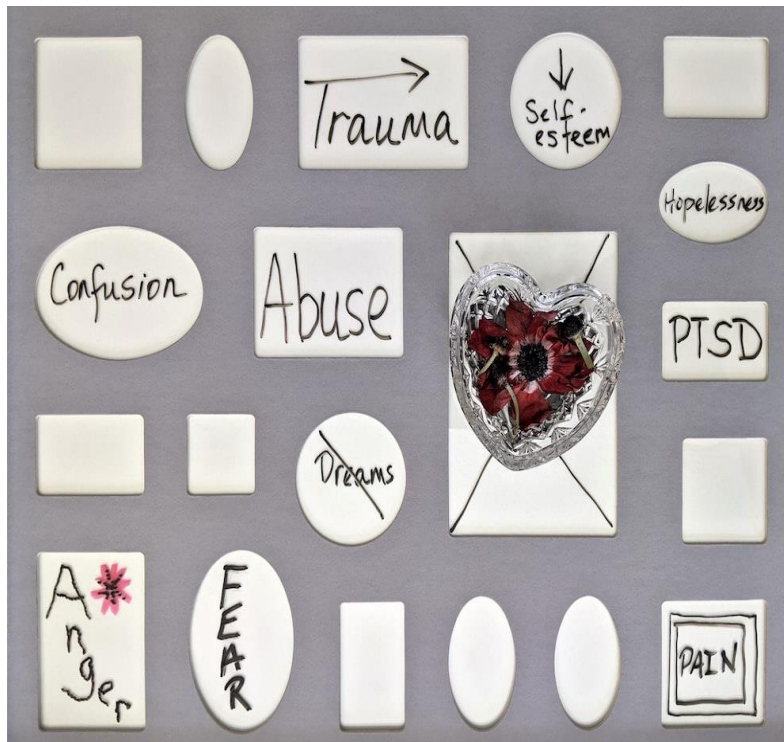




Narrative Therapy With Men who use Violence

Mohamed Fareez

A common story



- Zaini, 43 years old was referred to the Family Service Centre for Mandatory counselling under the Counselling Guidance Order (CGO) after enacting violence against his wife.
- In his first session, Zaini was upset with his wife, family members (including his children whom he felt had taken his wife's side) for "ganging up" on him in applying for the Personal Protection Order (PPO).
- His experience with his family was consistent with how he had felt ostracized from his own family who had abused him, and had also chased him out of the house when he was 17.
- Zaini shared that engaging in violence was the only way he had learned to survive in the harsh environments growing up, and trying to survive staying with friends, whilst also attempting to earn enough for his upkeep. He felt that his actions to his wife were justified as he had concerns of whether she was having an affair with her colleagues.
- Zaini felt that no one understands the struggles he had gone through, where he had struggled through substance addictions and depression to help him cope with his struggles.

My ongoing struggles

"This man is denying responsibility for the abuse by claiming that he is a victim amidst all of this...."



"But... he had also gone through extensive trauma. It seems clear that this may also affect his emotional regulation. I want to connect with him, but will I be complicit in the violence???"

My experiences

- Initially

- Focused on the influences of dominant masculinity, with the assumption that men were trying to influence me to thinking that they wanted to change when they were not.
- Felt I was being so oppositional that they perceived me as victimizing, and in turn, reinforcing the victim only narrative

Later

- When focusing on the effects of trauma and psychological explanations of how they brain operates, I find myself contributing to men's justifications and excuses for continued abusive behaviour
- Men may even use these ideas to reinforce their excuses for abuse.

Doing Social Justice Through Counselling (John Winslade)

- Role of counselling in social justice
 - Help clients find counter stories that inspire them to take significant steps towards social justice
 - Good counselling makes sense of the social formations that produce relations of oppression and of how injustice becomes internalised as forms of consciousness through processes of subjectivisation, a process better provided for by counsellors.
 - Help people understand personal struggles as connected with forces of injustice.
- Narrative therapy
 - Built social justice concerns into the centre of theory and practice, rather than just an afterthought.



The background of the slide features silhouettes of several men against a clear blue sky. Two men are prominently shown in profile, facing each other as if in conversation. Below them, a row of five smaller silhouettes of men is visible, also appearing to be part of a group. The overall mood is contemplative and professional.


Working with Men

- Acknowledging the risks that men's stories of victimization can be used to reinforce the "Victim-only" narrative and distract from the need to take responsibility for violence
- At the same time, it is important to simultaneously attend to men's experiences of being victimized and perpetrating violence.



The “Victim-Only” Narrative (Scott & Maerz 2017).

- Product of and are reflected in men being unable and unwilling to take on responsibility.
- Taking responsibility requires not only admitting that one had perpetrated abuse, but also stopping it, and then repairing and healing the effects of the abuse.
- Men recognizing their agency but not admitting that their behaviour is abusive.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a silver pen, writing on a grid-lined notebook. The background is a blurred pattern of blue and white. A large white circle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

Strategies for deconstructing “Victim-Only” Narrative (Augusta-Scott & Maerz, 2017)

- Challenging Dominant Masculinity
- Attending to persistent hyper and hypo-arousal
- Establishing a collaborative relationship
- Separating the past from the present
- Challenging victim/perpetrator binary

Dominant Masculinity

- Voluntary responses are heavily influenced and supported by the social norms of dominant masculinity
 - Demands that men should not show vulnerability
 - Encouraged to withdraw to become “strong, silent types”
 - Avoid or “numb” their feelings
 - Mask pain through alcohol
 - Encouraged to control their female partners



Involuntary effects of trauma vs Voluntary Responses to these effects

- Voluntary responses are often not intentional, neither are they ones that people are aware they have chosen.
- Adaptations are a result of influences from Socially determined ideas and behaviours that are considered as “the way things are supposed to be”.
- Victim-only narratives can be understood as a byproduct of complex Trauma, insecure attachment, violent behaviours, and mental illness (Dutton & Sonkin)





Balancing the equation

- If practitioners focus primarily on the involuntary effects of trauma
 - May diminish the importance of men's agency and responsibility, and reinforce the victim-only narrative
- If practitioners focus primarily on men's voluntary responses
 - Can lose compassion for men and the involuntary effects of trauma on them, leaving men feeling further victimized
- By acknowledging these 2 paradigms, practitioners can create the means to deconstruct the Victim-only narrative.
 - Help men to recognize that they are not to be blamed for being victimized, or the involuntary effects of trauma
 - But are responsible for how they choose to respond to the impact of these effects.

Deconstruction in Narrative Therapy

- We are mindful when we hear about “needs”, “rights”, “expectations”
 - Who are affected by these expectations or standards?
 - Effects of these expectations on the people we work with.
 - How can we work towards identifying and naming the discourses involved?
 - Can we collaboratively unpack these discourses?

Freedman & Combs, 1996



Deconstructive Questioning

- Asking questions of a more purposefully interventive nature
- Invites people
 - to see their stories from different perspectives
 - Notice how they are constructed (or that they are constructed)
 - Discover other possible narratives (unpack)



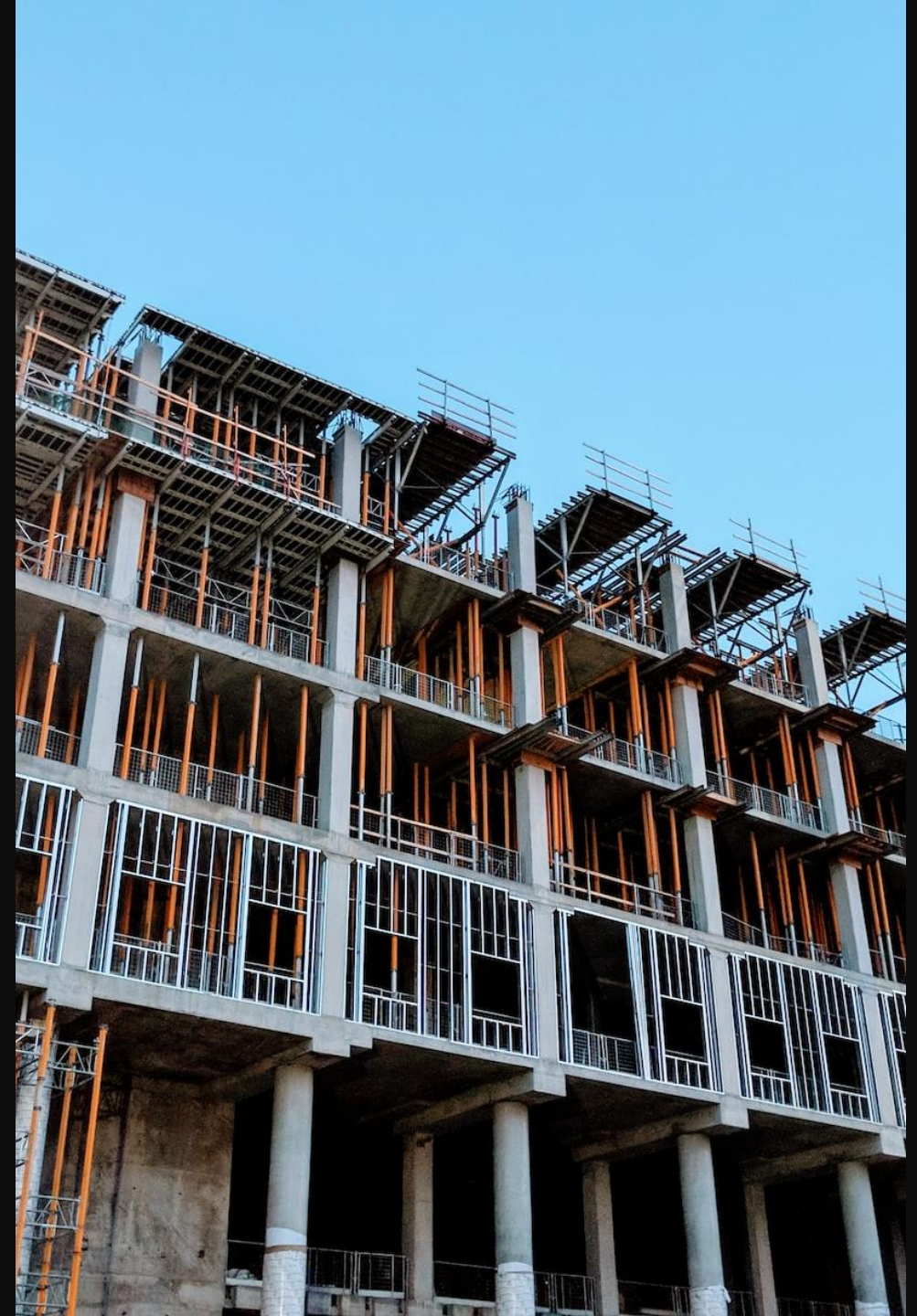


Deconstructive Questioning

“Deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices: those so called “truths” that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production; those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices; and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of people’s lives” – Michael White (1991)

Deconstructing Discourses

- People don't need to be aware of the discourse, the therapist should think of the discursive field they are moving from.
 - Unpacking beliefs
 - Where did you learn this belief that as a man, you need to
 - Is this belief helpful or not helpful, and in what situations?
 - Would there be other ways of "being a man"?
-



Exercise: The stories that define us

Think of a story that has been told about you more than a few times.

- Do you remember when this story got started? What were some of the events in your life that contributed to this story being told and taking shape?
- Who are the people who took part in telling this story?
- What effect did this story have on you? What did it have you thinking about yourself?
- Has this story contributed to your life in any way? Or has this story got in the way of things for you in your life?
- Is this particular story continuing to 'follow' you...or is it less influential than it once was?
- If this one story was all that anyone knew about you, what might be missing in their understanding of you and your life?
- What direction would you like this story to take in the future? Why would this be important to you?

This exercise was developed by the Narrative Teaching Partnership in Adelaide AUS.

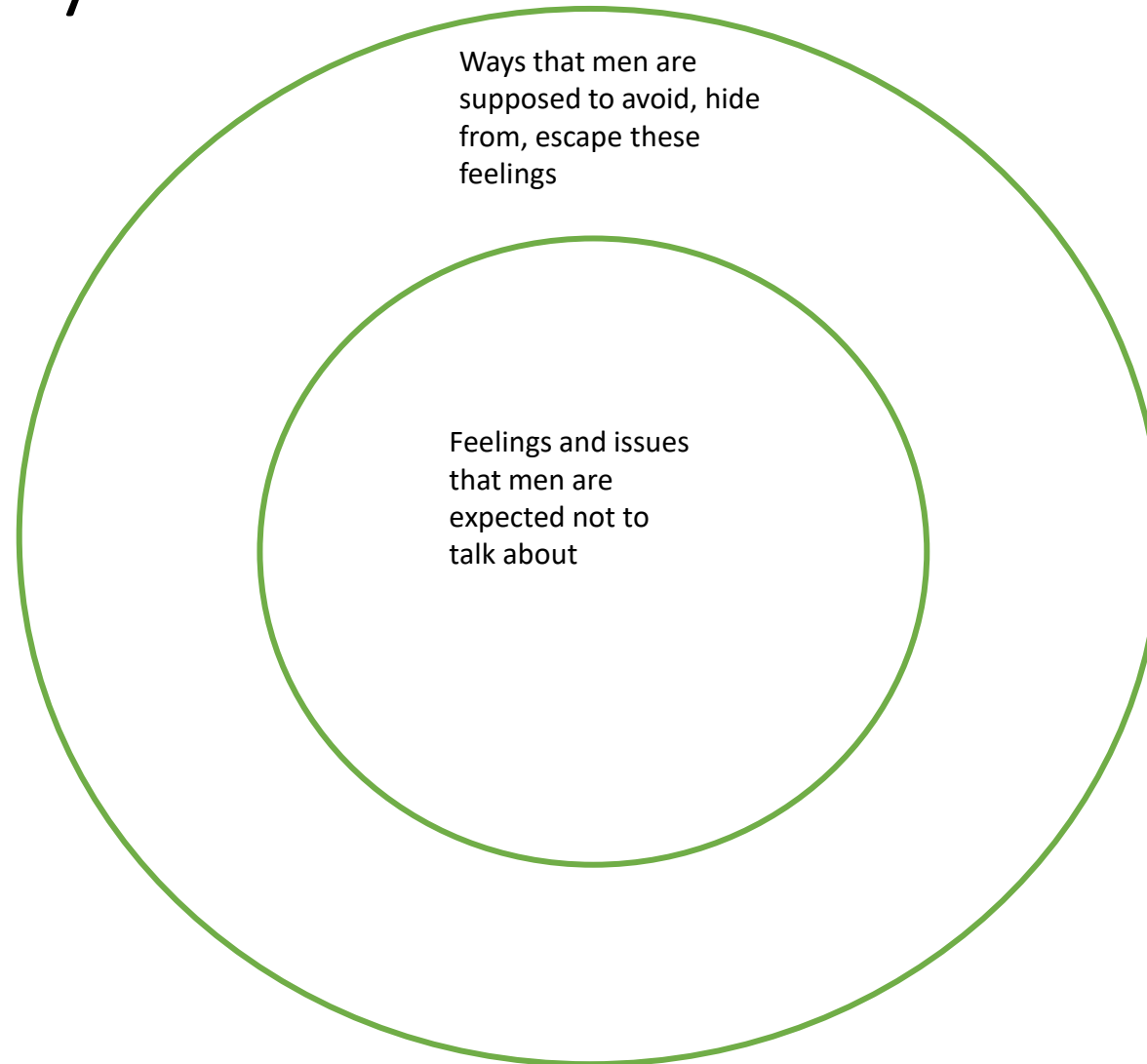


Deconstructing the "Victim-only" Narrative

- Investigating with men how they have learned to feel that they have never had power or agency
 - Equating the experience of powerlessness with failure
 - Recognising the power and agency they have as adults over their own choices
- Invitations to consider the effects of the narrative on a person's willingness to take responsibility for the choices that they make in the relationship
- Taking responsibility requires men to admit to choosing abuse and recognizing that they have the power to make other choices.



Deconstructing : Challenging Dominant Masculinity



How would escaping these feelings or issues affect men over time?

Would it be more courageous to face the things inside the circle, then to run away or avoid those things?



Attending to persistent Hyper/Hypo- Arousal

- Engaging in practices that help them regulate their emotions and connect with feelings and sensations in their body.
- Map and document themselves the effects of these states but also develop for themselves practices that they find helpful when they get triggered.

Complex Trauma

- Result of trying to and cope with the effects of living through Time with induced states of Hyper and Hypo-arousal
- When experiences of past traumatic injury are “triggered” in the present, a person’s body sensations, ideas and emotions can be INVOLUNTARY (Haskell, 2003)
- However, the adaptive coping strategies that people adopt in their struggle to make meaning of these painful experiences and how they choose to act in relation to them are VOLUNTARY.



Coping Breathing Space

Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture. If possible, close your eyes and bring your attention inward.

AWARE: (1min)

- Become aware of your body and the surface upon which you are sitting or standing.
- Notice your body from your feet and all the way to your head.
- Ask yourself: What is my experience right now in my thoughts?

BREATHE (1 min)

- Then, gently redirect your full attention to your breathing.
- Notice every in-breath and out-breath as they follow, one after the other.
- Notice the belly rising and falling with every in-breath and out-breath
- Your breath can function as your anchor to bring you into the present moment.

CONCIOUS EXPANSION (1 min)

- Now expand your awareness around your breathing.
- Include the sense of the body as a whole from your head to your feet
- Be aware of your breath throughout your body.

When you are ready, open your eyes and return to your current moment. This coping breathing space provides a way to step out of difficult feelings.

The Window of Tolerance (Siegel, 2018)

RED ZONE

(When I am in Flight/Fight Mode, body ready to react, where we lose control)

What are the things that put me in this state?

What happens in my body?

What helps you go back to the Green Zone?

GREEN ZONE

(When I feel Safe, comfortable and my emotions are regulated)

What are the things that put me in this state?

What happens in my body?

BLUE ZONE

(Feeling immobilized, Freeze or faint, withdrawn)

What are the things that put me in this state?

What happens in my body?

What helps you get into the Green Zone?

Collaboration

- Using “experience near” language
- Establishing a mandate for collaboration
 - “What hopes do you have for your relationship with your partner/wife?”
- Inviting men to consider solutions
 - “Some men have shared about how their own past experiences in violence had made them want to control others. Do you think this is something that connects for you?”
 - “What is your experience of being asked by people to take responsibility for your actions, when no one took responsibility for hurting you? What can we do together help you take responsibility for what you did?”



People always take steps in endeavouring to prevent the trauma they are subject to, and, when preventing this trauma is clearly impossible, they take steps to try to modify it in some way or to modify its effects on their lives. These steps contribute to the preservation of, and are founded upon, what people hold precious. Even in the face of overwhelming trauma, people take steps to try to protect and to preserve what they give value to.

(Michael White, 2006a, p. 28)

Journey Tool

- Identifying a vision
- Identifying past struggles and challenges
- Opening conversations on the effects of expectations

Credit to K. Shantasaravanan for developing the Journey tool



Cheerleading Squad

Past Challenges

Starting Line

- 1. Where are you in your journey?
- 2. What are the obstacles that are getting your way?
- 3. What keeps you on track to your goals?

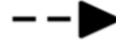
My Backpack

My Hopes & Dreams

Personal

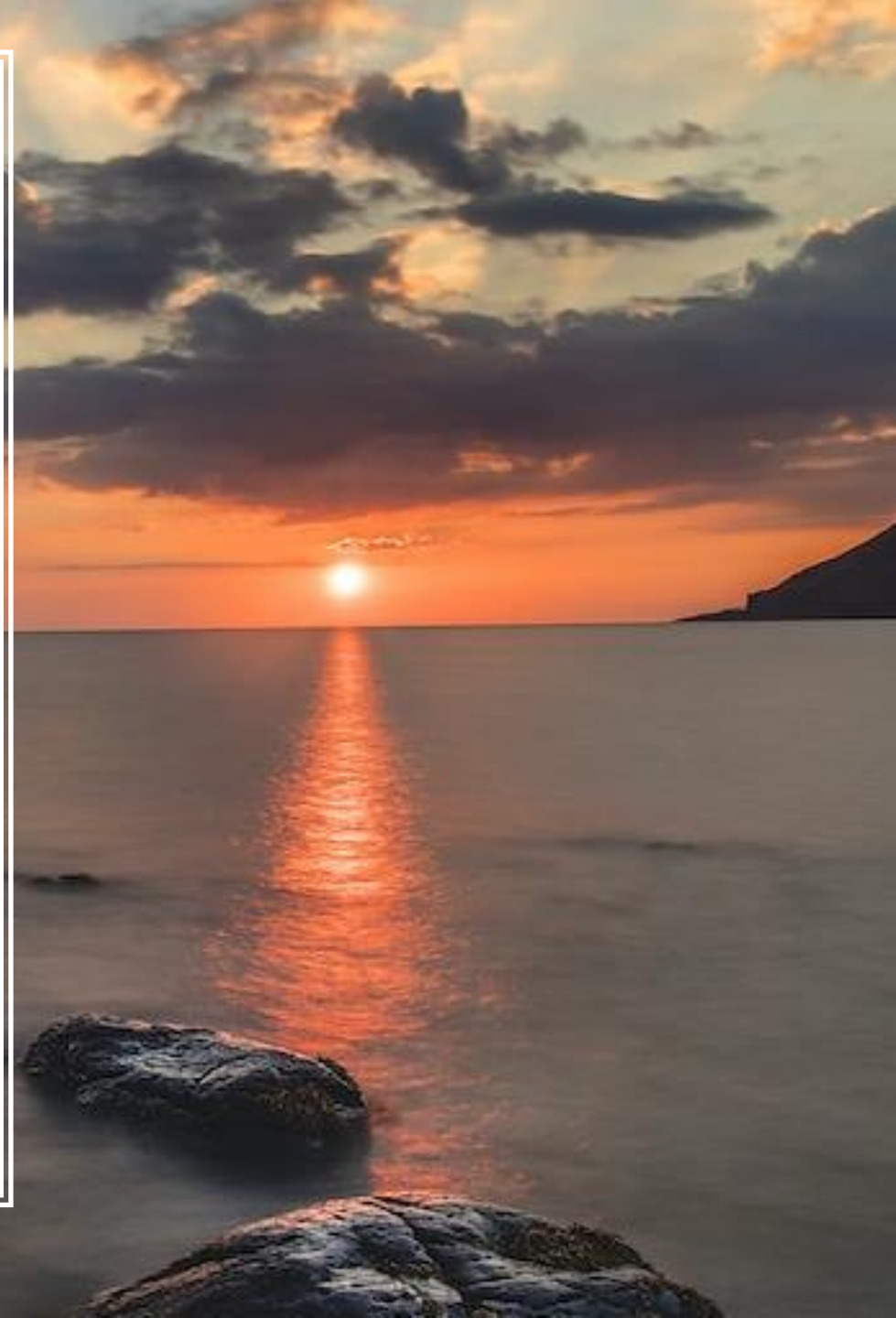
Professional

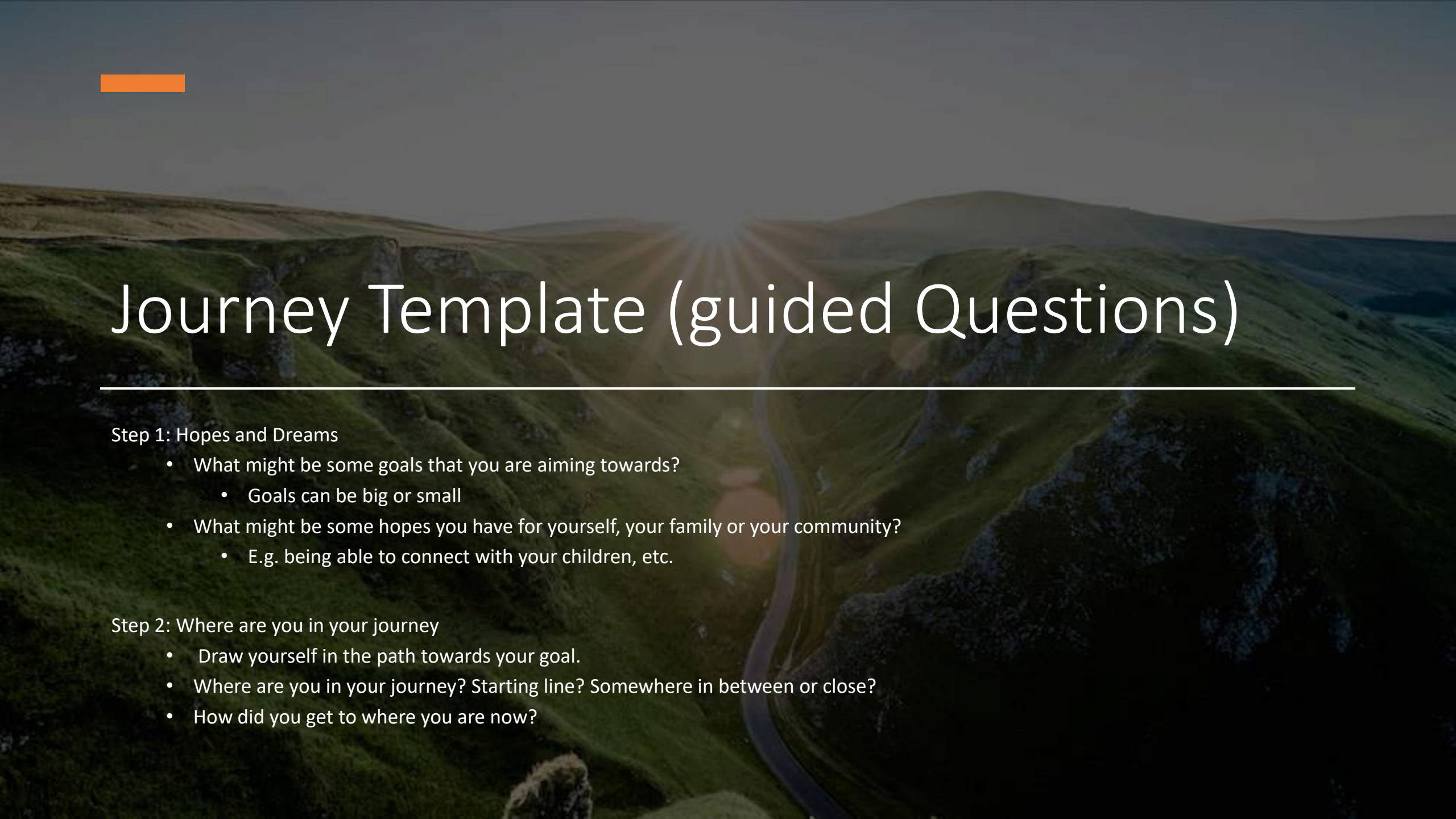
Family



The Journey Tool (Inquiry)

- My Hopes and Dreams
- Where are you in your journey
- Past Obstacles and Experiences
- Obstacles that may get in my way
- My Cheerleading Team
- My Backpack: My Current Resources






Journey Template (guided Questions)

Step 1: Hopes and Dreams

- What might be some goals that you are aiming towards?
 - Goals can be big or small
- What might be some hopes you have for yourself, your family or your community?
 - E.g. being able to connect with your children, etc.

Step 2: Where are you in your journey

- Draw yourself in the path towards your goal.
- Where are you in your journey? Starting line? Somewhere in between or close?
- How did you get to where you are now?



Journey Template (guided Questions)

Step 3: Obstacles and Challenges

- What might be getting in your way between you and your hopes? Draw them in your path?
- What might have past challenges or obstacles that you have already overcome? You can even put them before your starting line.

Step 4: My cheerleading squad

- Who are the people cheering you on?
- How have they contributed or supported you in their journey?
- What skills or values have they given you?
- What do they appreciate about you?

Journey Template (guided Questions)

Step 5: My Backpack

- What has been helpful in keeping you on track?
- What strategies have you been doing to respond to the “Obstacles”
 - Strategies can be big or small
- What might be any quotes or songs that have been helpful in supporting your journey?
- What might be values or skills that would support you?



Hopes and Dreams: Asking men to consider their values in relationships (Augusta-Scott, 2008; Jenkins, 1990,2009)

- What kind of relationship do you want?
- What do you value in relationships?
- What is important to you, in your relationship with your wife and your family?

A possible way to interrupt blaming partners for men's own choices:

“If respect is important to you, would you still be able to hold on to it even if you feel that you wife was disrespectful to you? Would you let go of these values then?”

Separating the past from the present

- Separate feelings associated with traumatic past from present experiences in the relationship
- Study recent incidents in relationship when they felt or acted threatened.
 - How do these feelings remind you of feelings from the past?
 - How would you know when you might react to your partner as if she was someone else from your past?



Challenging Victim/Perpetrator Binary

- Position of the practitioner
 - Not just totalizing and label men with “single storylines”
- Acknowledging men’s pain and at the same time not reinforcing that they are only victims.
 - Be able to admit to their abusive behaviour
 - Develop an identity separate from their experiences of being abused, and separate from experiences of perpetrating abuse.



Challenging the Victim/Perpetrator Binary

- How can we work on focusing together on what was done to your wife, without letting your past pain from preventing you to do so?
- Based on the values you shared, would it be more important to take responsibility for what was done, or to blame others for your actions?
- Would you be able to hold on to these values even though your wife does not follow them?





Re-authoring Identity

- Allows men to develop alternative stories that are contrary to the “Victim-only” narrative.
- E.g. Stories of resistance to violence, stories about where they did use their power to stand up against abuse and stood up for fairness, justice, and respect.

Re-authoring Identity

- When you shared your guilt about what you did to your wife, I am wondering what value you might be practicing?
 - Were there other times in your relationship where you were practicing this value?
 - How can we work together to prevent your past struggles (or externalized experience) from preventing you to take responsibility for the violence?
 - Were there times where your values allowed you to take responsibility instead of rejecting it?
 - When you decided to go down under the block, and instead of hitting your wife, what value or skill were you practicing? How is it related to your hopes for your relationship with her and your family?



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Credit Lim Shen Yong for revised Journey Tool