

# Erasmus+

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În perioada 01.09.2018- 31.08.2020, la Școala Gimnazială Smaranda Gheorghiu din Târgoviște se derulează proiectul My country, my family and my community, într-un parteneriat de schimb școlar, în cadrul proiectului Erasmus+, cu numărul de identificare 2018-1-UK01-KA229-048248\_3, cu finanțare în valoare totală de 15. 104 Euro. Marea Britanie este parteneră în acest proiect, alături de România.

**În cadrul acestui proiect am învățat o metodă de lucru nouă pentru copiii cu dizabilități.**

## **Breathe first**

### **Why?**

One of the key concerns that many professionals working with young people who have experienced trauma, is often that they are unsure what to do before or whilst therapeutic intervention is facilitated. Often many young people can go long periods of time without clinical intervention, and this begs the question of what schools should do in the meantime? Throughout my time in schools I have seen many young people unable to

access interventions because of their arousal states and inability to articulate their thoughts, needs and trauma. Too often are these young people placed into therapeutic settings without any understanding of how their brains and bodies work.

For us to begin working successfully with these young people, we first need to understand the need to support their regulation.

My last school was a provision specifically for children living with SEMH & SEND. It was here that the breathe first system was born. When I took on the school there was a sense of uncertainty and I was overwhelmed by the vast issues and needs our young people were facing. Many of them were living with adversity and trauma daily. The need for an approach would be respectful to and support the majority of needs within the provision was what we needed. We had incredibly skilled staff working hard daily to support behaviour and distress, but we lacked a coherent strategy informed by evidence. I was fortunate enough to have read the work of Dr Stephen Porges and Bessel Van Der Kolk on how the body stored trauma and what role the body played in regulation. It was here that the answers were to be found and we build the breathe first system on the back of these vital findings and extraordinary approaches.

Physicality is at the core of the approach. We talk a lot about brains, but too often the bodies are neglected. This programme puts equal emphasis on both.

## How?

The breathe first programme places an emphasis on regulation. Regulation and working with bodies is something that often goes under the radar. We focus often on verbal de-escalation, talking therapies, emotional literacy and much more, but we forget that these children store trauma in their bodies. For many young people who have experienced trauma, their nervous systems have been adversely affected. These sensitised nervous systems can be a real challenge for many young people who often find it challenging to regulate and cognitively label arousal states.

Breathe first brings the science, theory and practicality and places it into a system and way of working that can work with children with vast and complex needs.

The programme is implemented through Training, planning & design days and follow up support. It's important that change is manageable and considers professionals credibility and current practices. The system is respectful to staff's autonomy and experiences but also upskills staff in developing new and emerging thinking in this field.

The key aspect of the programme is giving staff the tools to work with young people affected by trauma. The practical application of the theory is crucial. Breathe first gives staff the vocabulary, strategies, observation skills, systems, spaces and critical thinking in which to successfully support their students and themselves.

## **Training**

The training is split into two days or a series of twilights. The material is thorough and applied to context. The sessions are practical and combine existing knowledge with research and theory.

The training seeks to join the dots up. Many practitioners have extensive experience, knowledge and understanding when it comes to teaching and

supporting young people, the training often confirms what staff have observed for many years.

“I knew it was a thing, but I didn’t know it had a whole theory behind it.” Is the most regular comment we hear in feedback. Its our job to join the dots up for our incredible practitioners.

Content:

- Effects of childhood trauma on neurodevelopment & nervous systems
- Co regulation
- Attunement
- Reframing behaviours
- Planning for regulation
- Poly vagal Theory
- Growing neural pathways & neuroplasticity
- Practicalities of regulation
- Supporting dysregulation
- Interoception
- Vulnerability
- Arousal states
- Building safety
- Physical pacification
- Physicality of emotions
- Physical interventions (not restraint)

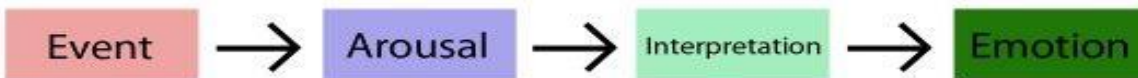
This is all delivered through practical activities that relate to each setting. The programme goes through each step of the approach methodically with many opportunities to develop comprehension and further support.

Each session has a lot of practical tasks, group work, presentation of ideas and live scenarios.

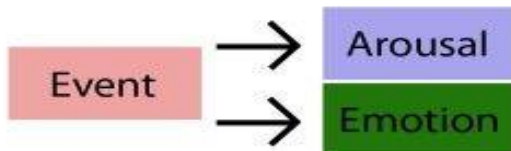
## Example training content

### Emotion Theory

#### **James-Lange Theory**



#### **Cannon-Bard Theory**



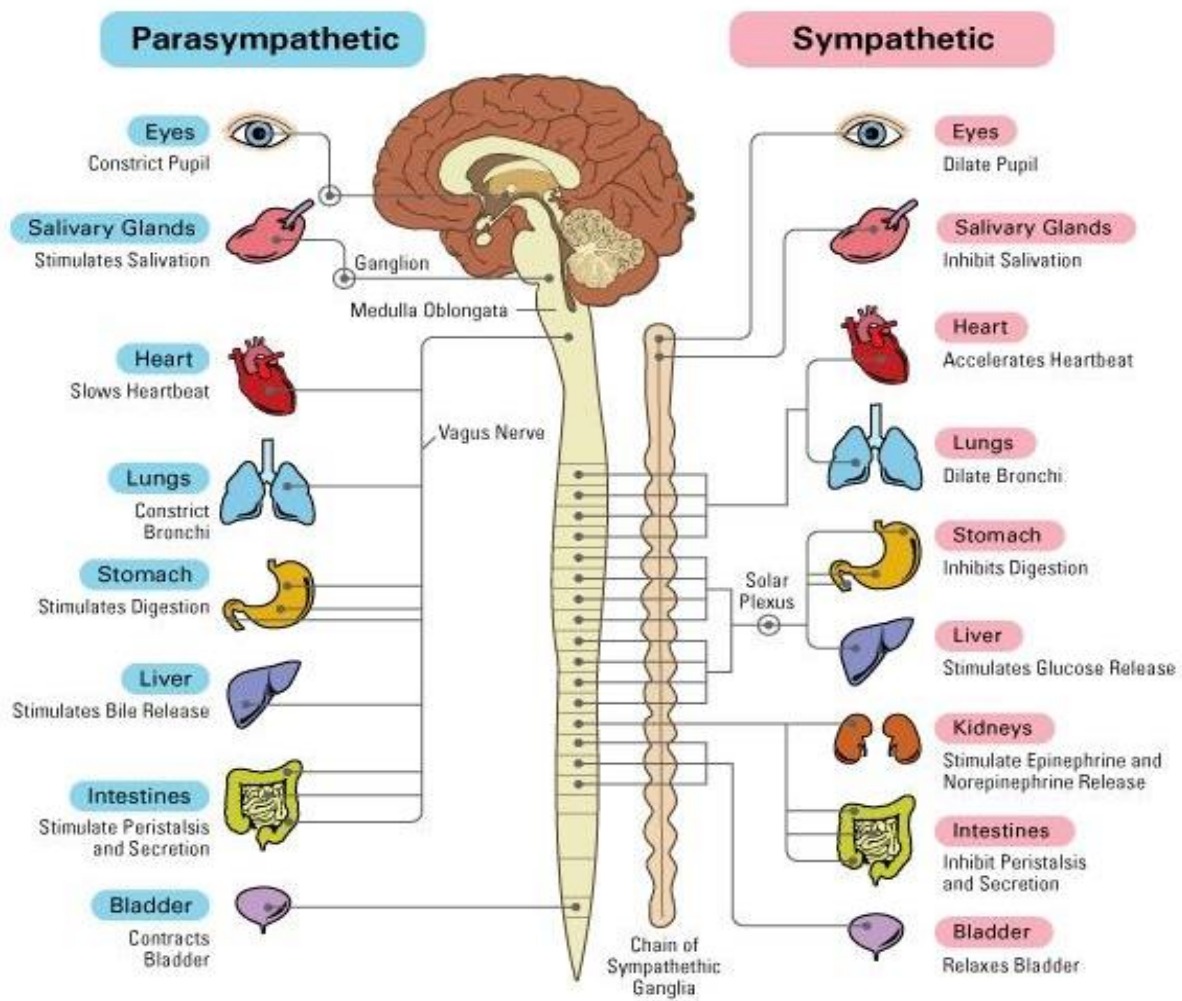
#### **Schachter-Singer Theory**



#### **Schachter Singer's Two-Factor theory**



## Autonomic nervous system



## Implementation

Planning days – Design of breathe first system is vital. BF I not a prescriptive programme. There are key elements that provisions should follow to maximise impact but there also exists an ability to be flexible. The planning days are the perfect opportunity to do that.

Often provisions are in challenging buildings and spaces need to be carefully considered.

The design days are a chance to observe existing practice and plan for the programme to be as bespoke as possible.

Planning day 1

Training day 1

Planning day 2

Training day 2

Coaching and embedding system

The planning days provide the opportunity to look at whole school systems and planning. The programme will naturally reshape the way we support learners and inform strategies both across school, therapeutic services and homes. The planning days provide the opportunity to add that planning to existing systems. Replication or creating more work is not what the breathe first programme requires. Building on existing practice and strengthening student support planning is where the focus will be.

The second planning day looks at spaces, whole school systems, interventions, policies and supports sensible changes and redesign.

At the end of the training process there is often a need to follow up and support staff in embedding the process. This can be done over visits or virtual support. This part of the process is not included in the initial price and can be accessed as and when necessary.

Each provision is also handed a programme manual and guidance in which they can further their development of the programme in their settings.

## Finally

End result:

Of course, this depends on each provision.

By the end of the process, provisions begin shifts towards thinking about behaviour and support through the lens of regulation.

An environment and system in place across the provision, with rooms specifically designed to support all types of regulation, co regulation embedded into staff's practice, interventions being facilitated that are informed by the theory covered in the training, timetables shaped around needing regulation breaks, parents accessing information on the breathe 1<sup>st</sup> programme and vitally young people beginning to use their regulation aids and understanding in other environments outside of the educational provision.

The conversation around adversity and trauma can often be overwhelming in terms of the challenges we face. This programme shifts us to a place of hope.



