

The Road from Estrangement to Reconciliation



15 Week Program

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The Road From Estrangement to Reconciliation

WEEK ONE - The Road From Estrangement to Reconciliation

Introduction

4 Possible Outcomes

The Pain of Estrangement

The Roots of Estrangement

Embracing Paradox

Introduction

Estrangement is painful. It is a daily reminder of a hurtful injury or injustice and a disconnect from a person, a family and or a community. All of these things make it important to look at and determine how we want to handle this estrangement.

Inner qualities of maturity, autonomy, discernment, courage, determination, honesty, compassion, humility, and accountability of the people involved determine the depth and quality of their reconciliation.

There are many ways of reconciling and the only measure of success is the emotional integrity of the solution for the people involved.

4 Possible Outcomes

1. A reconciliation that is deep and transformative in which intimacy is established or re-established, past hurts are resolved, both people experience closeness, satisfaction, and renewed growth in the relationship. (This is the hardest to achieve and the most coveted by many)
2. One person changes their frame of reference and expectations whether or not the other person makes significant changes.
3. Much of the relationship remains unresolved and ambivalent feelings persist. Both people agree to disagree and establish ground rules that enable them to have a limited but cordial relationship.
4. No viable relationship is possible. The only option is to find resolution within ourselves. Although not one most people would choose, it can bring some peace.

Remember: Even a few tiny steps forward represent progress.

The events or memory of events may be very different that lead to the last straw but the feelings are real. Shared events are experienced differently. Memory is a collage of images, feelings, perceptions and perspectives.

The Pain of Estrangement

“To endeavor to forget anyone is a certain way of thinking of nothing else.”- Jean De La Bruyere 17th Century French Essayist

“Obsession, discomfort, and rage are the hallmarks of estrangement, and sorrow is its center.”

The impact of an estrangement is often directly proportional to the closeness of the relationship that has been lost.

The Roots of Estrangement

Relationships become estranged for many different reasons. For most of us it is directly related to our childhood sexual abuse CSA and associated mistreatment and or denial of the abuse. The end of the relationship is usually intentional to relationships that were never healthy to begin with.

Estrangements usually start due to a lack of communication. This skill is often lacking in victims of childhood sexual abuse, where secrecy and silence were the hallmark of our experience. It is difficult to be transparent when we are feeling attacked or experiencing any type of rift in a relationship.

A lot of times we don't know how to apologize, listen emphatically, or speak assertively instead of with aggression and rage. Instead of resolving issues harsh words get set in stone and small slights become unforgivable injuries.

Misunderstandings never get discussed let alone resolved. Jealousies fester.

Ultimatums are made in anger and battle lines are drawn.

Many times estrangements are multi-generational. It simply becomes a way of life. It's easy for families to drift apart in this instance. Sometimes families are torn apart by alcoholism and abuse, the judicial system or other government officials.

Sometimes estrangement unravels slowly and then abruptly with a series of disappointments over the course of many troubled years.

When disputes are new, feelings of anger, betrayal and hurt are overwhelming. Time must pass in order for the pain to subside. Sometimes distance and life experiences put perspective to an argument or violation.

“Time, distance, and life experience can blur the edges of anger and blame, lessen the need to remember who was right and who was wrong, and open up new perspectives on old relationships.”

Time alone and maturity can't guarantee your willingness to let go of past hurts.

“Some people grow bitter, and some grow sweet.”

Embracing Paradox

Embracing paradox means being able to see the good and bad in people and even within ourselves. Human beings are complex. The father that taught you how to ride a bike could never hold down a job. Your mother who loved you also allowed your father to sexually abuse you. How do you make sense of these two very different realities? Is there ever a balance of good and bad behaviour? Can one cancel out the other or is it enough to know that both exist and that people have a mixture of both and at any given time is capable of either. Some decisions / choices are made in seconds. Should a behaviour sentence someone to life without any chance of redemption or rehabilitation?

“We create stories about our lives. It may not correspond to anyone else's version.”

Exercise:

What types of issues have led to estrangement for you?

How have you changed with maturity?

What sorts of life events might bring you closer together with the person you are thinking of reconciling with?

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“We only have this short opportunity to love people and I no longer wanted to waste my time holding on to grudges and resentments.”

Gaining a sense of perspective takes time. No matter how much you want to let go of resentments and find compassion, you cannot force yourself to grow. **“We can set the intention, lay the groundwork, and take the initial steps to heal, but we cannot will ourselves into a different state of consciousness.*

We can grow receptive to healing deep wounds in maturity, love from others and for ourselves, creating distance to gain perspective, and obtaining wisdom over time.

WEEK TWO: Building a Self: The Importance of Autonomy

Boundaries

When Injuries Are Unforgivable

The Difference Between Reconciliation and Capitulation

Boundaries

Until you can say no in a relationship your “yes” is meaningless. Part of autonomy is having our own independence, freedom and personal integrity separate from others. Boundaries protect us from harm or undesirable interactions.

The more you know where your boundary ends and another person begins the better you can take care of yourself.

When considering a reconciliation one of the first steps is to determine the ground rules. These ground rules should be mutually agreed upon and both sides need to listen to each other's requests.

The boundaries will most likely be determined according to what the past transgressions were that occurred. Boundaries are especially important as well when boundaries have been unclear in the past, power has been skewed, and trust has been broken.

The boundaries you initially set up do not need to be permanent. They may recede in importance but need to be established and followed to gain trust back as a way to feel protected as we reengage.

These boundaries do need to be established ahead of time when you are alone and calm. That way you won't be influenced by stress in the moment and make impulsive decisions. Practice with someone ahead of time so you are comfortable with and can build confidence in your ability to state your needs.

Exercise:

What boundaries do you need to set up to make you feel comfortable in a relationship with the person you are thinking of reconciling with.

<i>Person With Whom You Are Reconciling</i>	<i>Boundaries</i>
Dad	We will meet in a neutral location for a maximum of 30 minutes.
	If we make plans I expect a commitment.
	No physical contact.

When Injuries Are Unforgivable

When someone violates our trust by using physical, sexual or psychological violence to control us these injuries may not be forgivable. Attempting to reconcile before we've done the work of healing discounts the anger and grief that are essential for healing and reconciliation. Forgiveness is always an option but first we need to forgive ourselves. Forgiveness is possible without involving the person who is responsible for our injuries. In those cases, forgiveness may be a healthy way of moving forward.

The Difference Between Reconciliation and Capitulation

In any imbalance of power, where historically one party has had power over the other there is a fine line between reconciliation and capitulation. Capitulation is surrendering to what another person wants you to do. When we capitulate in a relationship we are collapsing our boundaries. Reconciliation is expansive. You are coming from a position of strength and wholeness.

Example of Capitulation:

“I capitulated to my mother’s request to have a hug after I had told her how I felt about my abuse. It felt like a demand to me at the time and I still did it because I desperately wanted some sort of reconciliation.” -Program Participant

Example of Reconciliation:

“We both agreed to no physical contact while we each share how we feel.” - Program Participant

The difference between reconciliation and capitulation:

<u>Reconciliation</u>	<u>Capitulation</u>
Mutual agreement of what is best for both parties.	You surrender to the request of the other. It feels like you are caving in to the demands of the other person.
A feeling of empowerment, strength, and self-love and as well, love for the other person.	A feeling of shame, humiliation, self-doubt, self-hatred, anger.
Personal needs are respected.	Personal needs are ignored or sacrificed.
We hold steady to our own truth.	The self is sublimated.
Both parties agree and feel heard.	One person is subservient. One person dominates.

Exercise:

In your notebook write the name of the person you wish to reconcile with and what boundaries you would need to put into place in order to renew that relationship.

What healing have you done to prepare yourself for considering this reconciliation?

What is the difference between reconciliation and capitulation? Give an example of each in your life.

WEEK THREE - Finding Clarity

Acknowledging Our Injuries

My Role in This Estrangement

How Important Is This Relationship to Me?

Acknowledging Our Injuries

When you want to reconcile with someone you care deeply about it is very easy to just want to get back together, forget old wounds and move on. Why rehash the past you think? Well it was that past and certain behaviours that led to the estrangement and although a quick fix may do just that it is not likely to last if you don't do some more work.

Before engaging in any reconciliation, it is imperative to acknowledge all of our injuries to assess the damage. With a violation of trust there are usually numerous facets to the injuries. In the case of childhood sexual abuse a myriad of injuries occur. Our sense of safety was impacted as well as physical, emotional and spiritual injury. In many cases loss of family, connection to others and intimacy damaged. Families who have experienced multi-generational sexual abuse usually lack parenting skills such as communication skills, boundaries, powerlessness, physical disorders and disease, mental health illnesses, not to mention difficulty with relationships. Before you begin any reconciliation make a list of injuries you sustained.

Make a List of Your Injuries

Check each of the injuries that apply to you and the impact that had on your life.

- Physical
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Problems with Relationships
- Problems with Career and or Education
- Problems with Addictions
- Loss of Family
- *Revictimization
- Other

*A study conducted in 1986 found that 63% of women who had suffered sexual abuse by a family member also reported a rape or attempted rape after the age of 14. Recent studies in 2000, 2002, and 2005 have all concluded similar results.

	Type of Injury	How this Injury Affected You In Your Life
	Physical	
	Have you engaged in self-harm because of the sexual assault you experienced as a child? If so to what extent?	
	Broken bones from your abuser or parent.	
	Spankings/ Whippings.	
	Permeant disfigurement or disability	

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	Emotional	
	Anger management issues or a complete lack of anger or emotion.	
	Panic attacks.	
	Shame, humiliation	
	Sexual	
	Sexual dysfunction with your partner.	
	Spirituality	
	Not feeling comfortable engaging in organized religion.	
	Disconnected with your spirituality. Unable to engage in meditation, mindfulness, yoga or other activities where there is a mind body, spirit connection.	
	Mental Health Issues	
	Personality Disorders; Borderline Personality Disorder, Bipolar, Depression, OCD, PTSD, Anxiety Disorders, Suicide Attempts	
	Did any of the above result in a stay in a psychiatric facility?	
	Did that stay in a psychiatric facility result in any further abuse occurring?	
	Life Issues	
	Problems with Relationships	
	Marital problems including divorce, marrying an abusive partner	
	Problems in school	
	Not getting a post-secondary education	
	Learning Disabilities associated with the abuse	
	Emotional or mental health issues that prevented you from getting an education	
	Disruptions in school due to frequent moves.	
	Problems with not being able to meet career goals or establishing a career.	
	Problems with Addiction	
	Drug or alcohol, eating disorders, theft, sexual addiction, gambling, or other	
	Criminal Behaviour following the pattern of abuse such as prostitution, assault, theft, drug or alcohol charges	
	Did that criminal behavior result in incarceration, disruption in work or loss of family?	
	Did that incarceration result in further physical or sexual abuse?	
	Revictimization	
	Have your children been sexually assaulted by the same family member or person that sexually abused you?	

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	Have you been raped or sexually assaulted in another way as an adult?	
	Parenting or Loss of Parental Rights	
	Unable to conceive because of the abuse or fear of having a child.	
	Unable to fully engage with your child or children.	
	Anger issues or other issues that affect your ability to parent.	
	Loss of parental rights due to mental health issues and or criminal behaviour or addictions.	
	Estrangement from your child/children.	
	Estrangement from grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces /nephews, cousins or other important family members that could have been part of your child/children's lives.	
	Other	

Write 3-4 pivotal injuries/injustices that caused you to estrange yourself from the person you now want to reconnect with.

Is it ever too late to be close again?

What do you tell yourself about the possibilities of reconciliation? What do you need from the person in order to reconcile?

Make a list of everything positive that you received from the person.

This could be something that the person taught you, a vacation or other activity that you enjoyed together where the person showed some good qualities. Maybe that the person paid for your education or made other contributions to your well-being. Try to sort out the good from the bad and look at the person objectively.

WEEK FOUR - Taking the First Steps

What Risks do you face in pursuing reconciliation at this time?

How to Overcome Your Fears?

Taking the First Step

Self Care

What risks do you face in pursuing reconciliation at this time?

“When we make the decision to extend ourselves to someone from whom we've been estranged, we enter unknown territory. No one can guarantee a positive outcome when we reach out through a hurt, angry silence. Risk and reconciliation go hand in hand. As aviator, Amelia Earhart once remarked, *“Courage is the price life exacts for granting peace.”*”

It takes one or both parties to take responsibility for setting things right. Doing so takes tremendous courage. “Every time we face a family member, a friend, or an enemy, and say “Can I have you back in my life?” we lay bare our deepest desires and admit our human needs - all to someone who has hurt us or whom we have hurt in the past.

“Life shrinks or expands according to one's courage.”

Whether your efforts produce good results or are thwarted, you give it your best shot and demonstrated that you were willing to fight for the relationship.

How to Overcome Your Fears

The courage to face uncertainty especially to face someone who has hurt us or whom we have hurt is huge. There is no telling what the outcome will be. Each reconciliation is unique. Being open to the evolving rhythm of a reconciliation requires flexibility and the willingness to enter uncharted territory.

Receptivity requires taking risks with people, opening the door to see if they've changed, assessing whether a new dynamic might be created. It entails setting aside fixed ideas, rigid expectations, and a legion of defenses; it means approaching the other person with an open heart and a spirit of curiosity.

Even when reconciliations are not as far-reaching or significant as we might hope, they can still be beneficial.

When we reach out to someone from whom we've been estranged, it is natural to feel afraid. Not knowing whether we face acceptance, rejection, or indifference can freeze us in our tracks. It is natural to worry that old injuries will be stimulated and that the vulnerability we reveal will be used against us. But just because we feel fear, it doesn't have to stop us.

Many people believe they have to master their fears first before entering into a reconciliation. If that were the case, none of us would ever attempt anything new. In order to achieve goals in life , we need to move forward despite our fears.

Certainly, not all fears can or should be overridden. Fear warns us of danger, it can let us know when holding our position or retreating is the best course of action. However, some degree of fear will be accompanying all the major risks we take in life.

When we're feeling scared, it can be helpful to ask, "What is the worst thing that could happen?" To identify our worst fears, we sometimes realize that we are not ready to move, forward. Other times, we recognize that we are willing to take the risk, or that the "worst thing that can happen" is not as bad as we imagined.

Taking the First Steps

When you're deciding how to respond to a gesture of reconciliation or are considering making one of your own, ask yourself the following questions:

- What result do I want from this interaction?
- What are the risks involved in confronting this particular situation at this time?
- If this goes badly, what is the worst thing that can happen?
- Do I have the inner resources to handle a disappointment if things don't turn out the way I want them to?
- Is this really the best time to do this?
- If I wait, might feelings or circumstances change?

Assessing the Best Way To Reach Out

When initiating a reconciliation, we need to assess the best way to reach out. Should we write a letter, send an e-mail, pick up the phone or meet in person at a neutral location.

Sometimes circumstances will determine how you meet; a wedding, funeral or birth can sometimes set the stage for a reconciliation. Working together on a project can give you a chance to observe the person and see what changes have occurred.

Don't expect too much. Some people hold back when they are afraid, while others act out with bravado. Stay in touch with your feelings, thoughts, judgments and practice being in the present by doing mindfulness.

Self Care

Stay in touch with your feelings. Are you eating a lot of chocolate cake? Are you drinking too much before or after being around the person with which you have reconciled? Make sure you have supports in place. It can be helpful to have a friend available as a sounding board and to help you gain perspective.

WEEK FIVE: Persistence Over Time

The Importance of Determination

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

Creating a New Future Together

How Committed Are You?

Being defeated is often a temporary condition. Giving up is what makes it permanent. - Marilyn Vos Savant

Determination is about making a commitment; it's deciding what we're going to do with the cards that life has dealt us. Hans Jorg Stahlschmidt believes the choices we make determine the quality of our lives. "In choosing to be intimate with another person, we put ourselves in a situation where our shortcomings invariably show. We are all human, and at times, we're going to fail each other." The way in which we respond to these failures is a measure of our resiliency and strength. In psychology, the measure of health is how well people are able to repair from injuries. Through any injury, deepening can happen. He even goes as far as to say without injury, the relationship will never deepen. However, relationships don't can't deepen without a lot of hard work, vulnerability, and love. Determination is the commitment to persevere despite the impediments that arise.

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

When you're rebuilding a relationship, it is important to keep our sights on our higher objective. There may be times we need to sacrifice short term comfort for the sake of attaining long term gains. This might mean putting out more than our share of the energy in order to get the ball rolling. It could mean holding back on saying all of our truths at once. We may have to go slower or faster than we want to, or compromise on issues that are less important to us than others.

Reconciliation rarely occurs in one smooth upward spiral. There are breakthroughs, setbacks, moments of grace, and times of sheer grit and determination. Keep listening and being aware of your behaviour and the behaviour of the person with whom you want to reconcile.

You also have to watch out for reversals. You can never rest on your laurels. No matter how much ground you have obtained. It's easy to fall back into old habits of collapsed or rigid boundaries and not communicating when there is a problem. When problems arise, it is important to ask the tough questions. To find out where each other stands.

Creating a New Future Together

One of the biggest barriers to reconciliation is staying locked in the past. Until we set aside our anger, bitterness, and blame, we can't accurately assess a relationship's possibilities. When we've have a serious rift with someone, it's easy to call up a whole litany of past injuries. Focusing on the pain and anger, when our goal is reconciliation, is rarely advantageous. It is important to air those hurts, but in most cases, when we are determined to seek reconciliation, it is wise to focus on what we share not what divides us. Exploring a common interest or focusing on a positive

activity can weave a context of connection that makes a relationship safe again and or at least manageable.

One of these ways is to communicate using positive language; accepting each other for who they are today. Being willing to allow people to make amends and make changes to their life.

How Committed Are You?

Reconciliation is a choice. Your commitment to this goal, as well as your spiritual strength, has profound influence in your family and community. When we are resolute about finding a path that leads to healing, possibilities emerge.

Exercise:

What activities could you do together? If none other than brief visits, what types of questions could you ask to get to know the person better?

What similarities can you see between yourself and the other person?

Take the self-assessment test online to identify your style under stress. See the website in the Appendix.

WEEK SIX - Communication That Furthers Closeness

Types of Communication

Learning to Listen

Types of Communication

When the truth is told lovingly, with insight and compassion, you can say anything. And when someone listens to you in a compassionate way that allows you to fully embrace your experience, you can survive everything. You can reconcile with any aspect of your life and let it go, when your story can be truly and deeply told. - Shawnee Undell

In a perfect world, this might be the case. Certainly, a cathartic sharing of the truth, having a moment of reckoning in which your hurt feelings would be exposed, anger could be expressed, mutual telling of experiences, and assumptions could be exposed leading to an unraveling of miscommunication is ideal.

However, for this to happen, both parties need to first be conscious of and then be able to communicate their feelings and thoughts clearly. They need to have the wisdom of the situation and have gained perspective. This takes a lot of hard work and although you may be in a place where that is possible the other person may not be capable or want to. What do you do in those circumstances, if you are still interested in reconciliation?

Reconciliation may take time. Some people may want to email first and test the waters. In some family's estrangement is common. So common, that when family members have offended siblings may simply cease to exist in the eye of the person who feels offended. Some family members may never even know that they have been casted out of your life. It sounds bizarre but this is the case for many families who don't communicate when something goes wrong or an injury has occurred.

It depends how deep a connection you want to have with the person. If you feel that you just want to be in that person's life you may be ok starting fresh after you have set boundaries. Choosing to focus on what you have now and not talk about the past which lead to the estrangement may be more productive.

In what circumstances could you see this type of reconciliation working?

In which circumstances may it not work?

Answer

If someone's version of the past, say a sibling, could be very different because of the age difference and experience with the abuser. It doesn't mean that your version is wrong and theirs is right. Nor does it mean that what happened to you is not valid and shouldn't be honored. Listening to your version of events may nudge some buried memories. Ultimately you both can have your own truth. In these circumstances, it is important to stay present and grounded.

"not being believed, not feeling valued, feeling humiliated. I saw them for what they

were-old feelings. They don't exist in my relationship with Vivian today, so I was able to observe them and let them go. I chose to stay focused on what we have now and I kept inviting her to share more. The fact that I could do that felt wonderful." *From the book I Thought I'd Never Speak to You Again page 170*

What this person was able to do was mindfulness. She continually noticed her perceptions, feelings, and sensations in the moment. It is hard to do especially when you are having a difficult conversation with a family member. If you can't do this don't judge yourself. Acknowledge it and rather than capitulate acknowledge that you need to be true to yourself in whatever way you can. There is no shame in removing yourself from the conversation or saying that you need to be validated. Honesty is the best policy. Telling the other person that you do not want them to talk about how wonderful the abuser is when they are around you is perfectly ok. You can agree to disagree and ask to be respected at the same time.

You Can Only Change Yourself

Be aware of your desire to change the other person. After a lifetime of silence good communication skills are not going to happen overnight, not for you or the person with whom you are estranged.

Sometimes face to face conversations especially at the beginning is not a good idea. Confronting someone who can't deal with feelings and wanting them to share could make them more defensive and shut down more creating more separation and misunderstanding.

Be aware, also, of body language and your tone of voice. Intonation in your voice may indicate your antagonism. Even a slight shift in your body could signal disgust or a refusal to listen shutting down any further conversation. In order for everyone to remain open and honest judgment needs to be suspended for the moment.

Even with all of this in place, people sometimes need time, months or years even, after reconciliation, to fully say what they need to say. Compassion and patience is required. Remember that you are trying to accept the unacceptable in each other.

In a lot of families sexual abuse and the lack of communication go hand in hand. Learning to say when you aren't happy or if something is bothering you is foreign. Even talking about the so called "negative feelings" can be taboo. This can lead to all kinds of misinterpretation. For instance, if you say you are upset about something that happened, in some families that can mean you blame someone? Or it may be seen as unacceptable. Here empathy is helpful. If you know this to be the case you might rephrase your feelings to identify what happened and how you wish the outcome to be different. For example, if you are upset that your mother is still drinking you might say when you drink I feel afraid that we might get into an argument again.

Learning to Listen

Listening requires that you be in the moment. So often when someone is speaking our mind wanders to the past or what we are going to say in the future to add to the conversation. Notice how quickly your mind hops away. As children when we don't want to hear something we can actually stop hearing altogether. This can continue into adulthood if there has been a lot of trauma. You can improve your listening abilities if you practice.

Start to practice in everyday situations where there is no stress.

Listening deeply to another human being- whether it be a friend, an enemy, a person who has wronged us or someone we have wronged - is a radical and powerful commitment to reconciliation. When we couple that commitment with the optimistic belief that people can change, we give ourselves, and the people we are struggling with, the opportunity to grow, to heal old wounds, and to make peace. From *I Thought I'd Never Speak to You Again*. Page 207

In The Anatomy of Peace, a book written by The Arbinger Institute they show the connection between what we think and how we communicate to other.

The box below shows when we view ourselves as worse than everyone else how it is difficult to connect or even see other people for who they truly are.

View of Myself	View of the Other
Not as good Broken / Defective Fated	Advantaged Privileged Successful
Feelings	View of the World
Helpless Jealous / Bitter Depressed	Hard / Difficult Against Me Ignoring Me

WEEK SEVEN - Recognizing Our Shared Humanity; Finding Compassion

Discernment with Heart

Compassion Begins with Acceptance

Growing With Compassion

Six Steps To Change Revenge to Compassion

Discernment with Heart

Compassion is discernment with heart. It is the ability to see another person clearly, without illusions, from a place of loving kindness. Compassion enables us to understand why our brother hurt us and to simultaneously care about his hurt, to recognize our father's history and feel sad about what he, too, had to endure. Discernment teaches us why it's so hard for our partner to admit her mistakes; compassion is what makes it possible for us to recognize our shared humanity, move beyond who was right and who was wrong, and lift reconciliation to a new level- one where keeping score, who did what to whom, and "whose turn it is: lose their meaning. It is the inner quality that enables us to care more about what we have to offer than what the other person has to give. It is the place where heart and mind come together, where a tenuous reconciliation grows from a negotiated settlement into a loving relationship. Page 209-210 I Thought We'd Never Speak Again.

Compassion is powerful and transformative. We cannot, however, force ourselves to feel it. We can open to it with our intentions, choices and actions.

Having compassion doesn't mean the other people will be nice, receptive, or transform from being abusive. You must go into this with eyes wide open. It you go into it thinking that if I'm super human good than nothing bad will happen to me, think again. If you go into this trying to manipulate the outcome you may not only be hurt but realize too late that you have no control over the outcome. Some people are not ready to respond in a loving way no matter how loving you are towards them. That is ok.

I can have compassion for my abuser without them responding to me. They may not have done the work necessary to be in a place to receive and or give any kind of love without further abuse. We only have control over us and our own actions and feelings.

Example from Program Participant:

My mother was in the hospital dying. I went to her lovingly and talked to her about the abuse because I wanted her to feel at peace and die knowing that we had resolved things. The hospital at first was not willing to allow us the space to do this but later agreed when my therapist, who was an MD told them my intentions were for her peace and not to make her last hours, days miserable.

As I lay my heart out on the table for her. She did not respond. Then when I finished consumed with hurt. My inner child bared in front of my abuser my mother responded by asking for a hug. I was shaken. I gave her a hug feeling again a total lack of caring and empathy from her. My heart was broken and she had no words to comfort me only to ask for comfort for herself. That was our relationship.

When my mother died a few days later my step father didn't call me to tell me. A kind social worker at the hospital called and asked if I knew my mother was in the last

stage of dying. I said no and ran to the hospital. When I entered the room my step father was there at the far end of the room. I went to her and held her. She tried to speak and couldn't. She died in my arms. I could not imagine her dying alone untouched while someone was in the room. My step father had a phobia for hospitals and sick people. The ordeal had been difficult for him. He couldn't bring himself to be close to her as she lay dying less than 10 feet away from him. I know he loved her and yet he was unable to do that. It didn't matter to me that he hadn't called me to tell me my mother was dying. It hurt tremendously but I was not about to blame him on her death bed or even afterwards.

When she died we, both sat with her and had cake and tea. It was an odd but very healing experience. I'm grateful to this day to have had the strength to overlook my abuse from her and the pain. We were connected not only as parent and child but in multi-generational childhood sexual abuse. Was I totally healed? No. Recovery from my mother's sexual abuse would take years, so that I could clearly see this for what it was; two people in pain, needing love and connection.

Compassion Begins with Acceptance

When we accept another person's inadequacies, compassion arises. Rather than see their weaknesses as something malicious directed at us, we begin to recognize them for what they are-human frailties.

Whenever I have reconciled with someone, I've had to go through as internal process of accepting things about the person that I don't like: it might be neediness, self-centeredness, or lack of responsibility. Page 213 I Thought We'd Never Speak Again.

If I find that it is very difficult for me to accept their faults I quite often find it is because I cannot accept that same fault in myself.

Exercise:

Is there a time when you have found it particularly difficult to accept another person's faults? What did you learn from that? or in retrospect now, what is it about that person's faults that make it so difficult for you to accept?

Growing with Compassion

Our capacity to accept other people's failings grows as we learn about their lives. Even when the wrongs committed are severe, it is possible to gain perspective and compassion. Being a parent yourself and knowing firsthand the trials and experiences of wanting to protect your child and feeling totally out of control to do so at times helps to gain understanding. Understanding and being aware of multiple factors doesn't mean you condone abuse or any type of violence; it simply means you have the capacity to be humble and accept that people are generally good and do the best that they can.

Being a person today in the world, with all that is understood about parenting, violence and having acceptance and help to recover from childhood sexual abuse is very different from having to deal with it in a world where there is no understanding or compassion.

Keeping a Gratitude Journal is a powerful tool to gain compassion. Having the capacity to see that although a situation or person may not be what is ideal there are qualities that are good within that that you can be grateful for; seeing the glass as half full, rather than half empty.

Sometimes we say we need more in a friend or family member than what they can give us. They may not be able to deal with our abuse or be supportive. This doesn't mean that the relationship can't exist. As long as they are there for us in certain ways that we can accept, that relationship may be good enough. Accepting what we get from that person and being thankful for that.

Six Steps to Change Revenge to Compassion

1. Breaking the taboo against speaking to each other.
There is an invisible barrier between children of survivors and children of perpetrators because speaking to the "enemy" is often perceived as a betrayal. Yet until these two groups engage in honest dialogue, they cannot begin to work through the layers of unresolved feelings they carry about the trauma and about each other.
2. Humanizing each other through telling our stories. When we listen intently to our stories and hear other's pain, we begin to care about one another. In spite of the "hatred" for what your abuser did, these feelings of empathy and friendship become more powerful than the imperative to hate.
3. Exploring and owning the potential bad behaviour/ cruelty in all of us. In order

to reconcile, people need to acknowledge that, under extreme circumstances, we all have the capacity for cruelty. Accepting this truth levels the playing field; children of survivors can no longer insist that the perpetrator is “over there”, a monster, and not human, and children of perpetrators no longer have to carry the burden of being tainted by an evil that runs in their blood.

4. Moving deeply into the grief. Grieving together is essential. People carry their parents’ and grandparents’ pain, and until that pain is grieved fully, the legacy continues to be passed on to the next generation.
5. Creating rituals of remembrance to publicly acknowledge the complex, difficult history we share.
6. Making commitments to acts of creation or acts of service. Survivors need to tell their stories, through writing personal essays, poetry, or art. The need to channel energy into service helping other survivors and doing other work toward ending injustice.

WEEK EIGHT - Taking Responsibility for Estrangement

Part 1 - Estrangement When It Does Not Involve the Perpetrator

Acknowledging Your Own Weaknesses

My Part in the Estrangement

The Healing Power of Accountability

Part 2 - Estrangement from a Perpetrator

When Perpetrators Want to Apologize, and Be Accountable

Part 1 - Estrangement When It Does Not Involve The Perpetrator

Acknowledging Your Own Weaknesses

Pride is a big impediment to reconciliation. When we keep a score of who was right and who was wrong, we set up impenetrable barriers between ourselves and other people. It's easy to say it's all my sister's fault. I'm not going to make the first move." Or "I always call. It is up to her to call." It's natural to want things to be fair. Reconciliation, however, needs you to stay focused on the larger goal of mutual healing and reconnection. When love is strong, blame becomes insignificant.

Nowhere is this seen more clearly than with the injustices done to indigenous people who have experienced lower education, poverty, health and residential schools. The damage was done and yet rebuilding a connection with government and the society that created the problem is necessary for growth and moving forward.

When a conflict is strong enough to end a relationship, there is usually a lot of blame and it is difficult for us to see our own behaviour objectively. As relationships become increasingly polarized, there are fewer opportunities to acknowledge mistakes and it becomes a sign of weakness to face our mistakes, rather than a sign of strength and maturity.

The predominant feeling is self-righteousness, outrage and hurt. These intense feelings propel people to say "That's it." Or "I'm not going to let him get away with this."

Rather than blaming the other person for the failure of the relationship, we might ask ourselves, "What could I have done differently? How am I still being rigid, unyielding or judgmental?" These questions can help us determine, at least in part, how we might be responsible for how things stand.

My Part in the Estrangement

Sometimes it's more to do with how we have responded rather than who is at fault. The bottom line might have been, "I don't believe you. Are you sure this isn't false memory syndrome? You only came up with this after you started seeing that therapist." That one sentence became a wall separating us. I used it to prove that if I was going to heal I had to be true to myself and everyone who didn't believe me/validate me had to be eliminated from my life. They choose him over me and I was justified in leaving them behind."

Never once did I ask "Did I hear you correctly?" "Do you really not believe me?" Have you changed your mind? Do you still feel that way? Instead, I held the injury up as a flag. I was the victim. I got a lot of attention for being the victim. It was them that were being insensitive. Loyalties were drawn. I was right. They were wrong.

They were on the abuser's side. I was on the side of all survivors. I felt self-righteous.

Learning to Apologize

Apology is a powerful tool in reconciliations and relationships. A sincere apology can be healing for not only the person receiving it but also the person making the apology. Author Stephen Levine said "Amends feed the heart and quiet the mind."

One of the hardest things to do is apologize when it is done from the heart. It is especially difficult when you feel you have been wronged as well. Words can get stuck in our throat. And when we do apologize our apology may be inadequate or gloss over what we did or how it affected the other person.

An apology is not an apology if we are simultaneously trying to point the finger at what they did that was wrong. At other times, we use apologies to manipulate the other person into giving us what we want in terms of an apology. This could be that we want them to fully apologize to us or we want cooperation or forgiveness. None of these things should be expected when we apologize.

A genuine apology does not require any of these things in return. It stands alone, on its own merit, with no strings attached. They are not encumbered by rationalizations or self-defense. It's making an apology without using the same breath to make an excuse. As the person making the apology we should be able to stand on our own two feet, without needing the other person to take care of us.

Conversely, when it is someone apologizing to us, we may think it may be satisfying to have the other person groveling and consumed with guilt and remorse in misery. Usually this is more of a burden than a relief. It never feels good to see someone feeling humiliated and ashamed. It does heal to know the person gets that what they have done is wrong and that they know the consequences of their actions and that they now know how to change their behaviour and they are willing to do so.

In response to a genuine apology a simple "Thank you. I appreciate that." Is suffice for now and later you can delve into the wrong doing if it seems appropriate. If the person is still raging, humility is the best response.

Being gracious is the moment doesn't mean you will never get another chance to talk about how badly you hurt, it just means that when someone comes forth with an apology it may not be the best time to be on the offensive. It is helpful to remember that in most estrangements, both people have hurt each other, and both have things to apologize for.

The Healing Power of Accountability

Saying the words-- “I’m sorry, I regret what I did.” “I can see how that affected you.” is part of the apology. Words alone are not enough. To have meaning, it must accompany a consistent change of behaviour. When one person in a relationship consistently breaks promises, fails to listen or is disrespectful, simply saying you are sorry is not enough. The person needs to change their behaviour.

When both parties have played a role in creating a rift, they both need to acknowledge their part in what went wrong. Estrangements based on misunderstanding, judgment or a stubborn refusal to say you are sorry or you were wrong can often be remedied by one or both people relinquishing their pride.

Getting bogged down in “who started it” or “who was the most at fault” doesn’t matter and it often reinforces feelings of estrangement. Instead humility and an attitude of generosity is necessary. The more quickly this happens when things start to go wrong again the more favourable their reconciliation.

This is a much different dynamic if the estrangement is rooted in deeper violations, in which one person has committed a terrible wrong against the other. The victim of incest, abandonment, or battering doesn’t owe the perpetrator anything and you don’t need to meet the perpetrator halfway.

Part 2: Estrangement From a Perpetrator

When Perpetrators Want to Apologize, and Be Accountable

Although we all make mistakes, victims of serious interpersonal violence such as incest or childhood sexual abuse or similar mistreatment are not required to show humility in order to mend relationships with the people who have hurt them. Rather, they need to build the courage, strength, and determination necessary to heal and reclaim their lives. Once that arduous task has been achieved, it can be beneficial to nurture the kind of receptivity that would allow a sincere apology from the person who wronged them. But even then, they are not required to welcome that person back into their lives. Page 255 *I Thought I’d Never Speak to You Again*.

Former perpetrators face a very different task. They need to nurture not only humility but accountability as well- the willingness to own their mistakes, ensure that they will not be repeated, and do all they can to make amends for the hurts they have inflicted. They need to do this not just for the sake of repairing the relationship but also in order to rebuild their own dignity, self-respect, and, if possible, place of worth in the community.

Taking responsibility for deeply hurting another human being takes tremendous

courage. Being accountable for violent, abusive behaviour means curtailing behaviours that may have been rewarding, habitual, or previously unquestioned, and opening the door to ways we may have been violated ourselves. It means shifting the blame to our own shoulders, while giving up our right to rationalize, minimize, or deny our transgressions. Many people don't want to make that leap; they would rather hide behind a wall of control, anger, and intimidation. It takes great strength to admit that we have perpetuated a great wrong.

WEEK NINE: The Question of Forgiveness

Forgiveness: Something You Work At

Forgiveness: A Spiritual Gift

Forgiveness: Something That Requires Accountability

The Trouble With Pseudo Forgiveness

Are Some Things Unforgiveable?

I feel like forgiveness is a course in which I've only taken the first couple of classes and it runs for two semesters. -Elizabeth Menkin

There is a tremendous amount of confusion in our culture right now over the concept of forgiveness. Forgiveness has expanded beyond its traditional place in religious circles; it has penetrated popular culture and become the subject of talk shows, pop psychology books, and hundreds of articles in the mainstream press.

Religious advocates of forgiveness believe it is our moral duty to forgive; they say forgiveness is necessary for salvation. Secular supporters of forgiveness claim it reduces blood pressure, lowers the risk of heart attack, and boosts self-esteem. Forgiveness has been hailed as a panacea for healing troubled psyches, reuniting estranged families, rebuilding divided communities, and strengthening our national character. Yet despite these claims of grandeur, exactly what is meant by forgiveness” remains unclear.

The words “reconciliation,” “forgiveness,” “compassion,” and “acceptance” are often used interchangeably, when in fact they are not all synonymous. People who experience forgiveness invariably feel compassion and acceptance, but don’t necessarily forgive.

Certainly, it is necessary to move beyond rage and bitterness to achieve reconciliation, but forgiveness is not the only way to accomplish such healing. As one woman told me, “I don’t forgive my father for what he did. I’m just choosing to be around him anyway.”

In the case of grievous wrongs that have been committed; such as incest, vehicular homicide, murder, and genocide forgiveness is very difficult to achieve.

Forgiveness: Something You Work At

One idea is that you can attain forgiveness through intention, effort, or prayer. In her book *Forgiving and Not Forgiving*, by Jeanne Safer, she says “Genuine forgiveness demands every mental, moral, and spiritual resource you have...Nobody forgives spontaneously; victims must make an effort to move beyond their inevitable shock, rage, grief, and desire for revenge.”

In the book *Forgiving the Unforgivable*, by Beverly Flanigan, describes forgiveness as

something to be achieved. She says “*Forgiveness* is the accomplishment of mastery over a wound. It is the process through which an injured person first fights off, then embraces, then conquers a situation that has nearly destroyed him.

Both of these definitions describe a similar process, although the terminology may be different, the journey is the same.

People who achieve forgiveness often characterize it as a spiritual pilgrimage and very much an inward journey, which may be done through a daily meditation practice.

Initially, you may only have feelings of rage and betrayal, but over time feelings of empathy, caring, and compassion may surface with commitment to the process.

“When forgiveness happens to you, you’ll know. It’s like releasing an albatross from around your neck.”

Forgiveness may happen all of a sudden after months of trying to work through it or it may happen incrementally. Sometimes just feeling a little less resentment than you used to, a little more forgiving. *“It’s like wearing one of those miner’s hats. It only lights up the path a little way into the cave, but if you follow the light, it lights up more of the ground in front of you, and then you can take a few more steps.*

Forgiveness is like that for me.” Page 267 *I Thought We’d Never Speak Again* by Laura Davis.

Forgiveness: A Spiritual Gift

The counterpoint to the above explanation is that forgiveness doesn’t have to be worked on or forced or controlled, it arises spontaneously from within. Supporters of this perspective compare forgiveness to love. We cannot make ourselves feel love we just do. We can’t will our hearts to open. Forgiveness can impede healing.

Forgiveness is a by product of the healing process and can’t be forced.

An example of this would be an incest survivor healing through experiencing their inner child and in so doing becomes aware of the fact that their abuser is also an incest survivor, who has not healed their inner child and is acting out of hurt and blame.

Forgiveness: Something That Requires Accountability

In this perspective, you can't forgive someone who denies that you were injured or who fails to take responsibility for having hurt you. Until a wrong doing has been acknowledged, and there is remorse and restitution on the part of the wrongdoer, forgiveness cannot be granted.

Richard Hoffman, author of *Half the House*, expresses this point of view. He says, "There's this weird Hollywood idea that all relationships should have a happy ending—that everyone should forgive everyone in the final scene. But if a man burns down my house, I don't owe him forgiveness; he owes me a house. No one ever talks about what the person who perpetuated the crime owes. It's always the victim who owes forgiveness these days, and that's ridiculous.

Real forgiveness restores the moral fabric of a community and a family. It says, "We are all accountable to each other. We owe each other a certain kind of treatment, and when someone violates those standards, the damage needs to be repaired."

If someone cuts a net and I say, "There's a hole in the net." And the other person says, "Oh yeah, that's my fault. I'm sorry." That's great, but there's still a hole in the net. Who's going to take out the needle and thread and repair the hole?

Everyone shrugging and saying, "That's okay, I forgive you," leaves us with a net full of holes, and it weakens us as a community.

In this type of forgiveness that requires accountability the perpetrator must show the five R's: recognition, remorse, repentance, restitution, and reform.

Recognition means admitting that what they did was wrong, and not only that but that they were responsible for the wrongdoing and all the negative consequences that followed. This means not making any excuses.

Remorse means that each time the perpetrator thinks of the wrong they did, they regret it and the fact that they did not make better choices. It must be that they repeatedly wish that they had done it differently, and given the chance they would do it differently this time around.

Repentance is a firm resolve to do better in the future. To make the necessary changes to lead a better life that would stop any more abuse.

Restitution obviously can't include giving the person a different life but the perpetrator can; if they have the funds, pay for therapy, your education or anything else that contributes to putting your life back on track.

Reform means creating a new form of themselves. If the abuse happened because of an alcohol or drug addiction then becoming and staying sober, going to therapy and working on recovery and making a commitment to heal. Another form of reform may be speaking to groups about their part in what happened.

This is the kind of active, ongoing accountability that is at the core of restorative justice. Offenders acknowledge what they have done, apologize, and make restitution.

The Trouble with Pseudo Forgiveness

We live in a feel-good society that encourages us to search for easy answers, speedy solutions, and the cessation of pain. In-depth healing from deep emotional wounds takes a long time to heal and a lot of hard work. Going through depression, grief, rage and hurt to get to the other side is what healing is all about. When people who are struggling to cope with the effects of trauma or betrayal seek help, they are often told to take a pill, visualize to wholeness or forgive as a quick fix to feeling better. There is an attempt to generate a false sense of magnanimity. Forgiveness is seen as a litmus test for how healthy or spiritually evolved we are and to attain that a lot of pain is stuffed down so we can present a more socially acceptable appearance. Richard Hoffman, who forgave his coach who raped him, believes, in retrospect, that his stance of forgiveness was nothing more than a denial of his own vulnerability. He says, "For years, I believed I'd forgiven Tom Feifel, but it wasn't forgiveness at all. It was denial that what he had done to me mattered. I responded to the rape in a very first-son-of-a-working-class-family kind of way. Forgiving Tom was my way of saying "I'm a tough guy." I choose to think, "He was a good coach; we won a lot of games. Everybody has faults." It was my way of walking away from something that should have been confronted.

Are Some Things Unforgivable?

Forgiving is not something we do for the other person. Forgiveness happens inside us and it represents a letting go of the sense of grievance, and more importantly letting go of the role of victim. Saying “What you did was thoroughly despicable and puts you outside the category of decent human beings. But I refuse to give you the power to define me as a victim.” I don’t hate you. I reject you.

Forgiveness is then a personal decision. People can find peace without forgiveness. You must draw your own conclusions. Wholeness is the goal. We can have different paths to find it.

Exercise:

1. What is your personal definition of forgiveness?
2. How do you think forgiveness happens?
3. Would someone need to take responsibility for his or her actions before you could forgive? Why or why not?
4. What is the difference between pseudo forgiveness and genuine forgiveness?
5. When you think about extreme evil are some things unforgivable?
6. Do you believe it’s possible to find peace or achieve reconciliation without forgiveness?

WEEK TEN - When Reconciliation Is Impossible: The Task of Letting Go

Accepting That the Relationship Is Over When You Are Responsible for the Estrangement

Leaving the Porch Light On

Inner Resolution When You Cannot Reconcile with The Abuser

“A “no” uttered from the deepest conviction is better and greater than a “yes” merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble.” - Mahatma Gandhi

Accepting That the Relationship Is Over When You Are Responsible for the Estrangement

No matter how much you may want it or desire it or have prayed for it, sometimes reconciliation is not always possible. People refuse to contact you. They hold onto grudges, leave no forwarding address and can't be found or pass away before reconciliation is possible. Sometimes the person you want to reconcile with are too drunk, mentally ill or hostile. Yet even if we never speak another word, we still can find peace within ourselves.

Letting go of an estranged relationship requires that we first acknowledge that the relationship is over. Until we give up hope that things might change, you will not be able to move on. The more significant the person is to you the more difficult it is to face that reality. However, once you come to that realization it is freeing.

It is even more divesting if you have injured someone and no matter of apology or amends will end the estrangement.

As a parent when a child closes the door, there is sadness and grief. A loss of power and control, not to mention recrimination by friends and the community at large. It is easy to indulge in self-hate and spiral out of control.

Leaving the Porch Light On

Although you have moved on with your life, you can make it clear that if circumstances were to change you would be receptive to re-engaging. This kind of maturity is different than putting your life on hold and longing for an outcome that is probably not going to happen. You can at the same time focus on what you need to do in your own life to move on, while keeping a warm place in your heart for the person who is gone.

If someone is constantly overwhelmed then having very limited contact may be the answer. This could include a yearly holiday card, or exchanging the odd email or text message. Some people say maintaining some sort of connection is preferable to

severing all ties. Sometimes the only connection is in spirit. When the attitude is to keep the connection even when nothing more is possible make a big difference.

Inner Resolution When You Cannot Reconcile with The Abuser

Estrangement may be the only answer when parents and or the person who has been severely abusive to you is still abusive. Of course, you must also protect any children involved or that could potentially get hurt. You can have empathy for the abuser but that does not mean they still get to be abusive to you.

In some cases where you can't be in the relationship and trust yourself that you won't be drawn into it again you must leave. In this case, it is important to get away to see them for who they are and to practice and gain perspective of a non- abusive lifestyle. It is important to have this physical and emotional separation to do your own healing. You can still have inner resolution that this is self-love and that it is because of the situation that you must remain apart. At all times your safety and that of your children's safety is paramount.

Exercise:

1. Describe a relationship in which reconciliation was impossible or you believe it to be impossible. How did you feel at the time? How do you feel now?
2. Think of a relationship where you were forced to find resolution on your own. What approaches did you take? Were those approaches successful in helping you to find resolution? Why or why not?
3. *“When one door closes, another one opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.”* How has this statement been relevant in your life?

WEEK ELEVEN, TWELVE, THIRTEEN: Crucial Conversations

Getting Started

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Staying on Track

Nothing in this world is good or bad, but thinking makes it so. - William Shakespeare

Week 11 Getting Started

When getting ready to have a conversation about reconciliation or what led to the estrangement it is important to first have an understanding of how to conduct a crucial conversation.

What's a Crucial Conversation?

What makes your conversation crucial? First, there is a difference of opinions, second, the stakes are high. You're meeting with someone you really care about or in some other way the stakes are high. Third, emotions are strong. Despite the importance of these conversations, we often don't have these conversations or handle them badly because the stakes are too high and we are afraid. When we're under pressure our rational brain stops working. Some common crucial conversations are:

- Having a problem with the relationship
- Setting boundaries
- Confronting a loved one about a substance abuse problem
- Talking about what happened that led to the estrangement

Preparation

The dynamics of crucial conversations and how to navigate once we are in one is covered in detail in the book *Crucial Conversations* by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler. Also see the Appendix for guidelines to navigate through the process.

1. Before you start it is very important to be conscious of your feelings. Are you hurt and worried or angry? Also, how do you usually handle those feelings when you are in a heated conversation? Are you silent or shoot back with an aggressive comment or cheap shot or do you alternate between the two?
2. Find out what you are telling yourself about the people and situation. What is your story?

Stories provide our rationale for what is going on. It is how we interpret the facts. They help us to explain why, how, and what is happening.

Starting the process, starts with you. It's easy to put the onus on the other person, by saying that they haven't done any work so I can't talk to them, however, a healthy crucial conversation starts with you. Remember the only person you can directly control is yourself. You have the power to state what your feelings are and what you think of the situation.

Be aware of your feelings and judgments and behaviours. Focus on what you really want the result to be. Paying attention to your motives when you move toward silence or aggression will keep you on track.

Ask yourself when preparing for a crucial conversation. "What do I really want for myself, for others and for the relationship."

How to start the conversation.

Setting it up. Where, when, what, and how are you going to have this conversation.

Where: Are you going to have the conversation in a public place like a park or restaurant, or a private area like a car or in place where a mediator or counsellor is present.

When do you plan on doing this? Make sure it is not an already emotionally charged time for you or the person you are speaking to. Sometimes you have a limited timeframe if you don't see each other very often. This might mean it is more important to seize the opportunity than pick the best place.

What are you going to say and **how** are you going to say it is most important and requires that you plan ahead and practice.

Be honest about your reservations. "I'm nervous that we may start fighting again. Can we agree that for now we just listen to one another and not make any comments?"

"I miss our time together. I have been missing the closeness we once had."



Source: Patterson, K. Grenny, J., Switzler, A., McMillan, R. (2011).



Diagram Source: [Kshatri](#) (2016)

You need to state what your story is, not as an absolute but as a something that you have told yourself. Next you need to find out what the other person's story is. Make sure you are talking about the real problem. If you have talked to someone a number of times about not being late then the real problem is not about being late but about keeping commitments they make to you. This overall problem or pattern of behaviour needs to be discussed and not individual violations.

Exercise: Think of a person you want to reconcile with and where you might like to do that. Think of or write out what you would like to say to them. Check in with your emotions and what story you are saying to yourself about that person.

Find a partner and each of you take turns being the person who is setting up the meeting and the person who you are wanting to reconcile with. Take 5 minutes each.

Week 12 - Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Telling Your Story

When you are telling, your story talk tentatively. First notice your behaviour. Ask are you in silence or violence mode? Second be aware of your emotions. Are you being triggered and if so how? Ask yourself what story is creating these emotions. And finally, what facts or evidence do I have to back up my story.

Example: Every time I make a suggestion you shut me down. You think only your ideas are valid.

That is the story I tell myself. I'm feeling angry and inadequate. The first part of the statement may be true. Or it may be that most of the time when you make a suggestion the other person has suggested something else. That is more likely. The second statement "You think only your ideas are valid." Is not a fact. You don't know what another person is thinking. It could mean almost anything. You need to explore what it means. Focus on the behaviour to separate fact from the story you tell yourself.

Note: Spot the story by watching for hot words.

Notice the difference when you say "she hurried to give her opinion and didn't accept my opinion." Perhaps, she was nervous, concerned or unsure of herself. You don't know that it had anything at all to do with you.

The Clever Stories

The clever stories we tell ourselves about why people are doing what they are doing and why we do what we are doing. Our stories have a purpose and that is to justify our behaviour - making us feel good about ourselves and calling for no need to change. Letting us think the other person deserved it. "Of course, I was angry she always has to be the centre of attention." Even our therapists might agree with us. After all they weren't there and the other person has no voice at this point. Very clever.

Victim Stories

These turn into victim stories when the person turns into someone who is bad, wrong, or dumb. We are good, right, and brilliant. Other people do bad, inconsiderate things and we are the innocent victim. We ignore the role we play in the problem. You tell your story in a way that judiciously avoids whatever you have done or neglected to do that might have contributed to the situation.

Villain Stories

You create these nasty little tales by turning normal people into villains. When your spouse is upset that we didn't keep a commitment, we see him as inflexible and stubborn. In victim stories, we exaggerate our innocence. In villain stories, we overemphasize the other person's guilt or stupidity. We assume the worst possible motives. This is even more exaggerated when we are thinking of abandoning a relationship. We need to justify ourselves. We forget or ignore that human beings are complex and that their reasons for doing things can also be complex and may have nothing to do with us. After all, we can feel ok insulting or abusing a villain whereas we might have to be more careful with a living, breathing person.

Watch for the double standard. "Sure, I was late getting home and then didn't call but I couldn't let the team down." The victim story. But when someone else does it the villain story comes out. "You are so thoughtless! You could have called and told me you were going to be late."

Helpless Stories

Then there is the helpless story when you say to yourself; "There is nothing else I could do." In these stories, we make ourselves powerless to do anything healthy or helpful. We convince ourselves there was no alternatives. We tell ourselves "If I didn't yell, she wouldn't listen."

It's particularly easy to act helpless when we turn others' behaviour into fixed and unchangeable traits. For example, when we decide that our friend is a "control freak" (villain story), we are less inclined to give her feedback because, after all, control freaks like her don't accept feedback (helpless story). Nothing we can do will change that fact. (helpless story)

As you can see, helpless stories often stem from villain stories and typically offer us nothing more than an erroneous choice of we can either be honest and ruin the relationship or stay silent and suffer or we can bale and end the relationship because it is domed anyway and we don't want to stay in an unhealthy relationship any more.

These *clever* stories get us off the hook. They excuse us from any responsibility, when in reality, we may be partially responsible. The other person isn't bad and wrong, and we aren't right and good. The truth lies somewhere in the middle.

Most likely you make up stories out of guilt. Here are some common reasons why you might make up a story about someone:

- You believe you should apologize but don't
- You believe you should help someone but don't
- You say yes when you know you should say no
- You believe you should talk to someone about concerns you have with them, but don't

- You believe you should listen respectfully to feedback, but become defensive instead
- You see problems with a plan and think you should speak up and don't

Even small issues like these get us to start telling *clever* stories. When we don't admit to our own mistakes, we obsess about others' faults, our innocence, and our powerlessness to anything about it other than what we are already doing. Of course, self-justification is not all we want. We really would like to solve the problem and strengthen the relationship but we are scared. Estrangement in the short term seems like a good solution. However, that eliminates a lot of potentially healthy relationships.

Taking responsibility can be especially daunting for sexual abuse survivors. Not to mention the "I" word - intimacy. The other problem is when we may believe we are victims and powerless it turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The stories we tell ourselves are powerful because we treat them as if they are real.

There are four questions you need to ask yourself to get all the essential facts to have a good conversation and problem solve. The questions are:

- Am I pretending not to notice my role in the problem?
- Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent person do what this person is doing?
- What do I really want; for me, for others, and for the relationship?
- What would I do right now if I really wanted these results?

The first question prompts us to face up to the fact that maybe, just maybe we did something to cause the problem. By asking what role you've played, you begin to realize how selective your perspective is and how you might have minimized your own mistakes, while exaggerating the role of others.

The second question asking why a reasonable, rational person would do what you think they have done you humanize others. It sets us on a course to search for plausible answers. Empathy can then replace judgment.

The third and fourth question takes us out of helplessness and makes you able.

The following statements get to the heart of the matter.

"I know you have some strong opinions and I do as well. I would like to explore that and see if we might come to some common ground."

Starting statements might be "I would like to talk to you about our relationship." Or

"I have found that we have drifted apart." Or "We may not see eye to eye on the

abuse or even that it existed. I would like to start talking to you about how I feel and also how you are feeling about it.”

Don't go into everything at once but talk about things in steps. For instance; “When you betrayed my confidence and told the other relatives my address after I asked you not to do that, you not only hurt me emotionally, but also that also lead to the abuser having knowledge of where not only I was, but also my children. This put their safety at risk.” If you don't get a response you might say “What do you have to say about that?” or I'd like to know what you were thinking when you did that.” Is even gentler. “The story I tell myself is that you think my request was not important. And you don't believe that Dad is any threat to me or my children. Is that the case?”

You might also need to obtain the help of an independent objective person. You could say, “Would you be willing to see someone who could help us sort this out?”

Sometimes this is as far as you can or are willing to go. If you want to proceed to meeting on a regular basis then you will need to set up ongoing boundaries and monitor the reconciliation at regular intervals to ensure you are staying on track.

Exercise: Think of a person you want to reconcile with and where you might like to do that. Think of or write out what you would like to say to them. Check in with your emotions and what story you are saying to yourself about that person.

Find a partner and each of you take turns being the person who is setting up the meeting and the person who you are wanting to reconcile with. Take 5 minutes each.

Week 13 - Staying on Track

Setting boundaries. Setting up regular meetings or talking times.

Knowing our limits and checking in with the other person's limits, feelings, and thoughts on a regular basis will help to keep on track. You might say something like;

"I would like to see you on a regular basis so we can get reconnected. Would you be willing to set up a time once a month when we can get together for an hour and talk?"

OR

"I need some time out but I would still like to continue talking after I take a break. Is that ok with you? How do you feel about that?"

If something happens to shake your confidence in the relationship again, talk to the person as soon as possible. Be honest about how you feel and what it means to you. If this is a deal breaker make sure you get all the facts first and tell the person your story. Make sure they understand or convey as best you can the importance of the situation and the consequences of their actions.

Don't make hollow threats or hasty decisions. Be clear on if new boundaries need to be set up what they are and how things are going to proceed from here on in.

Know that changes don't happen overnight and that the person may need time to correct their actions. Is an apology and new action plan to prevent this happening again in place? It's easy to fall back into old habits. Be vigilant in establishing and continuing new healthier habits.

Is real progress being made? What are the actions that support this or not?

Example:

Your mother has said she is stopping drinking but you have smelt alcohol on her breath the last couple of times you have met. You have brought it up but she has denied drinking. What do you do?

You might start by saying:

“The last couple of times I have smelt alcohol on your breath. This is in violation of our agreement that you don’t drink when we are together. Also, I’m concerned that you may be starting to drink again and this would seriously jeopardize our ever getting together again. What has been going on that you are drinking again?

How are you going to handle this so it doesn’t happen again?

If I smell alcohol on your breath again next time we meet that will be the last time you see me. End the meeting and set up another time to get together.

Make sure you are serious about this ultimatum. If not don’t say it. If you want to leave the porch light on then say “If I smell alcohol on your breath again I will not see you until you are completely sober again. If you should decide that you want a relationship with me then when you can prove that you have stopped drinking I will consider a relationship with you.”

Exercise:

1. Have you had a conversation like this with someone important to you? How did that go and would you do anything different next time?
2. Think of a person you want to reconcile with and where you might like to do that. Think of or write out what you would like to say to them. Check in with your emotions and what story you are saying to yourself about that person.

Find a partner and each of you take turns being the person who is setting up the meeting and the person who you are wanting to reconcile with. Take 5 minutes each.

Observe how you are feeling, your stress level and how you responded to the other person. Observe each other’s body language and tone of voice throughout the conversation.

Would you as the recipient of the crucial conversation be responsive to the person speaking to you?

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Write these comments down immediately following the conversation. Give this feedback to your partner after you have completed both scenarios.

WEEK FOURTEEN: The Benefits of Reconciliation After Estrangement

Reweaving the Web of Family and Community

Reconciliation Rekindles Optimism

Reconciliation Leads to Peace

Reweaving the Web of Family and Community

I've learned that it is possible to go through the most intense amount of hell and come out of it accepting things you never thought you could accept and loving people that you never thought you could love. - Patricia Robinson

Reestablishing trust after it has been broken is a gutsy, difficult challenge, and those who accomplish it are rewarded with a deeper sense of compassion, restored faith in human decency, and renewed bonds of love. Many people who successfully reconcile report that their new relationships are healthier and more enjoyable than the relationships they had before.

When people choose to make an effort to listen to each other and learn to work with their differences, a sense of cooperation and accomplishment pervades their relationship. Understanding the fragility of love, they no longer take each other for granted and cherish each other instead. Relationships soften, strengthen, and deepen, and optimism returns. The historical connection is really important in families and between friends. A new-found intimacy and respect prevail.

Reconciliation allows people to again be supportive to one another. A whole community of friendship and kinship can be reunited. As reconciliation deepens, old anger, hurt, and resentment lose their grip. Wounds that once were central recede into history. Preoccupation with the other person's mistakes and failings subside. Whenever a major conflict is resolved a new found understanding and appreciation is found.

"We made a quantum leap in a situation that I believed would never change, and it opened up the world for me."

Reconciliation Rekindles Optimism

Reconciliation often rekindles people's faith in themselves and in the people around them. "Getting my mother back gave me tremendous faith in the possibility that things can turn around when you least expect them to. I gained a deep conviction that things do work out and that there can be justice in the world. I know things don't always turn out that way, but I now know for me that they can." Patrice from *I Thought We'd Never Speak Again* page 315.

Richard Hoffman says "I've become an amazing optimist. Working through this with my father makes me committed to relationships in a whole new way. There's hardly anything that comes up in my marriage that my wife and I can't deal with: the same is true for my friendships. I've learned that you can sit down with someone and have an incredibly difficult conversation and not die from it, and no one as to get hurt in the process." from *I Thought We'd Never Speak Again* page 315

Reconciliation Leads to Peace

When we reconcile, old angers, hurts and resentments lose their hold on us. Whenever you resolve a major conflict with anyone and when it is taken care of there is a deep sense of peace. The issue loses its charge, the pain diminishes and there is no longer stress and tension surrounding the problem. Even when reconciliation doesn't lead to closeness, it can still bring feelings of resolution. There is no need to be vigilant any more. Once you know how to handle conflicts you can resolve them as they occur. Your boundaries are neither rigid nor collapsed. This doesn't mean that you still don't have to work on relationships. They are ever evolving and changing that will always continue. What will change is how you deal with them.

Not being at war or at odds will lead to a greater sense of self-confidence and finally the peace that comes from being connected with yourself and others in an imperfect and wonderful world.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever been successful in reconciling a relationship? If so, how have you benefited?
2. How have your experiences with reconciliation, both positive and negative, influenced your approach to relationships? Your world view?

WEEK FIFTEEN

Next Steps

Next Steps

Congratulations and thank you for completing the workshop **From Estrangement to Reconciliation**. This is not an easy journey and in the famous words of M. Scott Peck it is certainly a “*road less traveled*”. Honor your courage and persistence in making it this far, but, the journey has just begun. Taking those first steps will be tenuous and difficult. As we know reading and acquiring the knowledge is one thing. Taking action is something entirely different. Every situation and circumstance along the way, like in Little Red Riding Hood is a challenge. You are not alone. The Gatehouse is here to assist and you may want to reach out to participants that have been with you and supported you throughout the fifteen-week workshop.

Do you feel differently about reconciliation now then you did when you started the program? What have you learnt that has had the greatest impact on you? Are you planning on reconciling with someone you have previously been estranged with?

Next steps could begin with writing out a plan of action like the one below and then going over that plan with someone who knows your situation and can give you some guidance and advice.

Action Plan

Decide how you want to contact the person you wish to reconcile with. Be specific.	How? By phone, email, letter, in person. When (the actual date and time). Where? Make sure it is a safe and neutral place for both you and the other person. Why? Make sure you know in advance why you want to reconcile with this person. Are you ready to reconcile? Have you gone over the past injuries and
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	what lead you to be estranged in the beginning?
A conversation to begin the process.	Do you have an opening line? A conversation you have planned and what you want to say to begin the process. Remember attitude is the most important part of the conversation. What attitude are you going in with? What do you want the outcome to be? What if the response is negative? What will be your response?
Self-Care	Do you have supports in place? If so who are they? Write their names out ahead of time and make sure the person or people who are supporting you know they are and will make themselves available to you.
What is the worst that could happen?	Make sure you have listed what the worst possible outcome could be. Are you ready to handle that? Do you have a plan in place to take care of yourself or stop the process if you need to physically take care of yourself?
What is the best possible outcome? How can this reconciliation benefit you?	Make a wish list of the best possible benefits and outcome. How will this reconciliation possibly change your life, your world view and your sense of community?

I wish you all the best of luck in creating change and moving forward to transform your future.

APPENDIX

House Rules

The Gatehouse is a safe place where everyone has a “voice.” In order to ensure that everyone is being treated with dignity and respect, every participant is required to read and sign the house rules document. Please read the following information carefully.

Please sign the signature page and give it to your program facilitators. By signing, you are acknowledging that you have read and fully understand the information listed herein. If you have any questions concerning the information in this document, please approach your support group facilitator for further details.

The purpose of the House Rules is to help create a respectful, safe place where peoples’ voices can be heard.

1. Commit to the weekly sessions, attendance is essential for creating a climate of trust and respect. The group is closed after week two and no new participants will be allowed to join after that time.
2. If a participant misses two sessions, they may be asked to leave the group. Return to group is conditional upon group’s approval. The participant may re-apply to participate in the next group cycle.
3. The group meets from 7:00pm to 9:00pm weekly. Please arrive on time and be aware of the use of time during the session so we can finish promptly at 9:00pm.
4. Unless discussed with and approved by the group in advance, cell phones must be turned off or on silent during the session.
5. Refrain from substance use twenty-four hours before and twenty-four hours after each meeting. Refrain from other forms of addictions including but not limited to gambling and sex. Numbing our feelings will interfere with the awakening process and impede our ability to experience our feelings. ***We need to feel to heal.***
6. If a participant arrives at the meeting in an altered state due to substance use, they will be asked to leave and return the following week. However, if the behaviour is repeated, the participant will be asked to leave the group to first address substance abuse issues. They may re-apply to participate in the next group cycle.
7. Treat everyone with respect and dignity. Refrain from using abusive language, angry gestures or a raised tone of voice within the group.
8. Participants should avoid offering unsolicited advice, observations and comments to others. Instead, we should focus on ourselves with honesty and use “I statements”.
9. Do not touch other group participants, facilitators, Gatehouse staff or volunteers without asking permission. E.g. ask if it is ok to give the person a hug.

10. Participants should avoid sharing contact information including email, phone numbers with one another until the program is completed.
11. Group facilitators are not allowed to offer rides to group participants.
12. The practice of gift-giving between participants or participant/facilitator is not permitted. The facilitator/participant relationship is a professional one. If you would like to give something to The Gatehouse space, for example a book, plant, board game or donation that is acceptable.
13. Confidentiality is critical. Participants should maintain the confidentiality of fellow participants. The only exceptions for breaking confidentiality are if a participant threatens to harm themselves or somebody else, especially a child. In such cases, The Gatehouse will take action to protect participants and others.
14. It is recommended that you do not seek or engage in reconciliation endeavours until the end of this group.

Remember...

- Take initiative.
- Take responsibility for your experience.
- Communicate your needs. If you need support, ask for it.
- Honour the importance of everyone.
- See yourself and others as co-creators, mentors, and companions on the journey.
- Create a safe space for yourself and others to share your hopes and fears.
- Be open to life's mysteries, kicks and nudges, affirmations and confrontations.
- This is it. This is your life. Enjoy it.
- Support staff at The Gatehouse are available to assist with reconciliation efforts.

Is there anything else that feels important in order to create safety and trust in the group?

If you have any questions, please speak to your peer support group facilitators or The Gatehouse staff member in the office.

House Rules Participant Signature Page

I, _____ [Print Name] have read and fully understand the terms of the House Rules Document.

I will fully comply with all of the guidelines in order to ensure that everyone, including myself is treated with fairness and respect.

I understand that inability to follow the House Rules as indicated may result in my being asked to leave group.

I, _____ read on (date) _____
[Print your first and last name neatly] [MM/DD/YY]

Participant Signature

How To Create A Suicide Safety Plan

1. *When the Plan Should Be Used:* This step will involve making yourself familiar with what types of situations, images, thoughts, feelings and behaviours might precede or accompany suicidal urges for you. List these warning signs so that you can refer back to them when deciding whether to activate your plan.

Examples: "When I feel suicidal, I tend to isolate myself and not take good care of my health." Or: "Suicidal thoughts are often triggered for me when I am reminded of my childhood abuse."

2. *What I Can Do to Calm/Comfort Myself If I Am Feeling Suicidal:* Create a list for yourself of activities that are soothing to you when you are upset.

Examples: Taking a hot bath, listening to music, exercising

3. *What Are My Reasons for Living?* Create a list of your reasons for living. When you are feeling suicidal, it is very easy to get caught up in the pain you are feeling and forget the positives in your life. Your list will help you refocus your attention on the reasons to keep going until your suicidal thoughts and feelings pass.

Examples: My children, my spouse, my faith in God

4. *Who Can I Talk To?* Keep a list of contacts you can talk to if you are unable to distract yourself with self-help measures. List names, phone numbers or other contact information and be sure to have backups in case your first choice is unavailable.

Examples: Your significant other, friends, relatives, pastor

5. *Who Can I Talk To If I Need Professional Assistance?* Create a list of all professional resources available to you, along with their phone numbers, email addresses and other pertinent contact information.

Examples: Your psychiatrist, your therapist, a crisis hotline

6. *How Can I Make My Environment Safe?* Plan what steps you can take to make yourself safe. This may involve removing or securing any items that you are likely to use to hurt yourself, or going to another location until the urges have passed. It may also involve getting another person involved to help you.

Examples: "When I am feeling suicidal, I will ask my brother to keep my guns at his house." Or: "When I feel like hurting myself, I will go to a public place, like a mall, restaurant or library to distract myself."

7. *What to Do If I Am Still Not Feeling Safe:* If all other steps have failed to keep you feeling safe, go to your nearest hospital emergency room and ask for assistance. Keep the name, address and directions to the hospital listed in your plan for easy access or save it in your GPS. If you do not feel that you can get to the hospital safely on your own, call 911 or the emergency contact number appropriate for where you live and ask for transport to the hospital.

Suicide Safety Planning

When the Plan Should Be Used: If you find yourself in a situation when you don't feel like yourself or are having suicidal thoughts.

Gerstein Crisis Line: 416-929-5200

Toronto Distress Centre: 416-408-4357

1. What types of situations, images, thoughts, feelings and behaviors might precede or accompany memories of the abuse (warning signs)?

2. What can I do to comfort myself when I am feeling down?

3. What motivates me to get through the day?

4. Who can I trust to talk to?

5. Who can I talk to if I need Professional Assistance?

6. How can I make my environment safe?

7. What to do if I am still not feeling safe:

If all other steps have failed to keep you feeling safe, go to your nearest hospital emergency room and ask for assistance. If you do not feel that you can get to the hospital safely on your own, call 911 or the emergency contact number appropriate for where you live and ask for transport to the hospital.

**Gerstein Crisis Line: 416-929-5200
Toronto Distress Centre: 416-408-4357**

Safety Meditation

<http://www.joanfurman.com/blog/2009/04/guided-imagery-for-creating-a-safe-place>

Allow yourself to be in a comfortable position, either lying down or sitting up. If you're sitting up, place a pillow behind your back, and allow your neck and your back to be nicely supported, not leaning back too much if you have difficulty staying awake. Remember that if you feel afraid at any time, just open your eyes and ground yourself in today. You are safe and you are in control today.

Begin to take a couple of long, deep breaths all the way down into your diaphragm. [Inhale.] Hold it, and as you exhale, let go of the tension. [Exhale] Letting go.... Take another deep breath all the way in. [Inhale.] Allow all the tension to move into your lungs, and then let it go, [Exhale.] just begin to let go.... And if you're still feeling tense, repeat that process a few times as you begin to let go, begin to relax.... Create a silent and healing space around you.... Focus only on your quiet breathing and the sound of my voice. . . allow yourself to begin to let go, to create a healing time, a time of peace and safety.... I'm going to count from seven to one. And with each descending number, you'll find yourself becoming more and more relaxed.

Begin to breathe in the safety and peace. Breathe out the fear. And breathe in the safety and peace. And breathe out the fear. Each time you breathe in, relax your body. And each time you exhale, let go of tension. Breathe in relaxation. Breathe out tension. With each breath, count from five to one.... If you need more than that, begin at seven or ten, counting to one.... Make each breath a number. Each exhale letting go. As you are counting, as you are breathing, allow the image of safety to fill your mind.... You are there, in safety, in peace. No one can be there with you without your permission. Focus only on breathing, on counting, on imagining your safe place once again. Allow your vision to come alive as you breathe. Remember and focus on all the images in your safe place.... Breathe in the peace and the safety. Breathe out the fear. Allow your senses to come alive again in this place. Remember how it looks. Remember all the detail -- the color of the sky, the grass or trees or sand or water.... Remember your place of safety and how very beautiful it is.... As you continue breathing in safety and breathing out fear, remember the sounds of your safe place.... Remember how beautiful it smells.... Remember the sights -- glance around at your house or structure of safe shelter, and see your waterfall or pool of healing water.... And over there, see your garden.... And remember, remember the beauty and the peace and the safety.... Sit as long as you need to, breathing in safety and peace. Breathing out fear, as long as you need to.... Do whatever else you need to do in your place of safety. Spend as long as you like.... And when you are ready, simply count yourself out by counting from one to five. And as you leave the place of safety, bring with you the knowing that you are safe, you are at peace, and everything is going to be all right.

From Estrangement to Reconciliation Consent

Are you ready for reconciliation Questionnaire?

Purpose of the Evaluation:

This evaluation is being conducted by The Gatehouse to examine the effectiveness of the “From Estrangement to Reconciliation” program offered by The Gatehouse.

What will be done?

Participants are being asked to fill the current survey before starting support group program. This will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The scale will be administered again at the end of the peer support group. The survey is composed of:

1. Few socio-demographic questions (Age range, gender and city of residence)
2. A scale to measure the pre attending peer support group score.
3. A scale to measure post group attendance. The reason for using this scale is to measure the correlation between attending group and the application of transformative learning processes learned in group.

Benefits of this Evaluation:

By participating in this evaluation process, you will be contributing to enhancing the effectiveness of the peer support group program. This will help us to develop our program and therefore make it more effective.

Risks or discomforts:

Minimal risks are anticipated from participating in this evaluation. If you don't feel comfortable with any item or question in this questionnaire, you can withdraw from the evaluation altogether. If you decide to quit at any time before you have finished the scale, your answers will NOT be recorded. Please remember that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation from this evaluation at any time. If you do not want to continue, you can simply shred your survey or not submit it (if online). If you don't "submit" your survey, you can still continue your involvement in the peer support group without any reservation.

If you feel uncomfortable after participating in this survey process, you can contact the Maria Barcelos at the Gatehouse at 416-255-5900 x225 or mbarcelos@thegatehouse.org.

Confidentiality:

Your responses will be kept completely confidential. We will not share your answer with anyone except The Gatehouse evaluation team. After we have completed data collection and data analysis we will share the results at the end of the year. Once the data analysis is done we will shred all the surveys.

How the findings will be used:

The results of the evaluation will be used for scholarly purposes only. The results from the evaluation will be presented in educational settings and at professional conferences, and the results might be published in a professional journal.

Contact information:

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact Maria Barcelos at mbarcelos@thegatehouse.org.

From Estrangement to Reconciliation Pre Group Questionnaire

1. Please specify the gender you identify with: _____

2. Age (check one): I am....

18-24____ 25-35____ 36-49____ 50-65____ 65+____

3. Has a relationship with someone you once cared about ended because of anger, betrayal or miscommunication?

Yes No

4. Do you miss the other person and wish they could still be in your life?

Yes No

5. How much work have you done on your own thoughts and feelings?

None Little to some Much A great deal

6. Please indicate the type of work that you have done?

____Peer support through an organization or with friends, e.g. The Gatehouse

____Counselling & Psychotherapy individual

____Counselling & Psychotherapy group

____Self-help - books, internet

7. How willing are you to approach this person in a new way?

Not willing Somewhat Willing Very Willing

8. Are you ready to take responsibility (if applicable) without taking the blame?

Yes No Unsure

9. Have you thought of compassion towards the other person?

The Road From Estrangement to Reconciliation

Yes No Unsure

10. Have you moved beyond fantasies of revenge or retaliation?

Yes No Unsure

11. Could you move forward even if you receive no apology or acknowledgement that you were wronged?

Very Likely Likely Occasionally Not likely Never

12. I am being realistic with my expectations of the other person. (Please circle one).

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. If a limited relationship is all that possible, that would be acceptable to me.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. I can be in this relationship and still feel good about myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. Given the risks involved in reaching out, I am willing to face the worst possible scenario.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. I feel ready to rebuild the relationship.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

The Road From Estrangement to Reconciliation

17. Who are you considering reconciling with right now? (Check one only please).

Family member

Friend

Abuser/sexual offender

Employer

Co-worker

Other _____ (specify if comfortable doing so)

18. What do you want to get out of being part of this group?

P.A.U.S.E

Remember that P.A.U.S.E means, **“Paying Attention Unveils Sacred Experiences.”** P.A.U.S.E is a simple way of responding to obstacles as we go along our healing path.

When you encounter an obstacle, something that hinders you in any way, shape or form, simply pause, saying to yourself, **“I am here, I am now, how do I make this better?”**

In the initial stage of your **P.A.U.S.E** give attention to your breathing and see yourself as having the important task of ensuring that air leaves and enters your body as if it were a sacred life-affirming experience.

Internally begin your response with, **“How will I create a healthy response to this obstacle?”**

Pick a time that is good for you and write your experience down and what you learned about yourself. One of the questions you can ask yourself is **“How do you free yourself from limiting thoughts and behaviours?”**

Your Style Under Stress™ Assessment

When the stakes are high, emotions run strong, and opinions differ, we all struggle to stay cool. But more often than not, we clam up for fear that speaking up will make things worse; or, we blow up because we haven't a clue how to express ourselves honestly and respectfully.

Take the first step to improving your crucial conversations skills by learning your Style Under Stress™. This 33-question quiz reveals your natural tendencies to move toward silence (masking, avoiding, or withdrawing) or violence (controlling, labeling, or attacking).

Identify a Relationship. Before you begin, think about the relationship you want to explore with your boss, coworker, direct report, friend, or family member.

Identify a Circumstance. Next, think of a tough circumstance—one where you either stay silent or perhaps lash out with anger, a raised voice, sarcasm, etc...

Apply. With that relationship and circumstance in mind.

Take Your Style Under Stress Assessment at:

<https://www.vitalsmarts.com/styleunderstress/>

Resource:

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