



The Healing Brain: Supporting Children from Trauma to Resilience

Course Structure and Competency Framework

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
How to Use this Document	3
Course Structure	4
Learner Audience	4
Competency Framework	5
Course Content	8
Competency A - Explain brain development and function	8
Competency B - Provide trauma-informed care	9
Competency C - Incorporate culturally responsive approaches	10
Competency D - Build resilience in children and families	11

Acknowledgements

ACWS acknowledges the traditional lands upon which we live, work, and play. We recognize that all Albertans are Treaty people and have a responsibility to understand our history so that we can learn from the past, be aware of the present, and create a just and caring future. ACWS celebrates and values the resiliency, successes, and teachings that Indigenous people have shown us.

The ACWS office is located on Treaty 6 land in Amiskwaciwâskahikan, which is the traditional territory of the Plains Cree and an ancient gathering place of many Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. These lands have also been home to, and a central trading place of, the Blackfoot, Nakota, Assiniboine, Dene, the Métis people of western Canada, and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel.

We honour the courage and strength of Indigenous women. We honour them as life-givers and care-givers as we honour and learn from their continuing achievements, their consistent strength, and their remarkable endurance.

Our members serve all nations and all peoples. They are located on Treaty 4, 6, 7, and 8 lands across this province which include the five Métis territories of Alberta.

Project Contributors

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all past participants of the in-person workshops over the years, whose invaluable feedback shaped the foundation of this work. Special appreciation goes to the groups that vetted, tested, and helped iterate this content, including:

- Camrose Women's Shelter Society, Central Alberta Women's Shelter, Discovery House, Eagle's Nest Stoney Family Shelter, Fort McMurray Crisis Society, Phoenix Safe House, Wellspring Family Resource and Crisis Centre, and YWCA Sheriff King Home.
- Elders of Stoney Nation who gathered to remember and tell stories honouring children: Helen Beaver, Mary Fox, Wilf Fox, Delia Poucetter, Charlie Rabbit, Roland Rollinmud, Georgina Twoyoungmen, Buddy Weseley, and Peter Wesley.
- ACWS Education and Training Committee.
- The Further Education Society of Alberta Indigenous Committee.

Project Funders

We would also like to acknowledge that this educational offering is made possible with the funding from IODE Alberta and the Government of Alberta Ministry of Children and Family Services.



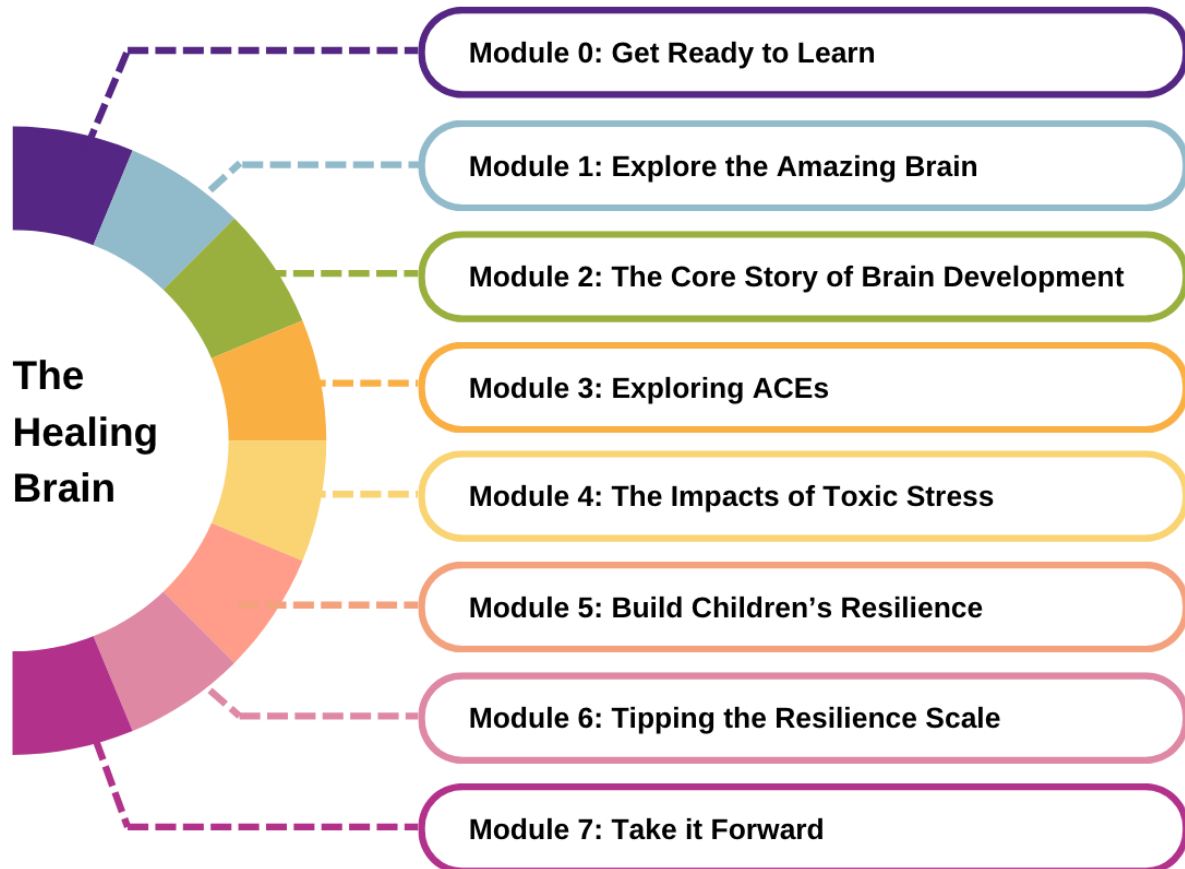
How to Use this Document

This Competency Framework has been developed for the use of individuals from several different audiences. The table below describes how each section can be used by each intended audience.

Section	Professional Development Assessors	Employers	Front-line Staff
Course Structure	Assess the course meets required time and content standards for continuing professional development.	Assess the course structure and time commitment for their staff.	<p>Demonstrate awareness of the length and structure of the course.</p> <p>Balance learning with work responsibilities.</p>
Competency Framework	Evaluate the competencies required for certification or licensure in relevant fields.	Identify key competencies their staff will gain.	Review the competencies they are expected to develop.
Course Content	Verify the learning tasks and high-level content that must be covered for each competency.	Clarify detailed program content and performance expectations for each competency.	Plan learning, allocate time effectively, and focus on developing competencies.

Course Structure

The Healing Brain: Supporting Children from Trauma to Resilience is a self-paced, online course consisting of six core modules, with one orientation module and one closing module as bookends. Each core module is expected to take approximately one hour to complete.



Learner Audience

The primary audience is **front-line staff** working with children in the context of women's shelters/domestic abuse shelters in Alberta. These individuals may have varying levels of experience working with children exposed to domestic violence and differing levels of knowledge regarding healthy early childhood brain development. The course is designed to equip participants with the essential knowledge and skills to promote healthy early brain development, mitigate the effects of trauma, integrate culturally responsive strategies, and foster resilience in children impacted by domestic violence.

Other individuals working in women's shelters/domestic abuse shelters who interact with children in their daily routines, but who are not directly involved in children's programming could also benefit from the course and improve their ability to connect with children in this context. Individuals working with children in other contexts may also benefit from the course to enhance their understanding of early childhood brain development and trauma-informed care.

Competency Framework

The competencies addressed in *The Healing Brain: Supporting Children from Trauma to Resilience* align with the graphic below. This framework highlights the four core competencies essential for front-line staff working with children and their families. It also emphasizes the guiding values and attitudes necessary for providing safe and effective care for children exposed to domestic violence.



Below are the specific competencies addressed in the course.

A. Explain early brain development and function	✓
1. Describe how the brain develops during early childhood and the role of the first five years in long-term outcomes.	
2. Explain how experiences impact brain development.	
3. Describe how to support the development of strong executive function skills.	
4. Explain the concept of brain plasticity throughout life span.	
5. Use practical tools to explain brain development to children and their families.	

B. Provide trauma-informed care	✓
1. Identify how exposure to domestic violence and adverse experiences can derail healthy brain development in children.	
2. Recognize signs of stress and trauma responses in children.	
3. Explain the neurobiological impact of toxic stress.	
4. Adapt age-appropriate approaches to meet the emotional and behavioural needs of children affected by trauma.	
5. Create a supportive and emotionally safe environment for children.	
6. Educate families and care-givers about the impacts of trauma and violence on parenting.	
7. Reflect on how your own beliefs, assumptions, and values impact the support you provide to children and their families.	

C. Incorporate culturally responsive approaches	✓
1. Apply culturally responsive practices based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action to support Indigenous children and families.	
2. Acknowledges the cultural diversity of the children and families.	
3. Incorporate Indigenous knowledge and experiences to foster a respectful and healing environment.	
4. Demonstrate cultural humility and sensitivity when working with children and their families.	

D. Build resilience in children and families	✓
1. Describe resilience and its development.	
2. Select age-appropriate strategies to support the development of resilience in children.	
3. Identify and enhance internal and external protective factors that contribute to resilience.	
4. Work collaboratively with families and care-givers to strengthen their capacity to support their children's resilience.	

Course Content

For additional course information, please contact the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters at learning@acws.ca.

Competency A - Explain brain development and function

Learning tasks	Content
1. Describe how the brain develops during early childhood and the role of the first five years in long-term outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Brain architecture ● Stages of brain development ● Sensitive and critical periods in brain development
2. Explain how experiences impact brain development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Building a house” metaphor ● “Serve and return” metaphor ● Role of positive vs. adverse experiences in brain development
3. Describe how to support the development of strong executive function skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Air traffic control” metaphor ● Key executive function skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Working memory ○ Cognitive flexibility ○ Self-control ● Role of play in building executive function skills ● Routine, structure, and practice
4. Explain the concept of brain plasticity throughout the lifespan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Neuroplasticity ● Brain plasticity in childhood vs. adulthood ● Impact of trauma and healing on brain plasticity ● Lifelong learning (via experiences)
5. Use practical tools to explain brain development to children and their families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A “hand model” of the brain ● “Serve and return” metaphor

Competency B - Provide trauma-informed care

Learning tasks	Content
<p>1. Identify how exposure to domestic violence and adverse experiences can derail healthy brain development in children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adverse childhood experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ACE study ○ ACE categories ● Three realms of ACEs ● Living in a home with family violence ● The arousal continuum
<p>2. Recognize signs of stress and trauma responses in children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The effects of domestic violence on children ● Differences in trauma responses based on age and development
<p>3. Explain the neurobiological impact of toxic stress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive stress, tolerable stress, and toxic stress ● Signs of toxic stress in children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Physical ○ Behavioural ○ Emotional ● Impact of toxic stress on brain structure and function (health, learning, and behaviour)
<p>4. Adapt age-appropriate approaches to meet the emotional and behavioural needs of children affected by trauma.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trauma-informed communication with children ● Strategies to reduce anxiety ● Emotional regulation
<p>5. Create a supportive and emotionally safe environment for children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategies to establish trust and safety with children ● Promote calm, connection, and healing
<p>6. Educate families and care-givers about the impacts of trauma and violence on parenting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effects of trauma on parent-child relationships
<p>7. Reflect on how your own beliefs, assumptions, and values impact the support you provide to children and their families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflective practice and ongoing learning ● Empathy and non-judgment ● Professional boundaries

Competency C - Incorporate culturally responsive approaches

Learning tasks	Content
<p>1. Apply culturally responsive practices based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action to support Indigenous children and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action
<p>2. Acknowledge the cultural diversity of the children and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cultural identity and its importance in trauma recovery ● Respect cultural differences in family dynamics, parenting, and healing
<p>3. Incorporate Indigenous knowledge and experiences to foster a respectful and healing environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build trust and rapport with Indigenous children and families ● How to respectfully ask about and incorporate cultural practices into care
<p>4. Demonstrate cultural humility and sensitivity when working with children and their families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building partnerships with culturally diverse communities and care-givers ● Circle of courage

Competency D - Build resilience in children and families

Learning tasks	Content
1. Describe resilience and its development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dimensions of resilience ● Biological sensitivity ● Resilience as a dynamic process (brain plasticity)
2. Select age-appropriate strategies to support the development of resilience in children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Play and creative activities ● Positive self-talk and emotional regulation skills ● Peer relationships and social support networks
3. Identify and enhance internal and external protective factors that contribute to resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internal and external factors ● Resilience quadrant ● “Resilience Scale” metaphor
4. Work collaboratively with families and care-givers to strengthen their capacity to support their children’s resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education and information sharing ● Three principles for improving child outcomes