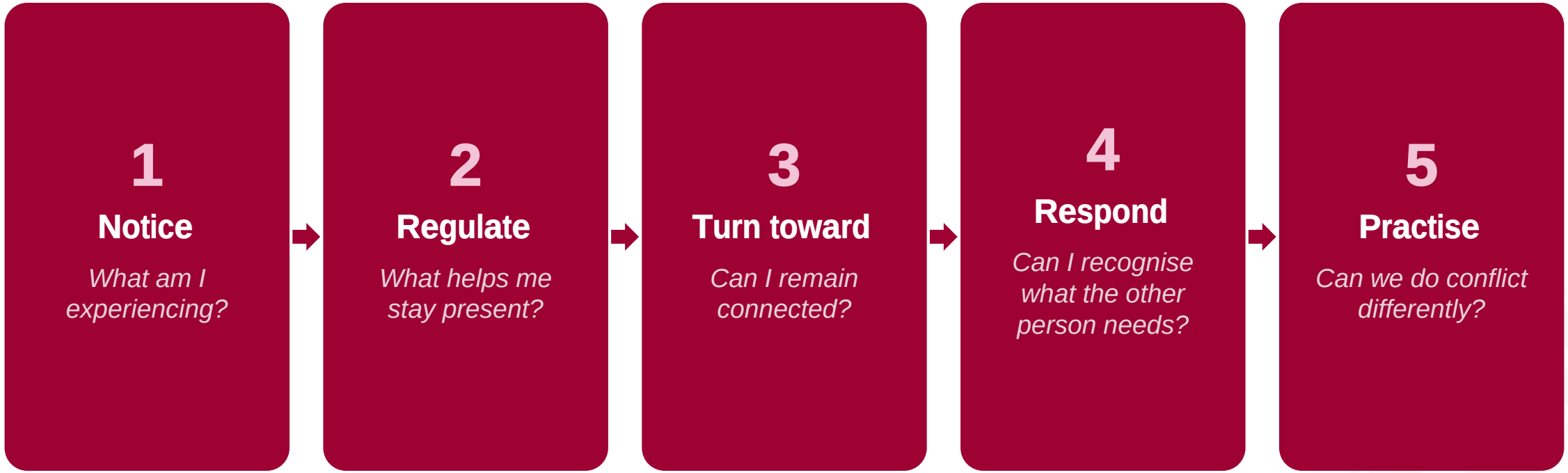
Responsiveness – does my response fit what you are communicating?

From: ”You never listen to me.”

To: “This is what happens between us”



TRM in practice



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What changed?

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

- ↓ Parent-adolescent conflict
- ↓ Parent reactivity
- ↑ Parent responsiveness
- ↑ Nonverbal communication
- ↑ Emotionally responsive interaction

NOT STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT

- Emotion coaching
- Adolescent mental health

Looking at the dyad

- After TRM:

➢more emotionally regulated

➢more consistent

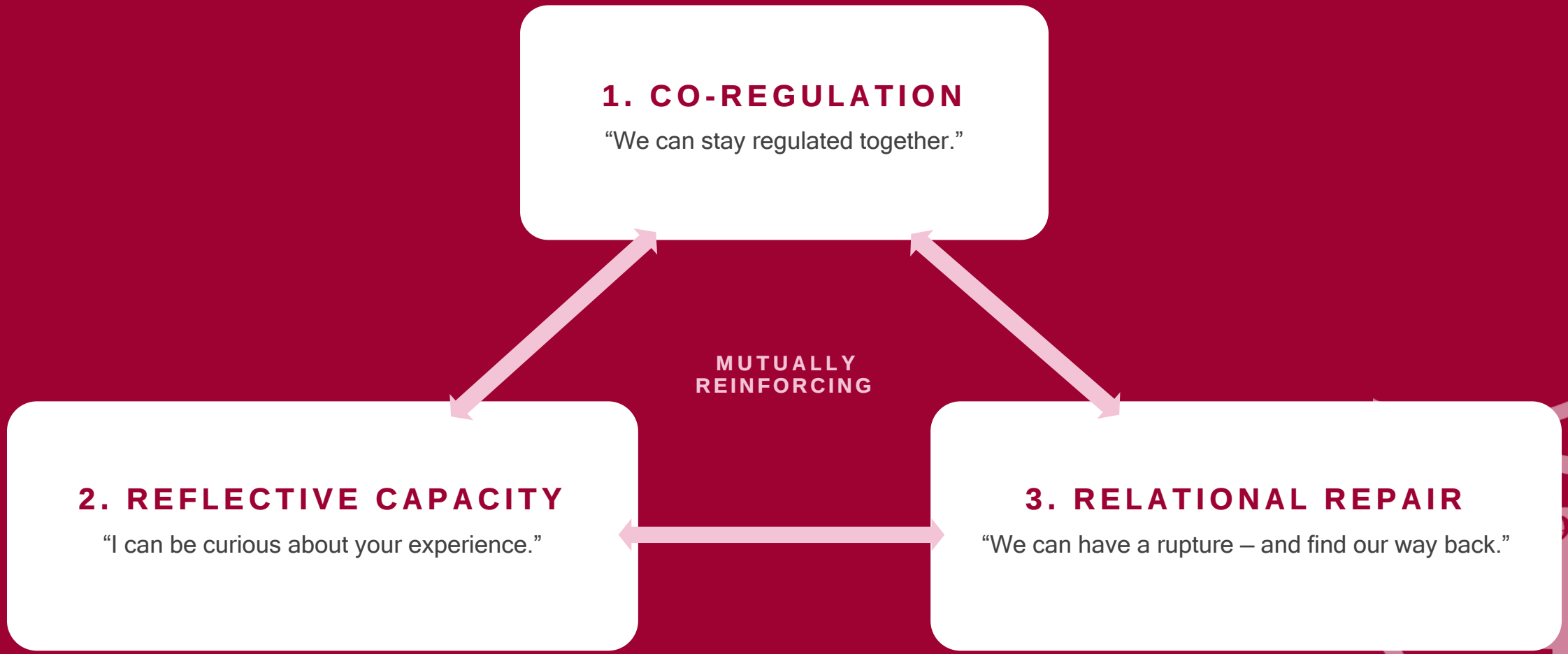
➢more predictable

during nonverbal conflict interaction



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Three interconnected pathways



From a linear model to a dynamic model

FROM A LINEAR MODEL…

Cognition

↕

Emotion

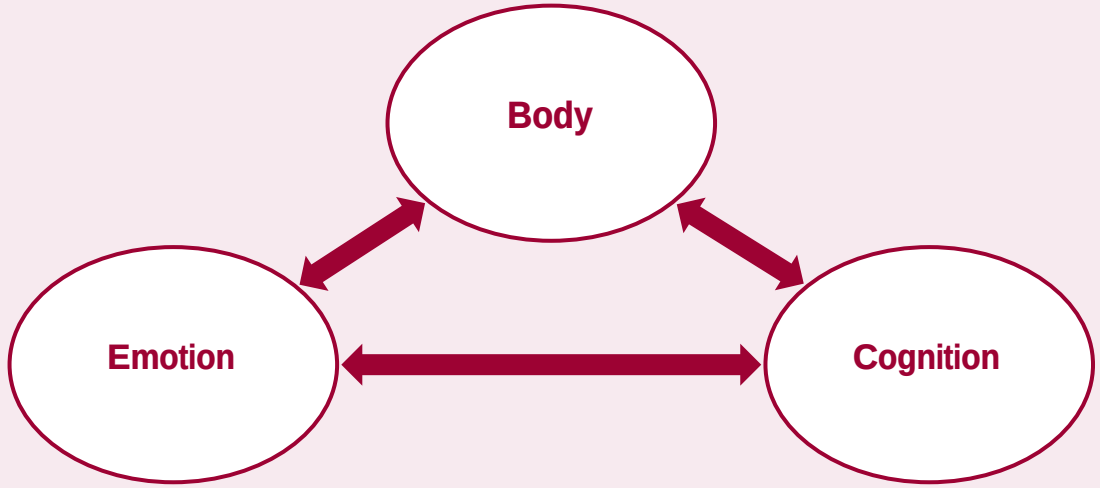
↕

Autonomic processes

→

TO A DYNAMIC MODEL

PARENT ↔ ADOLESCENT



Person ↔ relationship

RECURSIVE • MULTIDIRECTIONAL • SYSTEMIC

Three practice takeaways

THREE PRACTICE TAKEAWAYS

1. ASSESS THE SEQUENCE, NOT JUST THE INDIVIDUAL

2. FORMULATE RECIPROCAL PROCESSES, NOT INDIVIDUAL DEFICITS

3. TARGET THE INTERACTION AS THE SITE OF THERAPEUTIC CHANGE

Practise new ways of:

pausing → turning toward → responding → reconnecting



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References

- Colegrove, V. M., Havighurst, S. S., Kehoe, C. E., & Jacobsen, S. L. (2018). Pilot randomized controlled trial of Tuning Relationships with Music: Intervention for parents with a trauma history and their adolescent. *Child abuse & neglect*, *79*, 259-268.
- Colegrove, V. M., Havighurst, S. S., & Kehoe, C. E. (2019). Tuning Relationships with Music™: An intervention for parents with an interpersonal trauma history and their adolescents. *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia*, *7*(2).
- Colegrove, V. M., Havighurst, S. S., & Kehoe, C. E. (2019). Emotion regulation during conflict interaction after a systemic music intervention: Understanding changes for parents with a trauma history and their adolescent. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, *28*(5), 405-425.
- Colegrove, V., Havighurst, S. S., & Kehoe, C. (2025). Intervention for Parents With a Trauma History and Their Adolescent: Proposed Mechanisms of Change. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, *46*(2), e70004.

Questions

What brings about therapeutic change when conflict has become entrenched?

Co-regulation
Reflective capacity
Relational repair



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