

Building Thriving Connections: The Contextualised Optimal Relationship Approach (CORA)

From Connection to Flourishing in Every Child Interaction

with Dr Kate Renshaw (Australia)



Every child who enters our professional care brings their whole self - their strengths, struggles, context, and story. Yet too often, interventions focus narrowly on fixing deficits rather than building the relational foundation that allows children to truly flourish. Without understanding how to create optimal relationships that are responsive to each child's unique context, well-meaning professionals can inadvertently miss opportunities for transformation. The quality of our professional relationships with children isn't just important - it's the foundation upon which all effective engagement is built.

The Contextualised Optimal Relationship Approach (CORA) provides a comprehensive, evidence-based framework that integrates play therapy principles with relationship science to create transformative connections with children across diverse professional settings. Developed from over two decades of clinical practice and research, CORA moves beyond traditional intervention models to empower professionals with practical tools for building relationships that acknowledge each child's context, culture, and individuality. This approach recognises that when children experience optimal relationships with the adults in their professional lives, they develop the confidence, resilience, and sense of safety needed to overcome challenges and reach their full potential.

By the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

- Understand the evidence base for relationship-focused approaches and why relationships are the most powerful tool for creating change in children's lives
- Apply the core principles of CORA to create contextually responsive, child-centred relationships across diverse professional settings including therapy, education, health, and community work
- Recognise and leverage the therapeutic power of play and child-centered interactions within your professional role, regardless of setting
- Build environments and interactions that foster connection, autonomy, creativity, and flexibility - essential ingredients for child wellbeing and development
- Adapt your relational approach to respect cultural contexts, family systems, neurodiversity, trauma histories, and individual differences
- Implement practical strategies for navigating challenging behaviours through connection rather than control, building cooperation and trust
- Integrate play-based and child-centered communication techniques that deepen engagement and understanding.
- Develop sustainable relational practices that prevent burnout while maximising impact in your work with children and families

This seminar is designed for professionals working with children across health, welfare, education, justice, clinical, social, therapeutic, and community settings. Whether you're a psychologist, counsellor, social worker, allied health professional, educator, coach, youth worker, or community practitioner, CORA offers a transformative framework for deepening your relational impact and supporting children to thrive.

Dr. Kate is a Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor (RPT-S™) with over two decades of experience transforming how professionals connect with children. Known internationally as "Dr Play"; she is the creator of the evidence-based Teacher's Optimal Relationship Approach (TORA) and its adaptations CORA (Contextualised Optimal Relationship Approach) and ORA (Optimal Relationship Approach), which bring play therapy principles into educational, clinical, parenting, and community settings. An accomplished researcher, clinician, author, and podcast host, Dr. Kate has contributed to policy reform through parliamentary submissions and advisory work, positioning play and relationship-focused care as fundamental children's rights. She holds memberships with the Australian Play Therapy Association, British Association of Play Therapists, International Consortium for Play Therapy Associations, and Association for Play Therapy. Her work bridges research and practice, offering professionals evidence-based yet deeply practical frameworks for creating meaningful change in children's lives. With an engaging, compassionate teaching style grounded in real-world experience, Dr. Kate brings clarity, energy, and actionable expertise to every session.



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