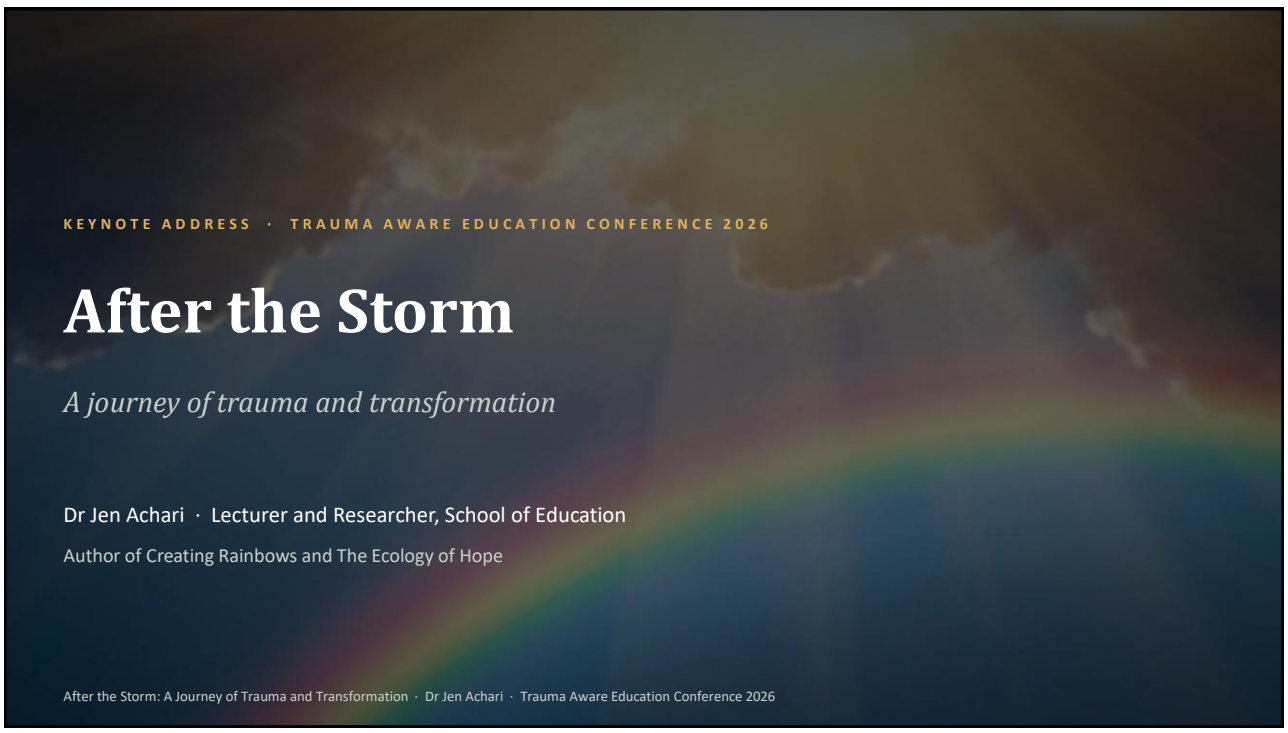
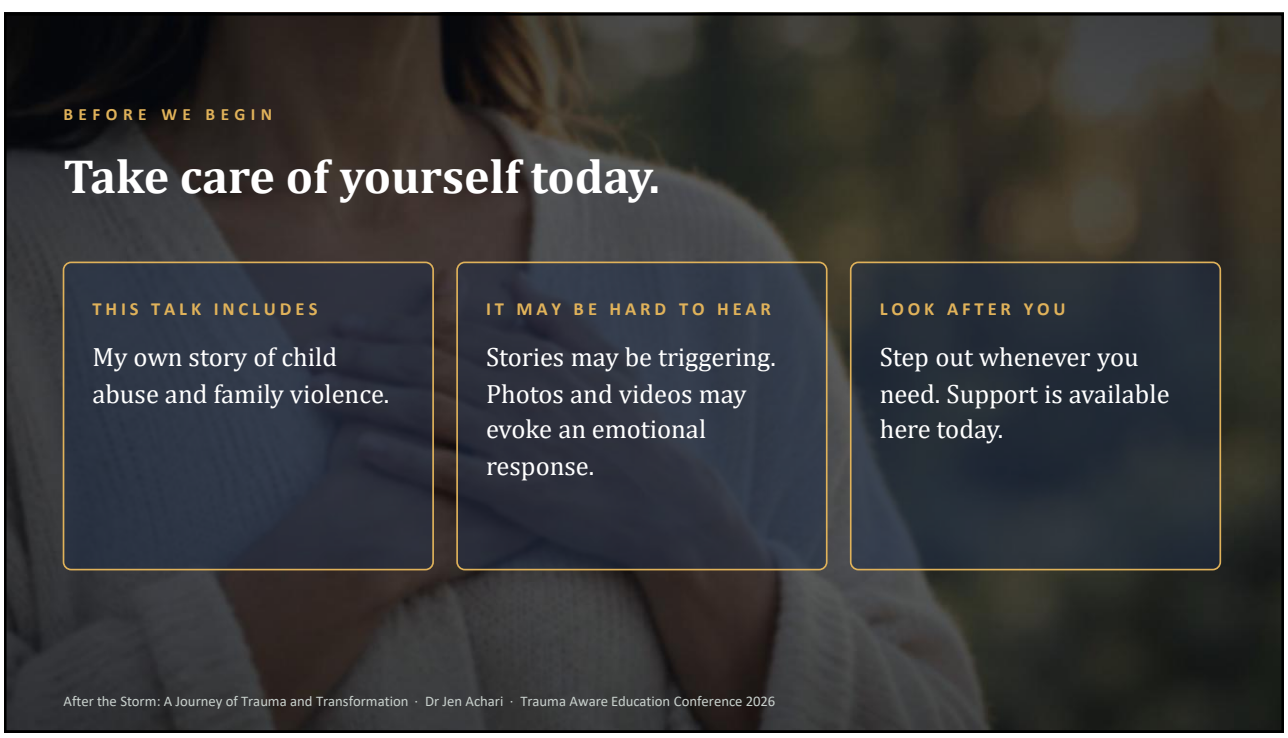

KEYNOTE ADDRESS · TRAUMA AWARE EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2026
After the Storm
A journey of trauma and transformation
Dr Jen Achari · Lecturer and Researcher, School of Education
Author of Creating Rainbows and The Ecology of Hope
After the Storm: A Journey of Trauma and Transformation · Dr Jen Achari · Trauma Aware Education Conference 2026

1


BEFORE WE BEGIN
Take care of yourself today.
THIS TALK INCLUDES
My own story of child abuse and family violence.
IT MAY BE HARD TO HEAR
Stories may be triggering. Photos and videos may evoke an emotional response.
LOOK AFTER YOU
Step out whenever you need. Support is available here today.
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2

WHY THE STORY HAS TO BE RETOLD · THE THREE E'S OF TRAUMA

We recreate the past in the present.



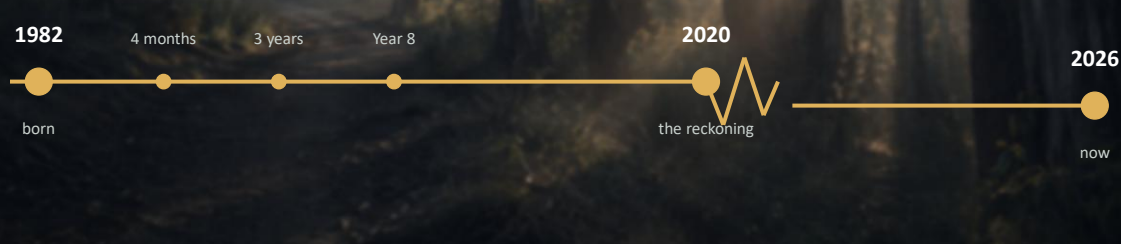
"Individual trauma results from an **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse **effects** on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). *SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach* (HHS Publication No. SMA 14-4884), p. 7.

3

1982 TO 2020 · THE GROUND BREAKS OPEN

The dark night of the soul.



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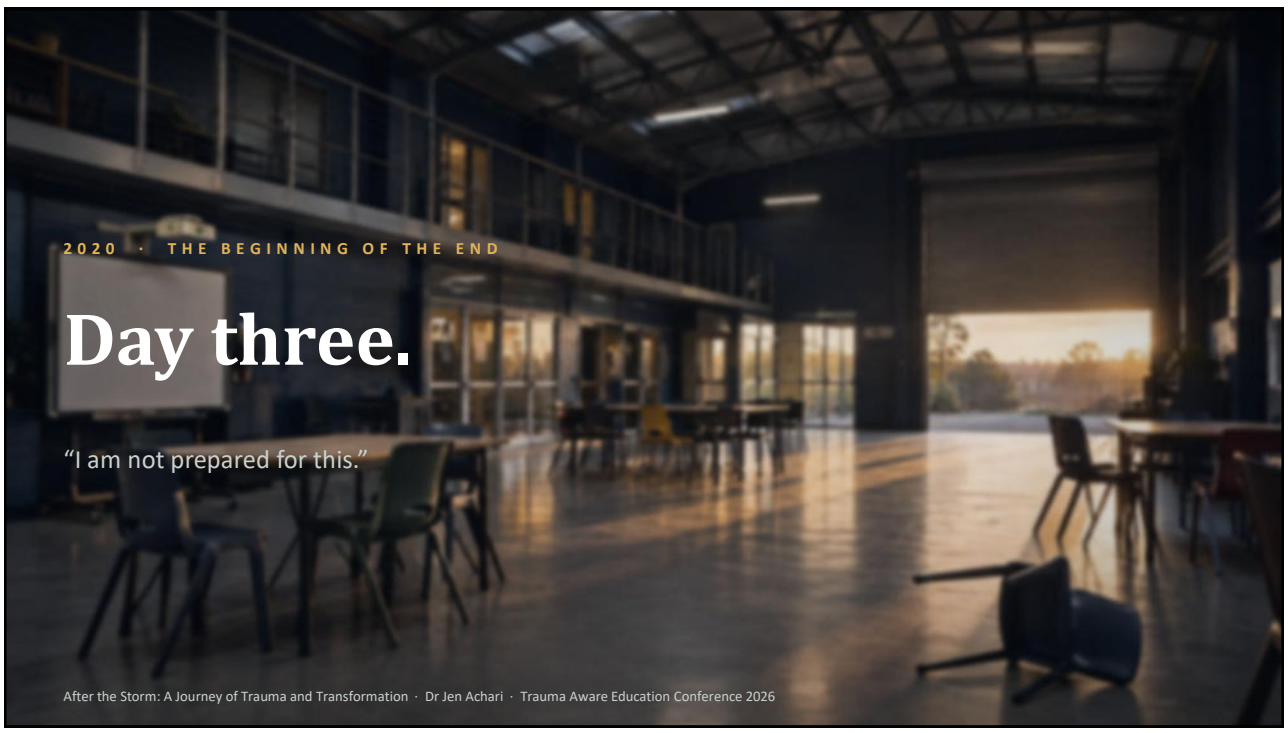

5

A MONTH IN · THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING DAY

Six or more.

–20 years off a life.

Six or more ACEs: death at 60.6 years on average, against 79.1.



Felitti, V. J., et al. (1998). *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *14*(4), 245–258. Brown, D. W., et al. (2009). *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *37*(5), 389–396. Categories after the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study; graphic form after the CDC and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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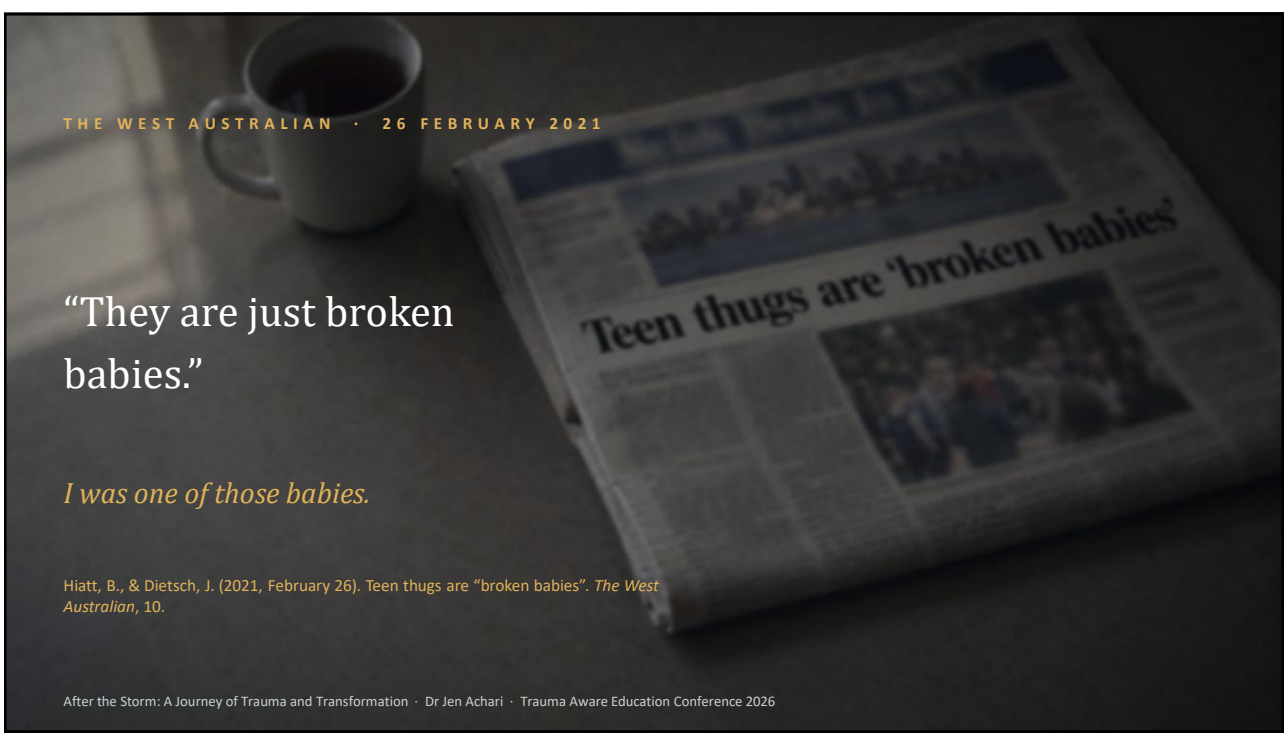
6



Seven News Perth, 2021

7



"They are just broken babies."

I was one of those babies.

Hiatt, B., & Dietsch, J. (2021, February 26). Teen thugs are "broken babies". *The West Australian*, 10.

8

Vicarious transformation.

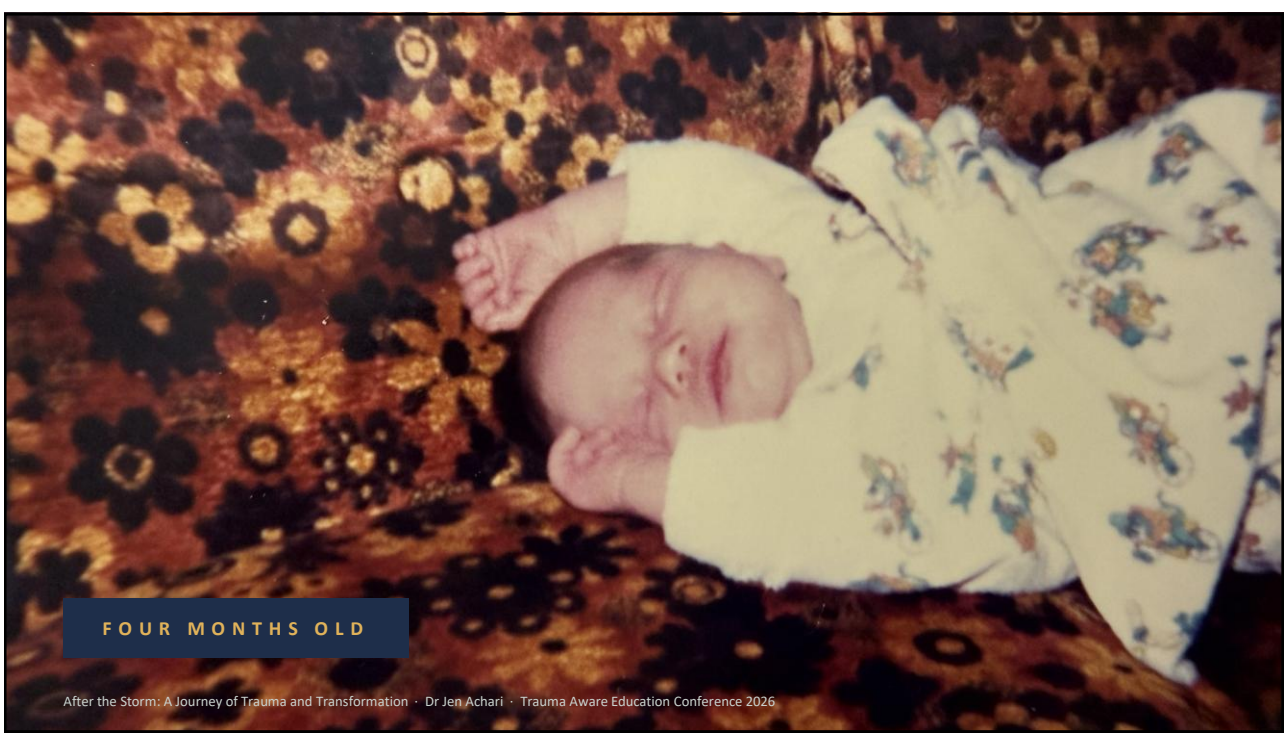


Dr Laurie Anne Pearlman

"Through opening ourselves to the darker parts of the human experience, we may grow. When our hearts and minds are open to whatever we encounter, our humanity is enhanced."

Pearlman, L. A. (2011). *Keynote address* [Conference session]. ATTACh Annual Conference.

9



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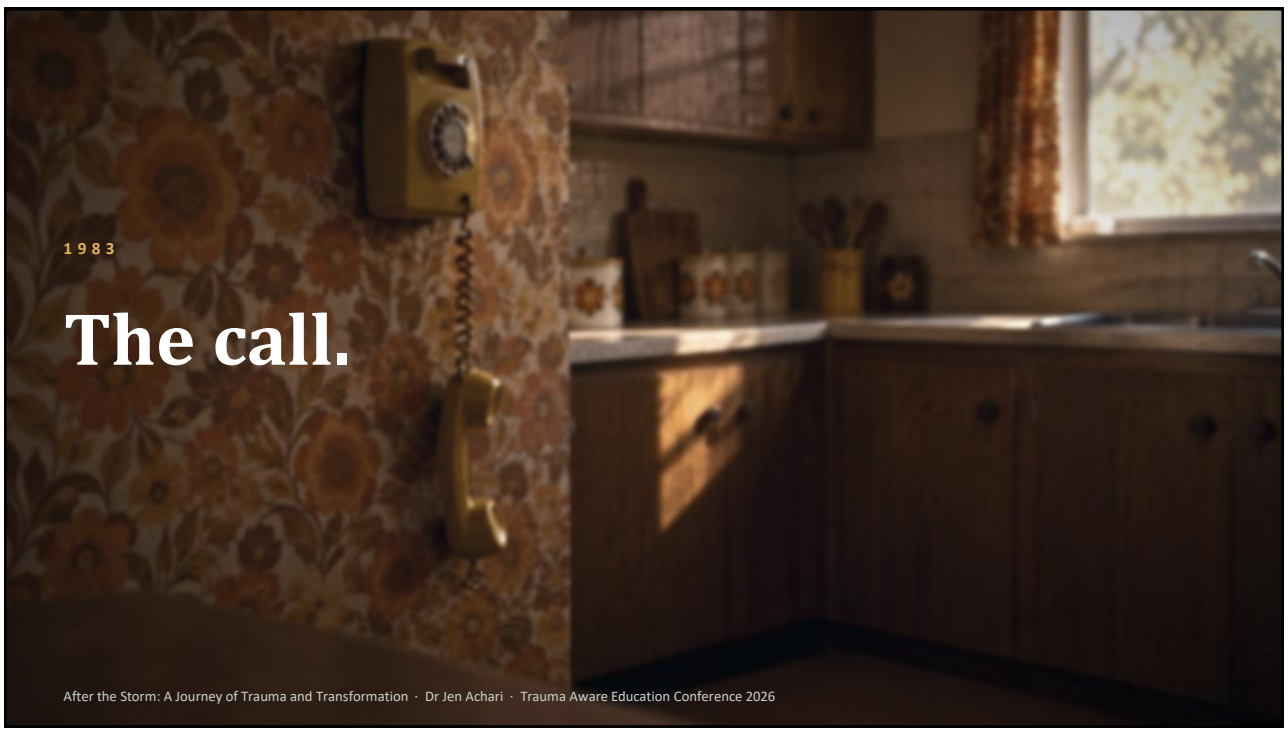
1983
The call.
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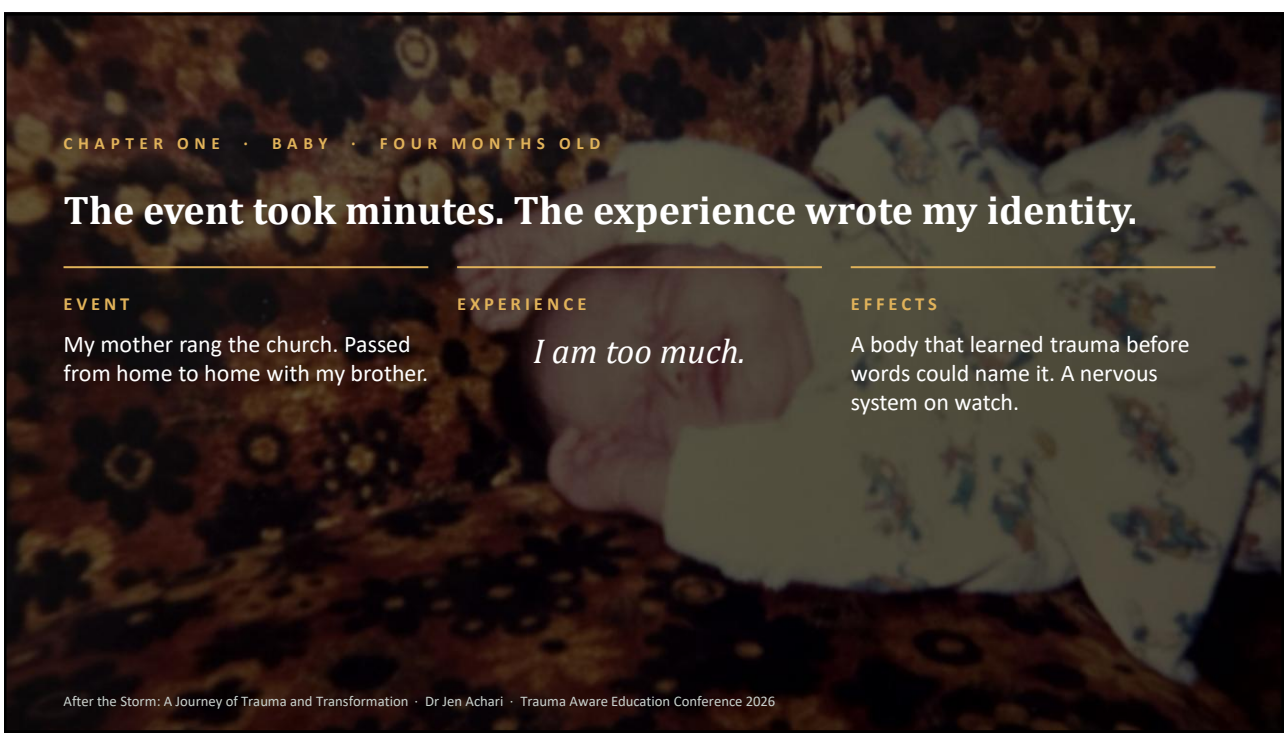
CHAPTER ONE · BABY · FOUR MONTHS OLD
The event took minutes. The experience wrote my identity.
EVENT
My mother rang the church. Passed from home to home with my brother.
EXPERIENCE
I am too much.
EFFECTS
A body that learned trauma before words could name it. A nervous system on watch.
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THREE YEARS OLD
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Conference 2026

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PRE-SCHOOL
The house next door.
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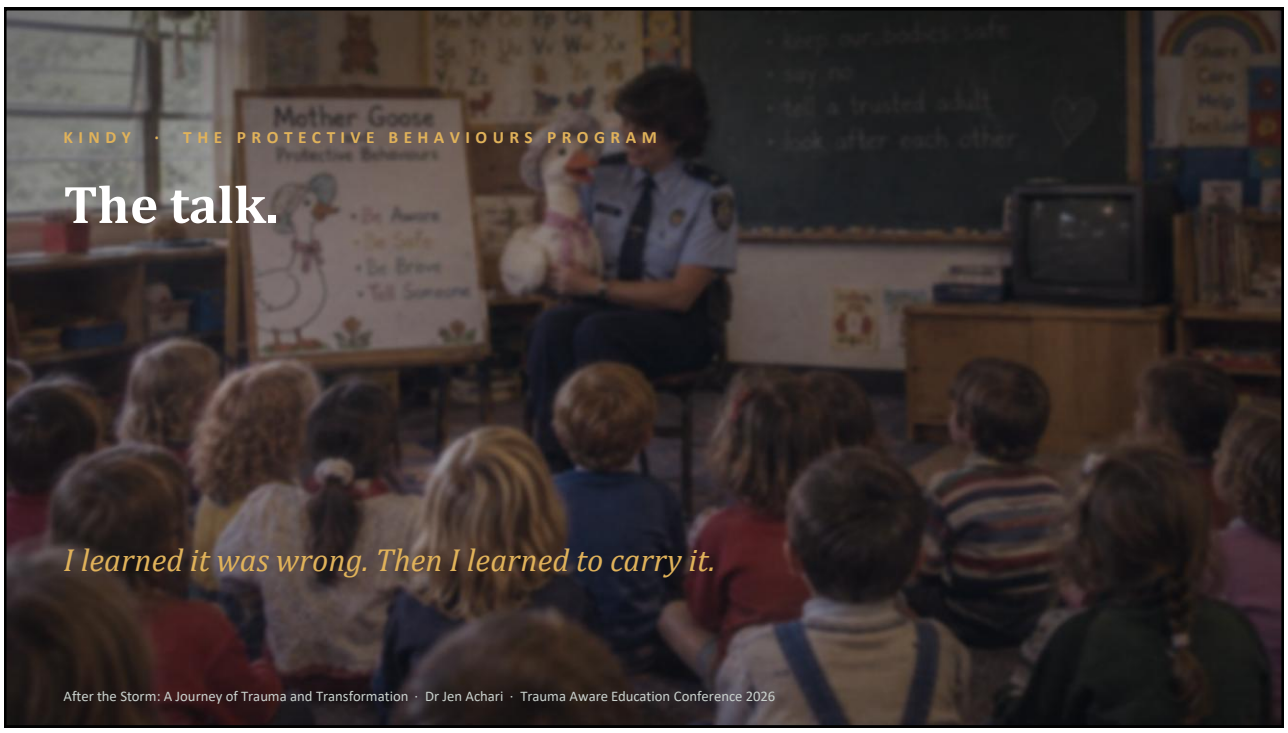
14


KINDY · THE PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOURS PROGRAM
The talk.
I learned it was wrong. Then I learned to carry it.
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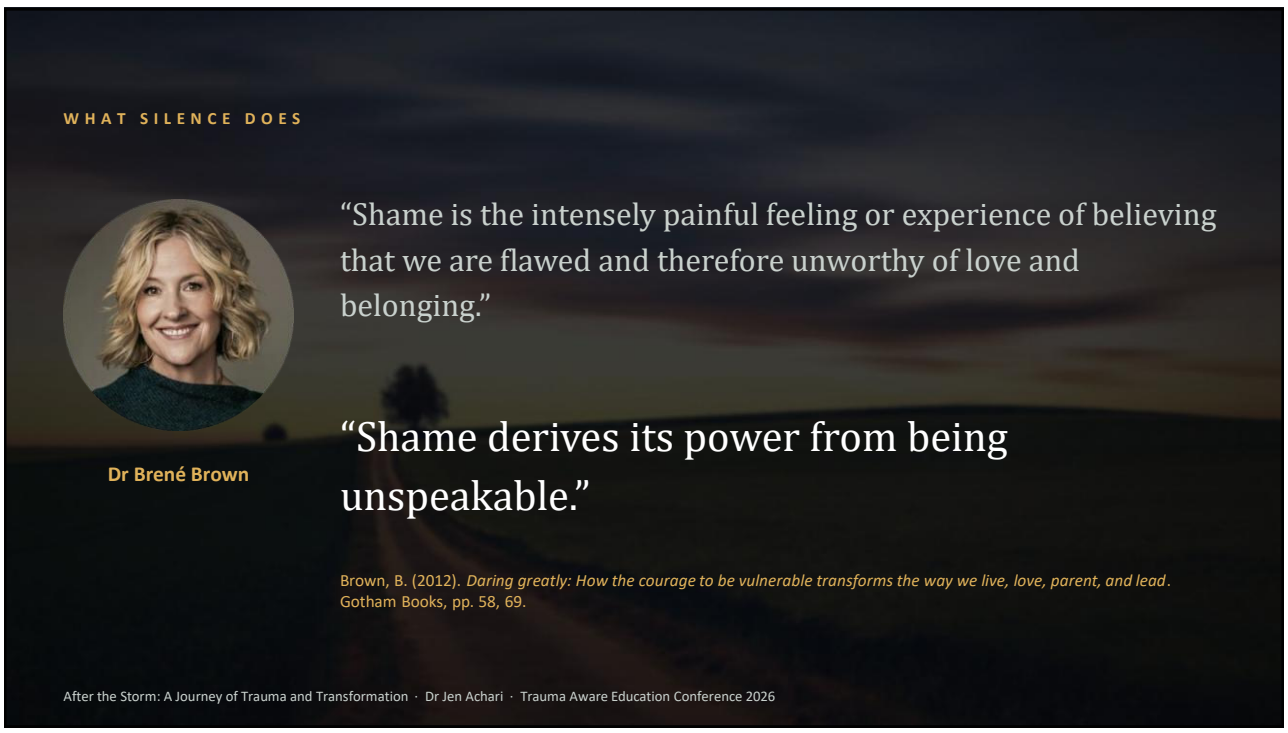
WHAT SILENCE DOES
Dr Brené Brown
"Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging."
"Shame derives its power from being unspeakable."
Brown, B. (2012). Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead. Gotham Books, pp. 58, 69.
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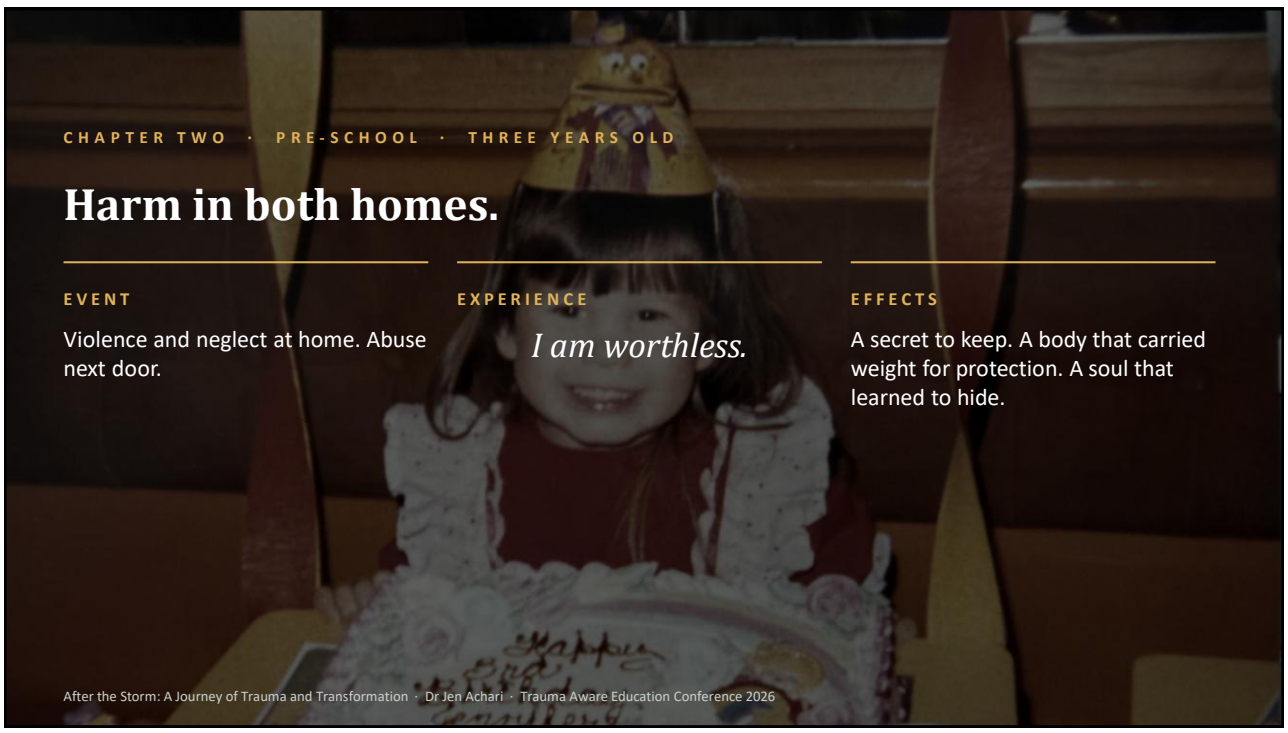
16


CHAPTER TWO · PRE-SCHOOL · THREE YEARS OLD
Harm in both homes.
EVENT
Violence and neglect at home. Abuse next door.
EXPERIENCE
I am worthless.
EFFECTS
A secret to keep. A body that carried weight for protection. A soul that learned to hide.
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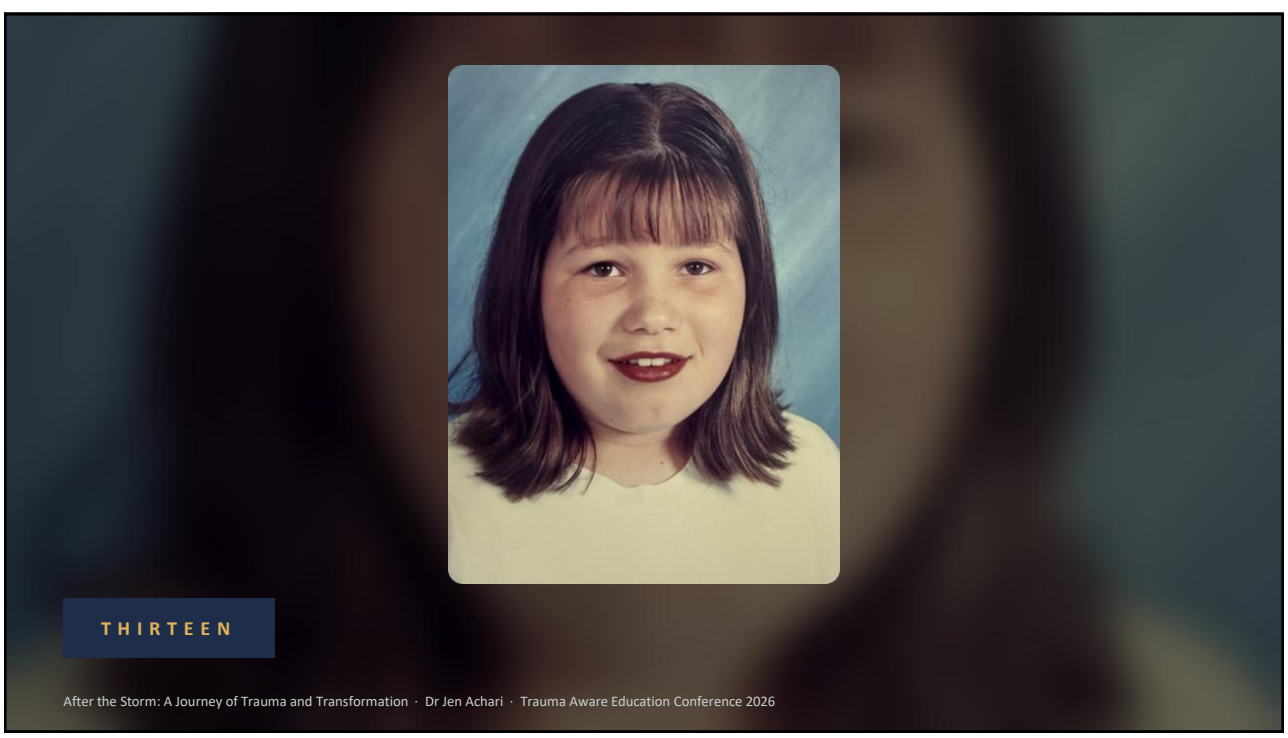
17


THIRTEEN
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18


YEAR 8
The safe house.
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ART THERAPY
Rainbows.
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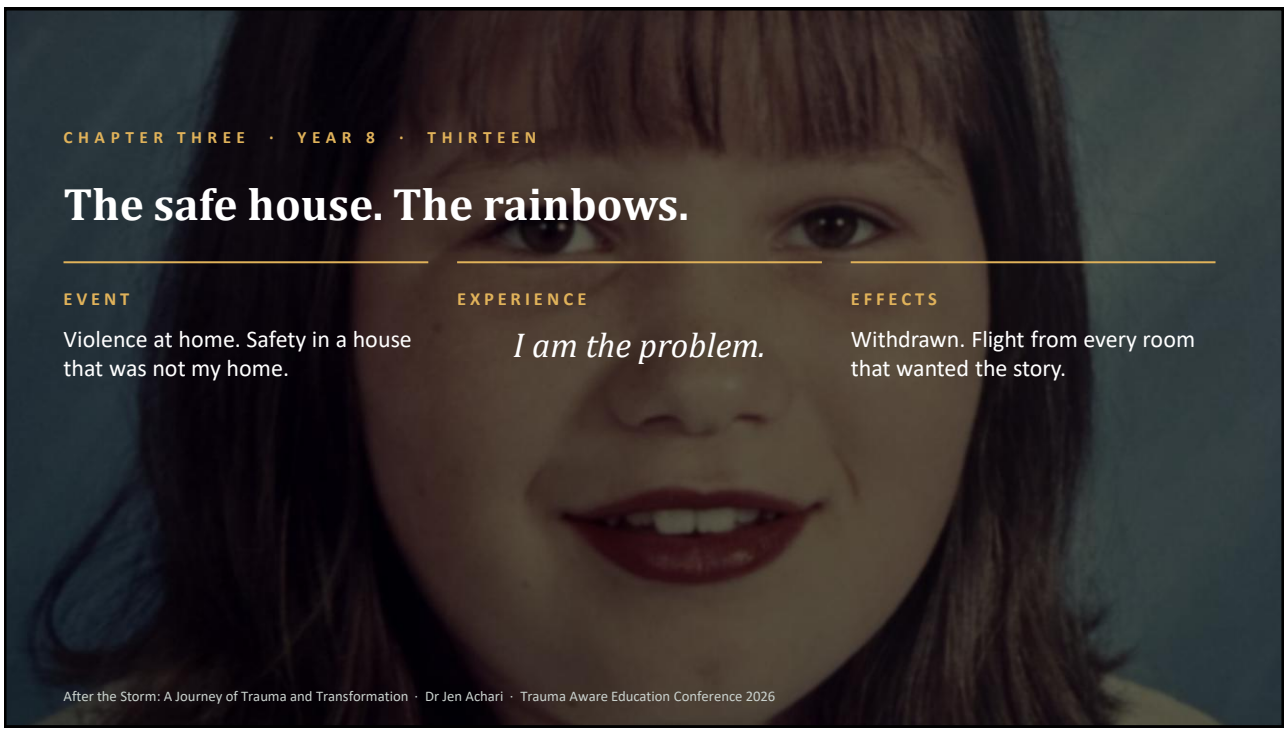
20


CHAPTER THREE · YEAR 8 · THIRTEEN
The safe house. The rainbows.
EVENT
Violence at home. Safety in a house that was not my home.
EXPERIENCE
I am the problem.
EFFECTS
Withdrawn. Flight from every room that wanted the story.
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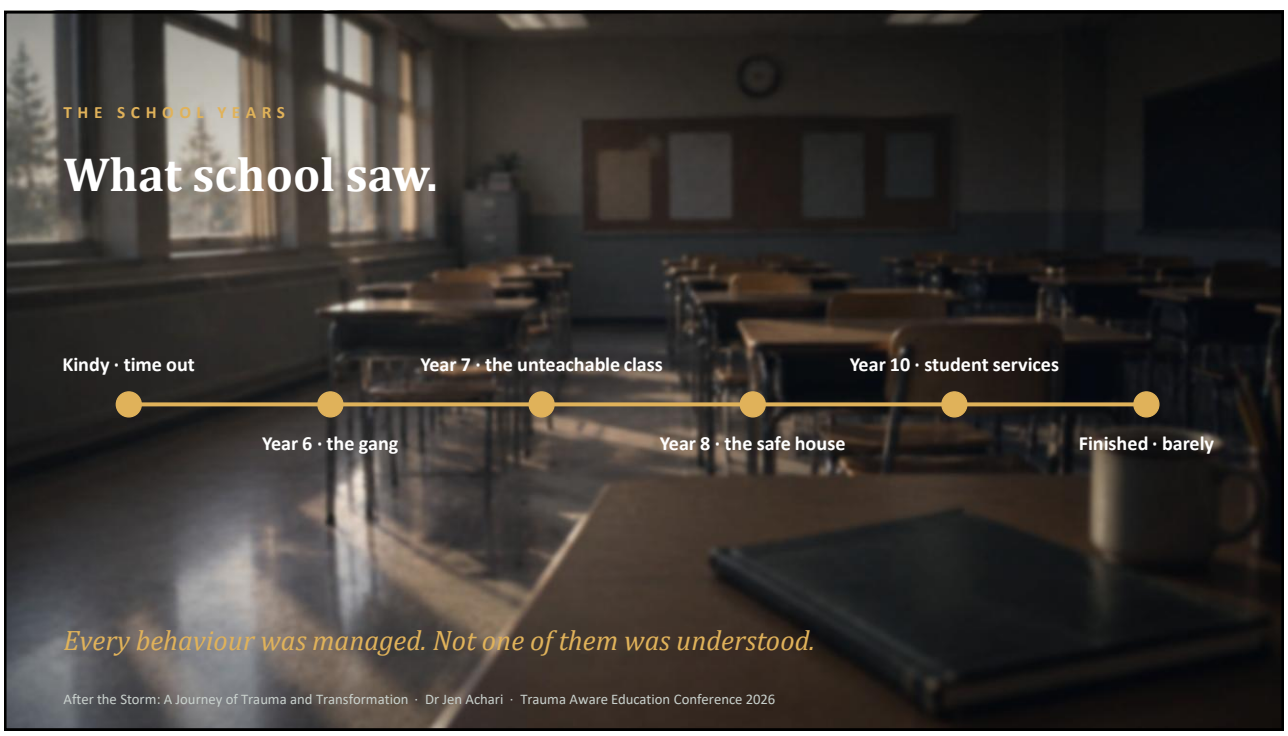
THE SCHOOL YEARS
What school saw.
Kindy · time out
Year 6 · the gang
Year 7 · the unteachable class
Year 8 · the safe house
Year 10 · student services
Finished · barely
Every behaviour was managed. Not one of them was understood.
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ONE SENTENCE

Someone reframed it.

"You have passion for young people."

23

THE AGENTS OF CHANGE · RELATIONSHIPS, PLURAL



Dr Bruce Perry

"The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will be to recover from trauma and thrive. Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love."

Perry, B. D., & Szalavitz, M. (2006). *The boy who was raised as a dog: And other stories from a child psychiatrist's notebook*. Basic Books.

24

THE OTHER BRAINS THAT REWIRED MINE

A web of interconnections: people and systems.



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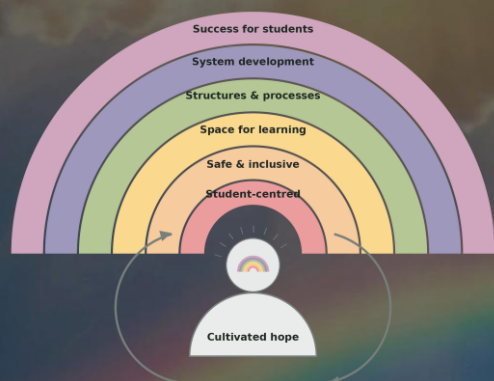
The Ecology of Hope

Achari, J. (2026). The ecology of hope: Building rainbows in education systems. *British Educational Research Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.70263

Architectural hope *The six layers a system builds.*



Latent hope *reaches up.*

Structural hope *is internalised.*

Tangible hope *Cultivated hope, externalised and visible.*

Past Present Future

Transformative hope *Past storms transformed into present rainbows, toward a future envisioned in colour.*

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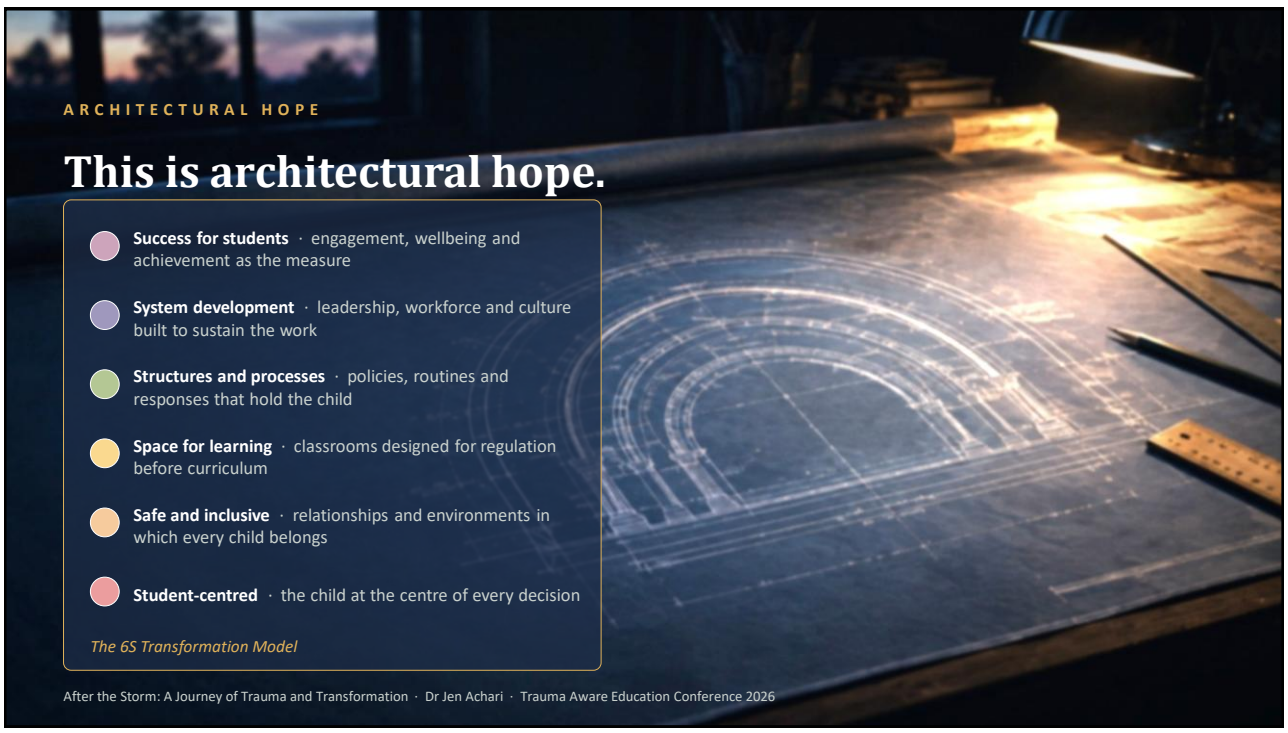
ARCHITECTURAL HOPE
This is architectural hope.
Success for students · engagement, wellbeing and achievement as the measure
System development · leadership, workforce and culture built to sustain the work
Structures and processes · policies, routines and responses that hold the child
Space for learning · classrooms designed for regulation before curriculum
Safe and inclusive · relationships and environments in which every child belongs
Student-centred · the child at the centre of every decision
The 6S Transformation Model
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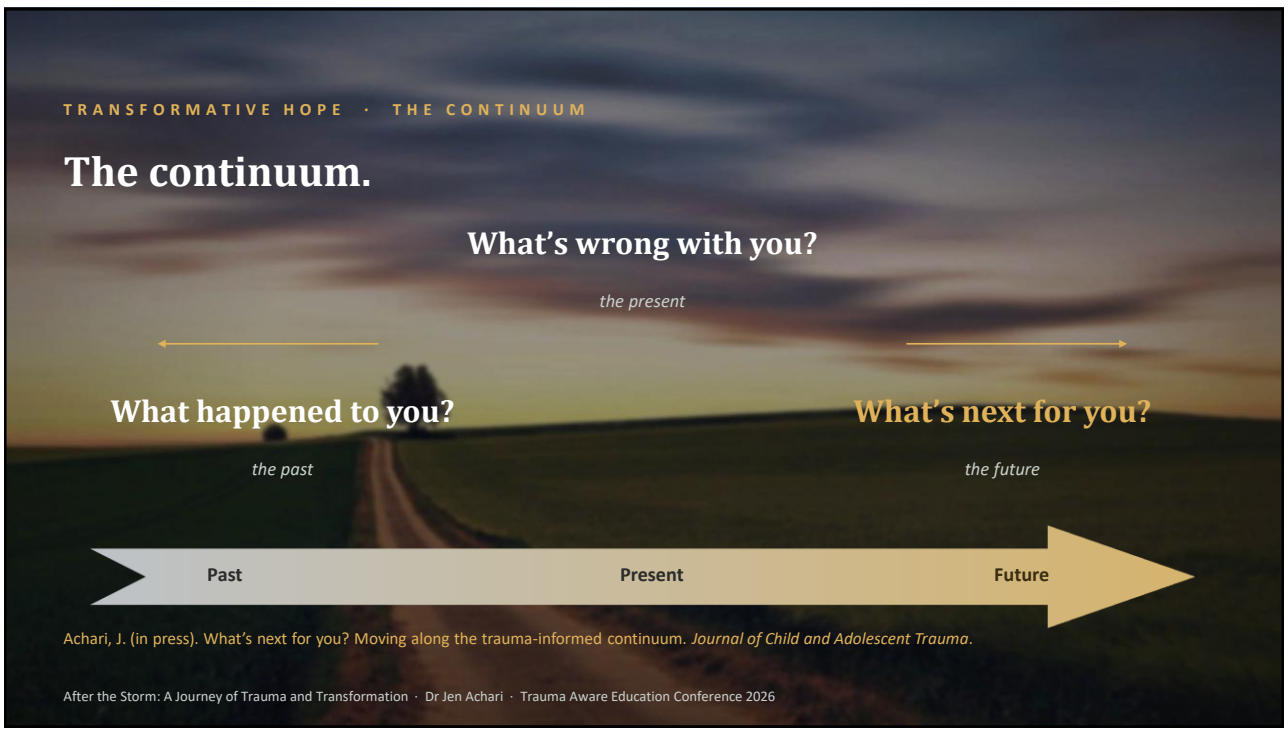
TRANSFORMATIVE HOPE · THE CONTINUUM
The continuum.
What's wrong with you?
the present
What happened to you?
the past
What's next for you?
the future
Past
Present
Future
Achari, J. (in press). What's next for you? Moving along the trauma-informed continuum. Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma.
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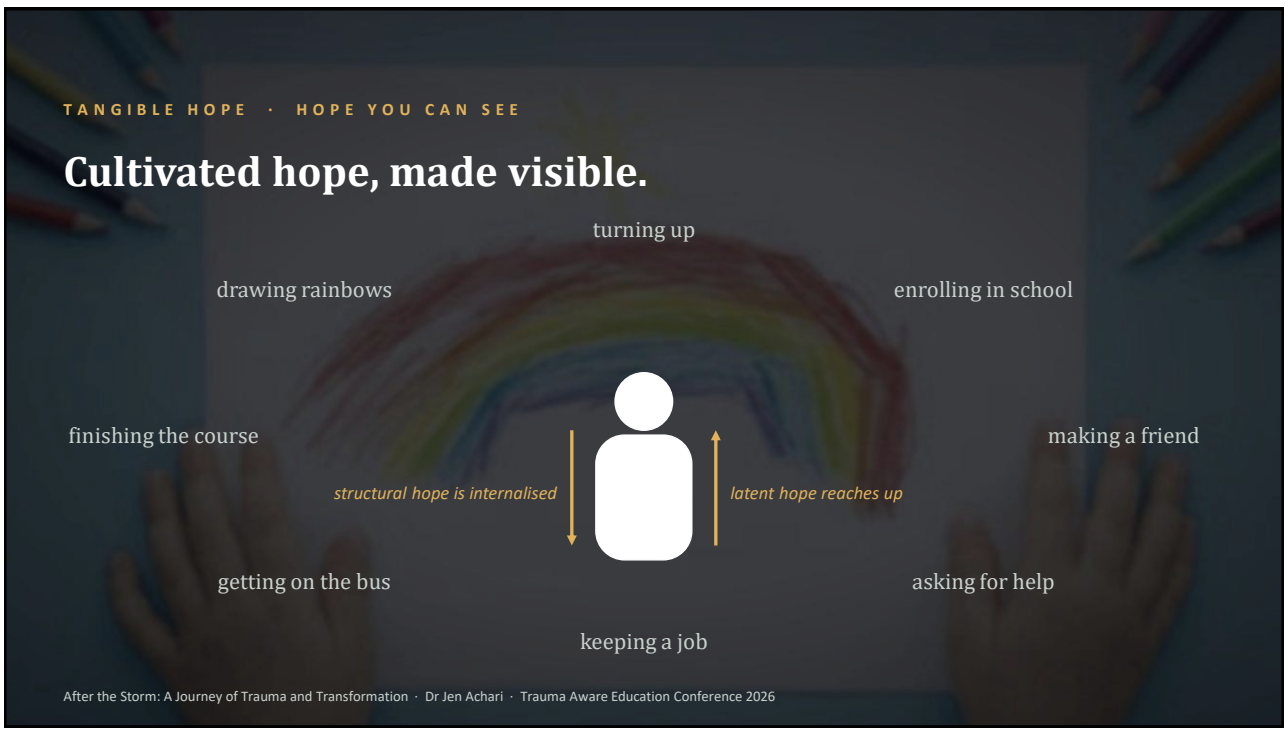
28


TANGIBLE HOPE · HOPE YOU CAN SEE
Cultivated hope, made visible.
turning up
drawing rainbows
enrolling in school
finishing the course
making a friend
structural hope is internalised
latent hope reaches up
getting on the bus
asking for help
keeping a job
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OUR STORY · AUSTRALIAN CHILD MALTREATMENT STUDY
I am not unique. This is our story.
62.2%
Two in three people in this room.
Higgins, D. J., Mathews, B., Pacella, R., Scott, J. G., Finkelhor, D., Meinck, F., Erskine, H. E., Thomas, H. J., Lawrence, D. M., Haslam, D. M., Malacova, E., & Dunne, M. P. (2023). The prevalence and nature of multi-type child maltreatment in Australia. Medical Journal of Australia, 218(S6), S19–S25. https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.51868
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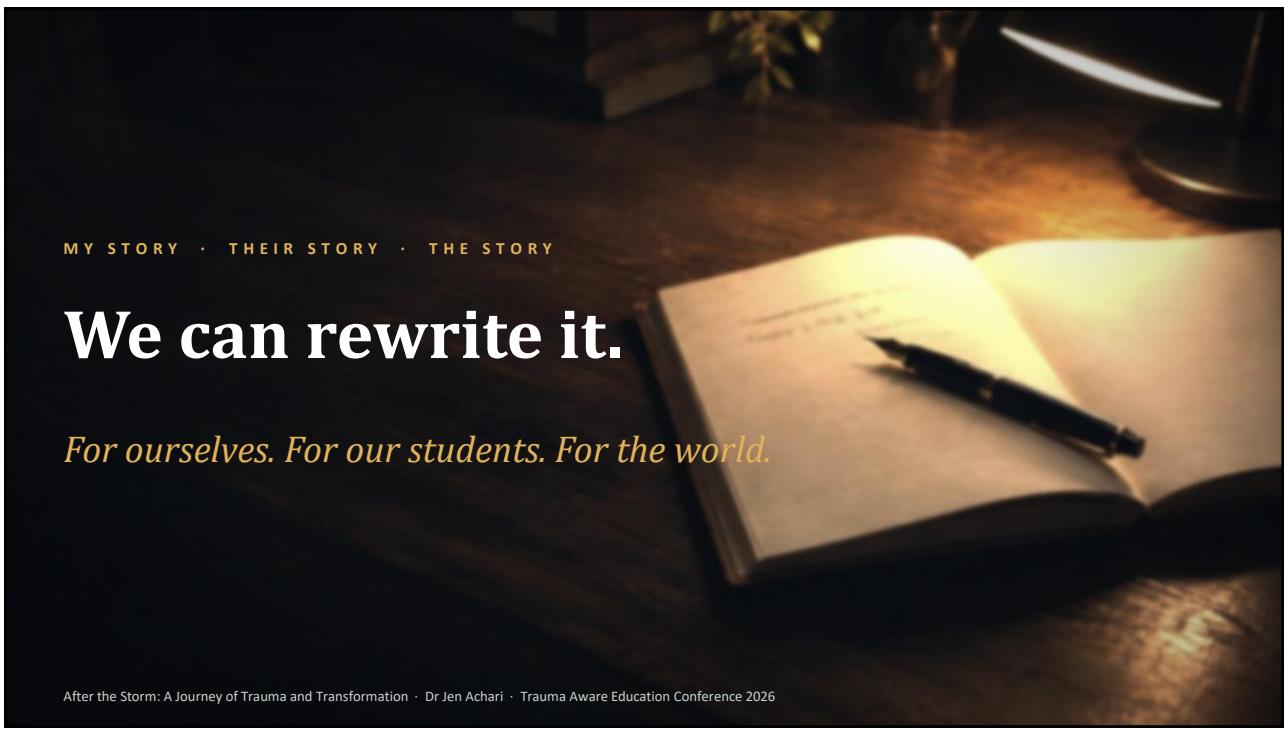
30


MY STORY · THEIR STORY · THE STORY
We can rewrite it.
For ourselves. For our students. For the world.
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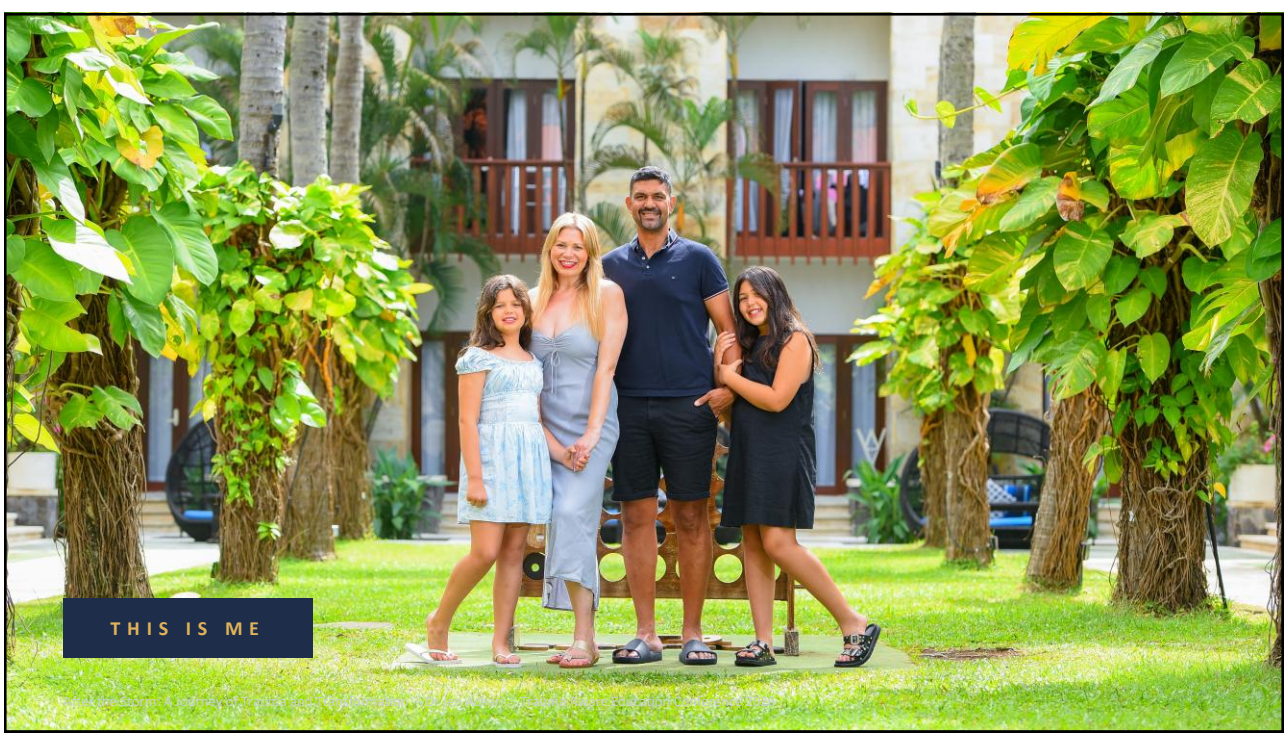
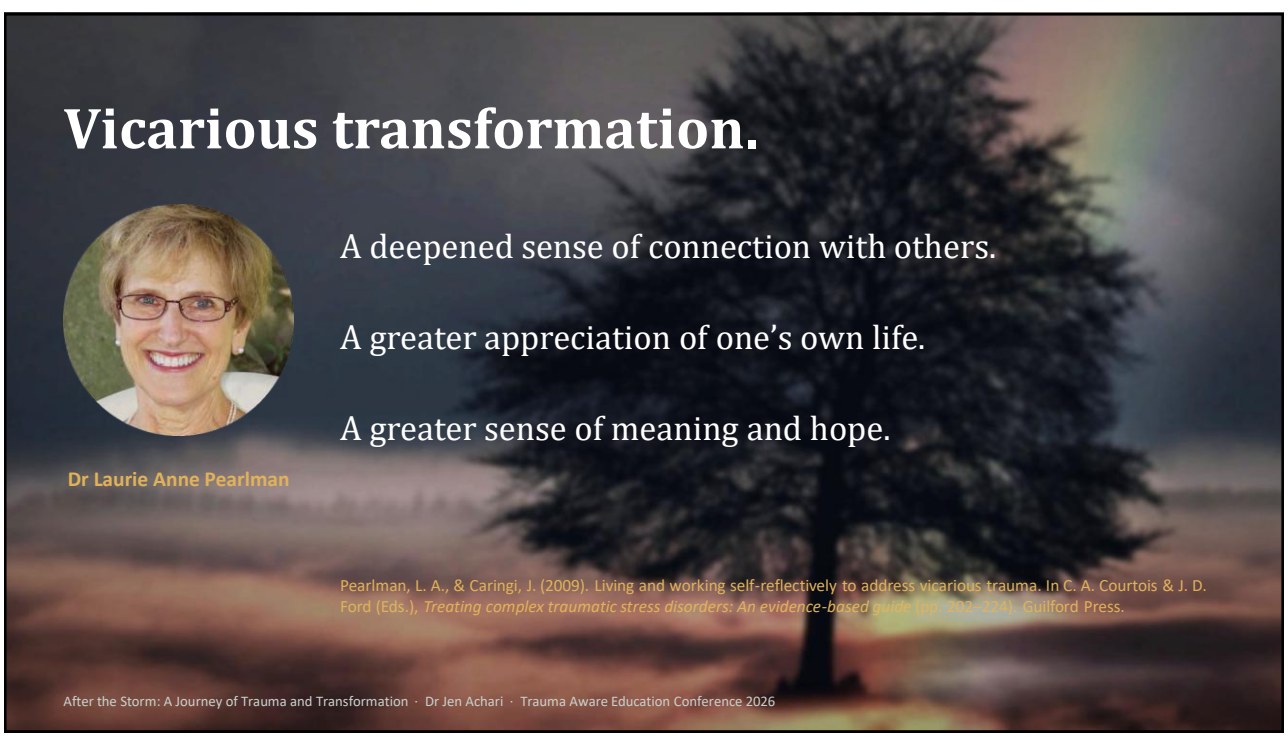
31


THIS IS ME

32


FEATURETTE
HD

33


Vicarious transformation.
A deepened sense of connection with others.
A greater appreciation of one's own life.
A greater sense of meaning and hope.
Dr Laurie Anne Pearlman
Pearlman, L. A., & Caringi, J. (2009). Living and working self-reflectively to address vicarious trauma. In C. A. Courtois & J. D. Ford (Eds.), Treating complex traumatic stress disorders: An evidence-based guide (pp. 202–224). Guilford Press.
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FINDING MEANING



Dr Viktor Frankl

"We must never forget that we may also **find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation**, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to **transform a personal tragedy into a triumph**, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement."

Frankl, V. E. (2006). *Man's search for meaning*. Beacon Press. (Original work published 1946), p. 112.

35

TRAUMA EXISTS · THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE



Little Jen

"Trauma may predict risk **BUT** it does not determine destiny."

36

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Higgins, D. J., Mathews, B., Pacella, R., Scott, J. G., Finkelhor, D., Meinck, F., Erskine, H. E., Thomas, H. J., Lawrence, D. M., Haslam, D. M., Malacova, E., & Dunne, M. P. (2023). The prevalence and nature of multi-type child maltreatment in Australia. *Medical Journal of Australia*, *218*(S6), S19–S25. https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.51868

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