

# **Creative Therapies with Children: Neurodiversity and Trauma through the lens of Polyvagal Theory Workshop**

Neurodivergent children experience the world through different sensory and regulatory pathways, yet traditional therapeutic approaches often rely heavily on verbal processing and behavioural compliance. Polyvagal Theory offers a fundamental understanding of how all humans connect and relate—revealing how every nervous system moves through states of safety, activation, and shutdown regardless of neurotype. This understanding becomes the foundation for all therapeutic work. By developing their own nervous system literacy first, practitioners can meet neurodivergent clients' nervous system to nervous system, recognising that healing and relationship occurs through co-regulation rather than cognitive insight alone. This bottom-up, body-centred approach honours neurodivergent children's innate communication styles through creative and non-speaking modalities like play, art, movement, and symbolic communication—building capacity for regulation and relational connection in ways that respect how their nervous systems naturally engage with the world. This is particularly significant for neurodivergent children who have experienced trauma, as it creates safety through attuned presence rather than demanding adaptation to neurotypical therapeutic norms.

Grounded in Polyvagal Theory, this experiential workshop supports practitioners to develop neurodiversity-affirming approaches with neurodivergent children. Through embodied learning and clinical case analysis, participants will cultivate their own nervous system awareness as the foundation for recognising and responding to clients' autonomic states in session.

## **Presenters: Anna Crooks & Amanda Flynn**



Amanda and Anna have been collaborating for four years within a private practice setting in Cairns, Far North Queensland, working with NDIA, Medicare Mental Health, and private clients. Together they bring over 19 years of combined private practice experience.

Amanda is an accredited clinical play therapist with certifications in Autplay Therapy, Sandplay, and Expressive Therapies. Anna comes from a creative arts therapies background, integrating dance/movement, art, sandplay, and play in her work with children and adults.

Together, they specialise in working within family systems to build understanding, support, and education for families while supporting capacity building and trauma processing for all individuals. They share a special interest in neurodivergent children and families.

As Social Workers, Amanda and Anna utilise multimodal, creative approaches within a humanistic and body-centred framework. Their work supports non-verbal development, relational processing, and trauma healing while honouring each client's innate ways of connecting and communicating. They support children and their caregivers towards regulation, growth, and meaningful change through attuned, nervous-system informed practice.

### **Presenters Professional Affiliations**

#### **Amanda Flynn**

Director at Treehouse Theraplay

Mental Health Social Worker, Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)

Play Therapist

Expressive Arts Therapist

#### **Anna Crooks**

Senior Practitioner at Treehouse Theraplay

Mental Health Social Worker, Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)

Creative Arts Therapist, Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association (ANZACATA)

