

# Grievance, trauma, gender, shame and masculinity: Understanding risk, invitations to collude and systems abuse when engaging adult users of domestic, family & sexual violence

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# Types of family violence tactics

Coercive control

Psychological and emotional violence

Physical violence & harm

Sexualised violence

Economic abuse

stalking

Social violence

Image based abuse

Technology facilitated abuse

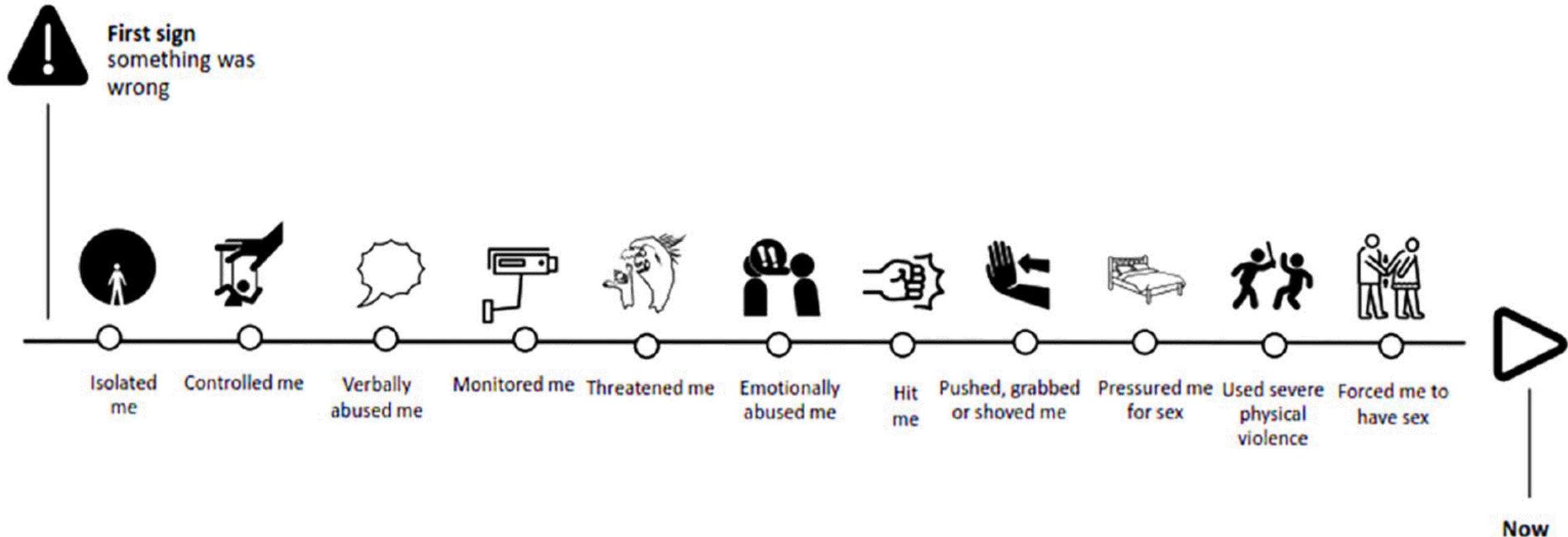
Systems abuse

Cultural and spiritual abuse

Reproductive violence

To learn from the lived experiences of victim-survivors, and what these insights mean for how to respond in helpful ways, see **[insightexchange.net](http://insightexchange.net)**

# Timeline of psychological and social entrapment



<https://theconversation.com/he-stopped-me-from-talking-to-male-colleagues-new-research-shows-how-domestic-violence-so-often-starts-with-isolation-and-control-257457>

# Impacts on children

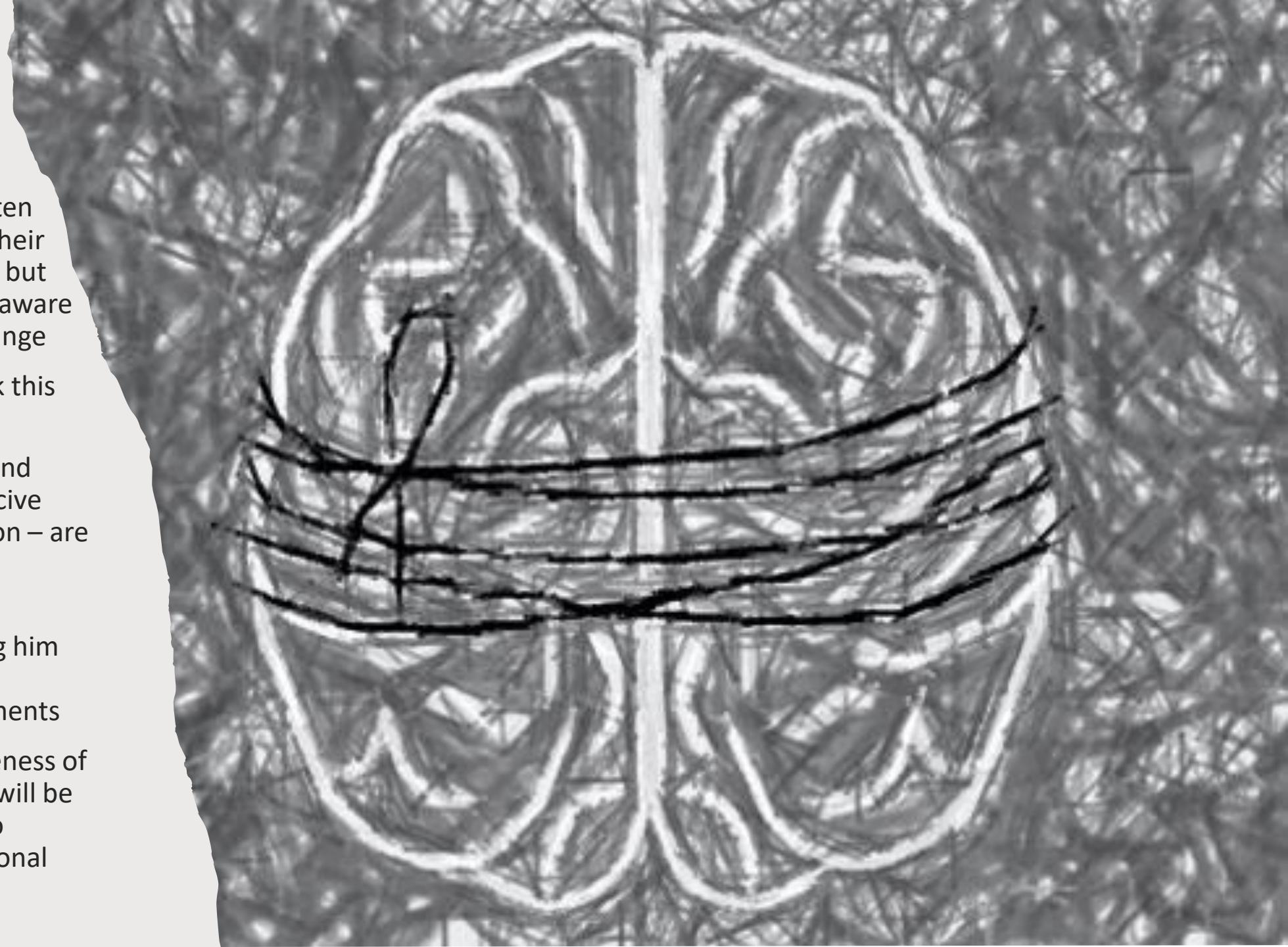
Fathers who use DFV are often unaware of the impacts of their behaviour on their children, but differ in whether becoming aware of impacts will motivate change

Sometimes shame will block this awareness.

Sometimes their historical and current investments in coercive control – for whatever reason – are too strong.

Sometimes growing this awareness, without flooding him with shame, can create motivational light-bulb moments

Sometimes increased awareness of children's emotional needs will be weaponised by the father to enhance his systems, emotional and financial abuse tactics.



# his use of violence

isolating

intimidating

dominating

**Shaping our beliefs and  
perceptions of each other**

obscured from seeing all his strategies

**secrecy**

dividing and deceiving us

disconnecting us

keeping us far apart

We live in the spaces

**Connecting** between

the trap wires

**Creating** safety

Unsilenced

Being together in our ways.  
In our **understanding**.

Violence is always a choice → coercive controlling patterns are often **highly invested behaviours** (to maintain gender-based privilege *and* to cope with emotional vulnerabilities)

See the resource *Four considerations in assessing choices to use DFSV* for further details, summarised in the next slide.

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## Capability

- What intersecting factors (AoD, MH, complex trauma) might be making it harder for the offender to choose non-violence?
- To what extent do they have existing non-violence skills (but choose not to apply them)

## Levers

- Privilege-based levers
- Cultural, extended family or community-based levers
- Peer group association levers

## Planning

- Degree of planning and premeditation that has gone into executing particular DFSV tactics
- How much time is spent planning how to humiliate, punish, degrade and/or terrorise the victim-survivor?

## Intention → specific impacts

- How much of the impacts of his use of DFSV – on the adult(s) and child/ren experiencing his violence – is he already aware of, but still chooses to use violence anyway?
- What impacts does he **intend** to deliberately produce? What impacts is he aware of but **doesn't care about**?
- What impacts doesn't he know about, that if he knew about, might motivate him to change his behaviour?

I need to control  
my environment!

(because I'm an autist...  
because I have OCD...  
because I suffer with  
anxiety... because I am so  
easily triggered...)



Entitlement



Coercive  
control

# Entitlement and other factors in contributing to coercive control



Mostly other factors, some entitlement

Both entitlement and other factors are significant

Mostly entitlement and some influence of other factors

Mostly or purely entitlement

## No/little entitlement

Considers others' needs  
Negotiates  
Self-manages  
AOD/MH/  
trauma/  
neurodiverse  
issue still  
impacts  
others

## Moderate entitlement

Focuses more on own needs  
Expects others to accommodate his needs  
Some self managing  
AOD/MH/etc has major impacts on family

## Substantial entitlement

Self-focused  
Demands others to accommodate his needs  
Makes others responsible  
Perpetrates DFSV

Language that blames the victim-survivor	Language that places responsibility on to the user of violence
"They have a violent relationship" / "They live in a DV household"	"He uses violence against her"
"The mother has a history of violent relationships"	"The mother is a victim-survivor of several past relationships where her male partners have used significant violence and coercive control against her. Her previous attempts to obtain support did not appear to help, and she is wary that child protection involvement might make the current situation worse."
"The children are exposed to violent conflict"	"The children see him using degrading emotional violence and intimidation when she tries to negotiate family matters"
"The children's schooling is being affected by the violence"	"The father's violent and controlling behaviour interrupts the children's schooling"
"The mother yells and screams at him when he gets angry"	"She tries to stand up for herself when he escalates into using violence"
<p>"The mother is non-compliant / did not engage with CYF's investigations"</p> <p>"She refuses to call police, and denies the behaviour"</p>	<p>"The mother is not returning calls or present during our visits. We are assessing the reasons for this"</p> <p>"The mother appears to be assessing that police involvement will make things worse / might escalate the father's behaviour"</p>
"The father gets angry..."	"The father uses violence..."
"The mother frequently fails to send her children to school"	"The father uses significant social violence and surveillance of the mother, limiting her actions and ability to attend to their children's needs. This impacts on the mother's ability to engage with their children's school. Further, the father is taking no action himself to help his children engage with schooling."

# Entitlement, trauma, masculinity and humiliation: A poem

How dare you make me less of a man.

Being a MAN is the only thing I have.

You women chatter and scheme, you never stop. I keep to myself. Trust no-one but myself, it's got me through this far.

Being a MAN is the one thing that protects me from entering the black hole. You want to take that shield away from me?

Being a MAN dullens the shame of who I was, who I must have been, what I must have deserved.

Dullens the shame of who I have become... or so I whisper, too softly for me to hear.

If I was man enough then, I would have stopped him. He would not have done what he did to us, to me, to my sisters.

Yes, I was a boy. But a boy needs to be a man in moments like that. Not a sis. Not running to the bedroom with his tail between his legs.

If I was a full man, I would have confronted my Mum. She was never there to protect me. Women are weak, indecisive.

My mates were right back then. My new mates are right now. You can't trust them. Sleeping around. Manipulating us, going behind our backs. At least us men, we fight it out.

I learnt my lessons early, what you need to do to survive.

How dare you make me less of a man.

So what if my skin isn't exactly white. Or if I can't get a stable job or a deposit on a house. I can still be a full man, just as much as any other man, can't I?

I can, I must, I have to, what am I if I'm not? A girl?

You make me shake with anger. You make my insides collapse.

You don't know the half of what I do to manage this, to manage you. I need to make you feel crazy. To stop those idiots from egging you on. How else do I disarm you?

And you blame me for exploding when everything I try doesn't work and you still challenge me!

I'm hurt. Don't you care? Why do you twist the knife?

I survive through you I whisper inside, and cry out loud to your mother heart.

You think you can see through me. You think you can call me out. You seemed to be different – no, you're just like all the other women controllers in the world. Backing us into a corner. Getting all the big wigs on your side.

No more! I'm getting back what's mine, what's been taken away from me.

How dare you make me feel less of a man.

Perpetrators of DFSV differ in the extent to which they use power and control against their intimate partner to:

Entrap the victim-survivor to purposefully maintain and extend the gender-based benefits and rights they believe they are entitled to – as distinct from ‘merely’ benefitting from everyday male privilege – without having a real interest in forming a relationship with their partner based on genuine connection;

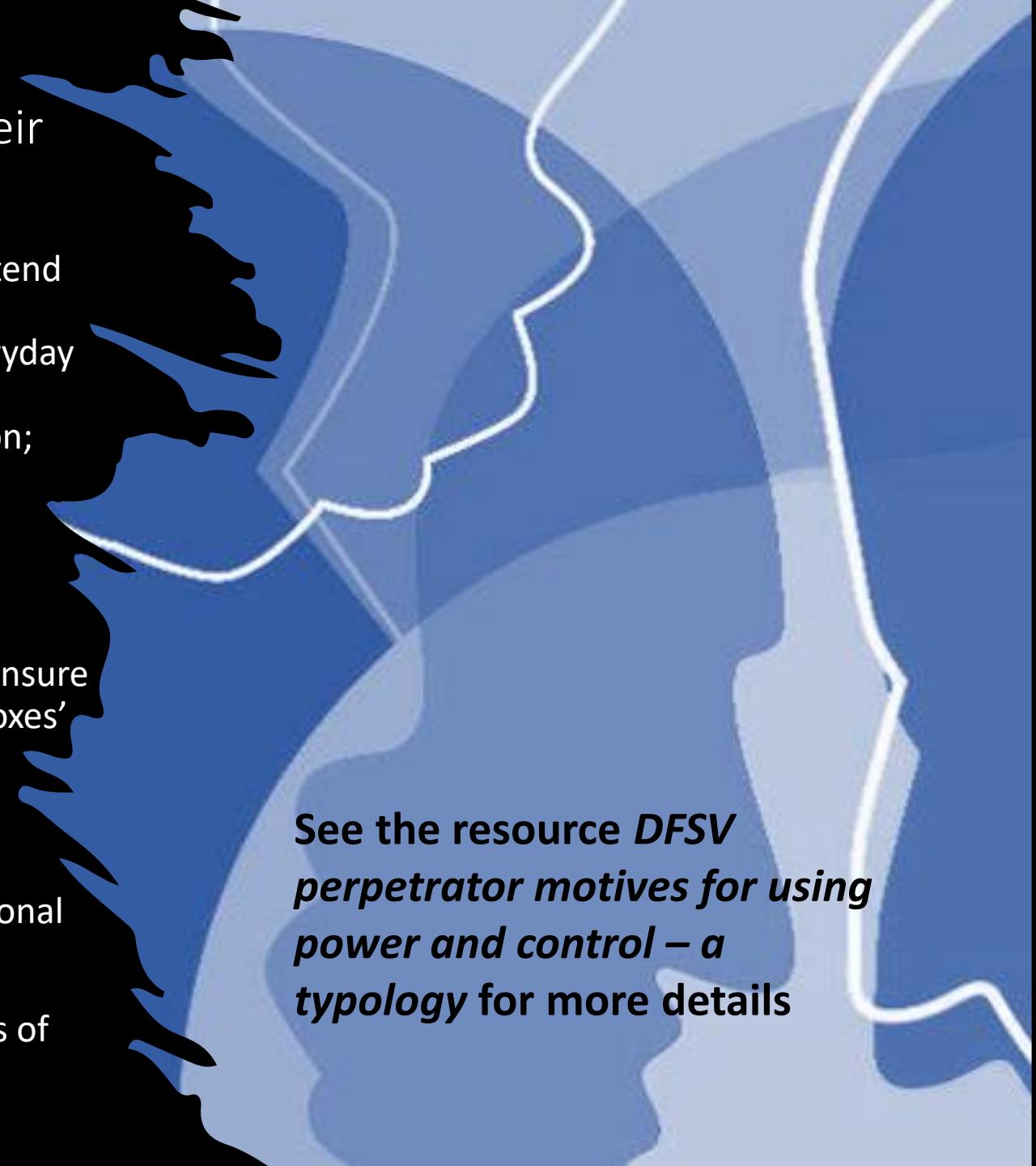
Express misogynistic hatred, and participate in a sense of collective grievance that some communities of men have against women;

Maintain a positive, narcissistic image of themselves, and ensure that they have a relationship and standing that ‘ticks the boxes’ of what they need to feel admired;

Express sadist cruelty;

Psychologically ‘survive’ in the context of substantial emotional dependency on their ex/partner; and/or to

Maintain an ‘attack first’ mentality associated with patterns of generalised violence behaviours.

A graphic on the right side of the slide features a woman's profile in profile, facing right. Her hair is dark and curly. A hand, also dark, is reaching up from the bottom left towards her head, specifically her temple. The background behind the woman is a light blue gradient.

**See the resource *DFSV perpetrator motives for using power and control – a typology* for more details**



practitioner  
/ responder

A practice model for responding  
to the “I’m the victim here!”  
thinking of adults who perpetrate  
violent and controlling behaviour

I must hold  
him  
accountable!

I want to talk with  
him about his  
behaviour and it’s  
impacts on his  
ex/partner and  
family

I want to talk about  
what’s been done  
to me... by my  
other half / my ex,  
by the cops, by the  
feminazis...

No one  
wants to  
listen to me!

adult user of  
domestic, family  
and sexual violence



# victim stance

**Male entitlement:** setting unfair expectations on his ex/partner to manage his emotions (to do all the emotional labour work he should be doing for himself / with his support networks / with her/him/they as part of connected intimacy), and blaming his ex/partner when they do not conform to his entitlement-based and patriarchally-informed rules he sets for their behaviour

**Complex trauma (interacting with male entitlement):** Totally misperceiving and misconstruing her/his/their actions based on his intense emotional vulnerabilities and experiences of being 'triggered' by her needs to have a life not governed by his vulnerabilities... when she is not the 'mother' he expects her to be, he feels hostility and abandonment

**Repeated experiences of victimisation** (not from his ex/partner), due to being part of one or more minoritised communities who are deliberately marginalised and hated-against due to structural and systemic oppression... users of violence who do not have privilege levers other than gender, and who use violence *in part* as a chosen way to cope with oppression

**Users of violence who have privilege levers in addition to gender** and who might 'play up' "I'm the victim here!" impression management as part of systems abuse tactics... who put more upstream planning into attempting to convince responders that their ex/partner is 'the problem' or the 'unfit parent'

These thoughts, fed by entitlement-based beliefs (sometimes intersecting with the meaning he makes of and his responses to any complex trauma he might have experienced), provides himself with permission to use a range of coercive controlling tactics to shut down behaviour that he sees as 'unfair', 'unreasonable', 'defiant', or as 'victimising' or 'bothering' him

## victim stance thinking

"I keep telling her not to... she just doesn't listen"

"She did that deliberately to piss me off..."

"I just can't trust her"

"She can't continue to treat me like that"

"I'm not putting up with this anymore!"

"She makes me so jealous!"

"It's her fault!"

"She never gives me a break!"

"It's for her own good, I'm just trying to protect her!"

"She knows how to push my buttons!"

"The kids will grow up soft if I let her parent her way – they need to know right from wrong"

"She knows I'm a jealous guy!"

"How dare she!"

"She can't treat me like that!"

"I've got to stop her from doing that to me again"

"She needs to know her place, she can't humiliate me like that!"

"She gets me so angry!"

"I just can't take it anymore, it's her fault that she made me lose it"

How he winds himself up to choose to use violence

Fitzgerald, R., & Douglas, H. (2025). Domestic violence and the role of imprisonment as a response: men's post-conviction talk about strangling women. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 1-21.



These are made up quotes that accurately represent what the men were saying in the research. Implications for intervention:

- Educate about the harms caused through NFS
- Assess function of using NFS in each case – some men want to traumatise and terrorise the victim-survivor into silence
- Attempt to counter collusion between DFV offenders in prison, as they confirm and embolden each other's sense of grievance
- Post-release work with DFV offenders is vital, as some will be more dangerous after release

## Qld incarcerated DFV offenders talk about their use of non-fatal strangulation



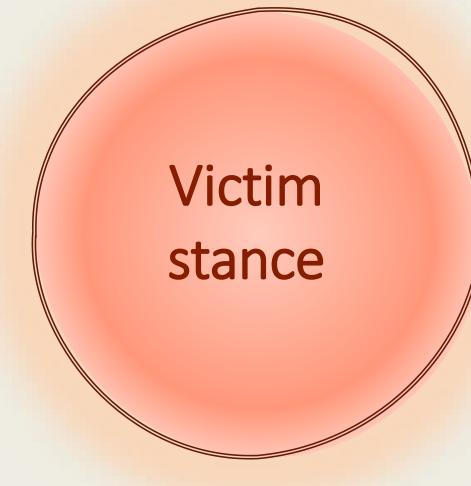
'I didn't want to hit her, so I choked her instead, it's not as bad as hitting her!'

'I had to shut her up, she was just going off, hysterical, I needed to control that woman or she just would have kept going at me'

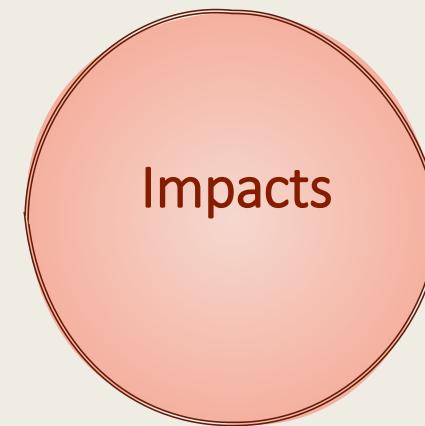
'This whole non-fatal strangulation charge, it's further proof that women and all those femo-men now rule the world and want to victimise us real men'

'There are so many other men here in prison on domestic charges, the place is full of men like me, treated unfairly. They all agree with me. And I'm learning so many new ideas about how to keep her under check when I get released.'

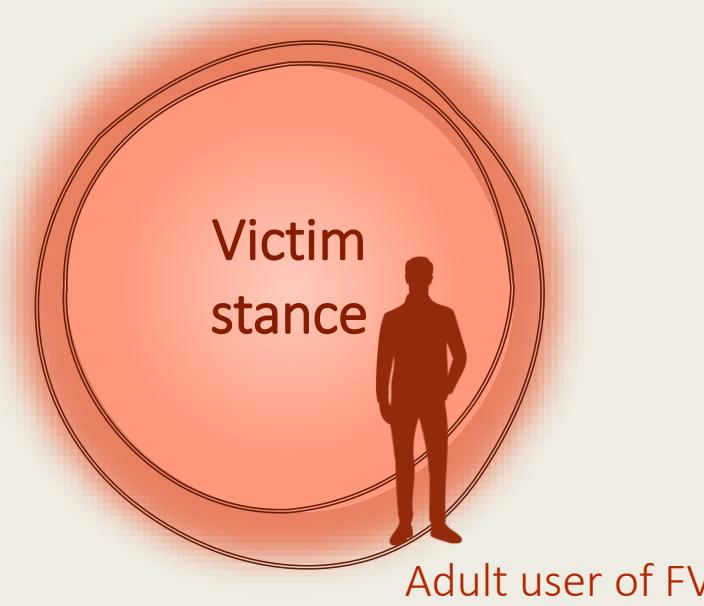
Some adult users of DFV are able to conceal their behaviours from service systems, and from other potential responders in their extended families, natural networks and communities. However, in other situations, their harmful behaviours become more visible over time, due to the problems that their behaviours cause for family members and for their own lives. As their harmful behaviours become 'bigger' and cause greater impacts – and as service systems and other responders possibly begin to intensify their responses to the adult's behaviour – the adult can tend to 'double down' in their victim stance orientation.



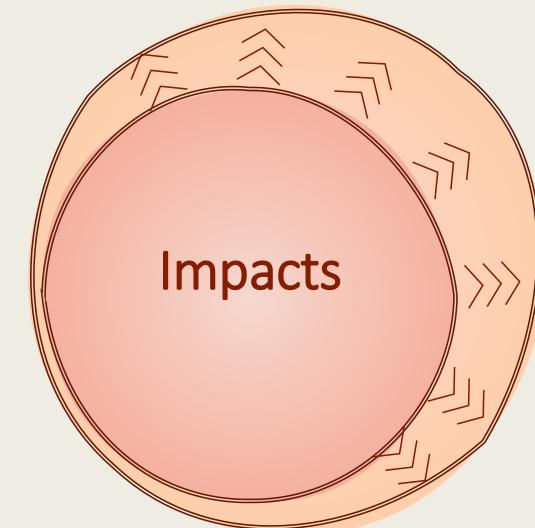
Much gratitude to Phil Jones for introducing me to an earlier version of this 'four circles' model, that he in turn developed further from practitioners in Western Australia.



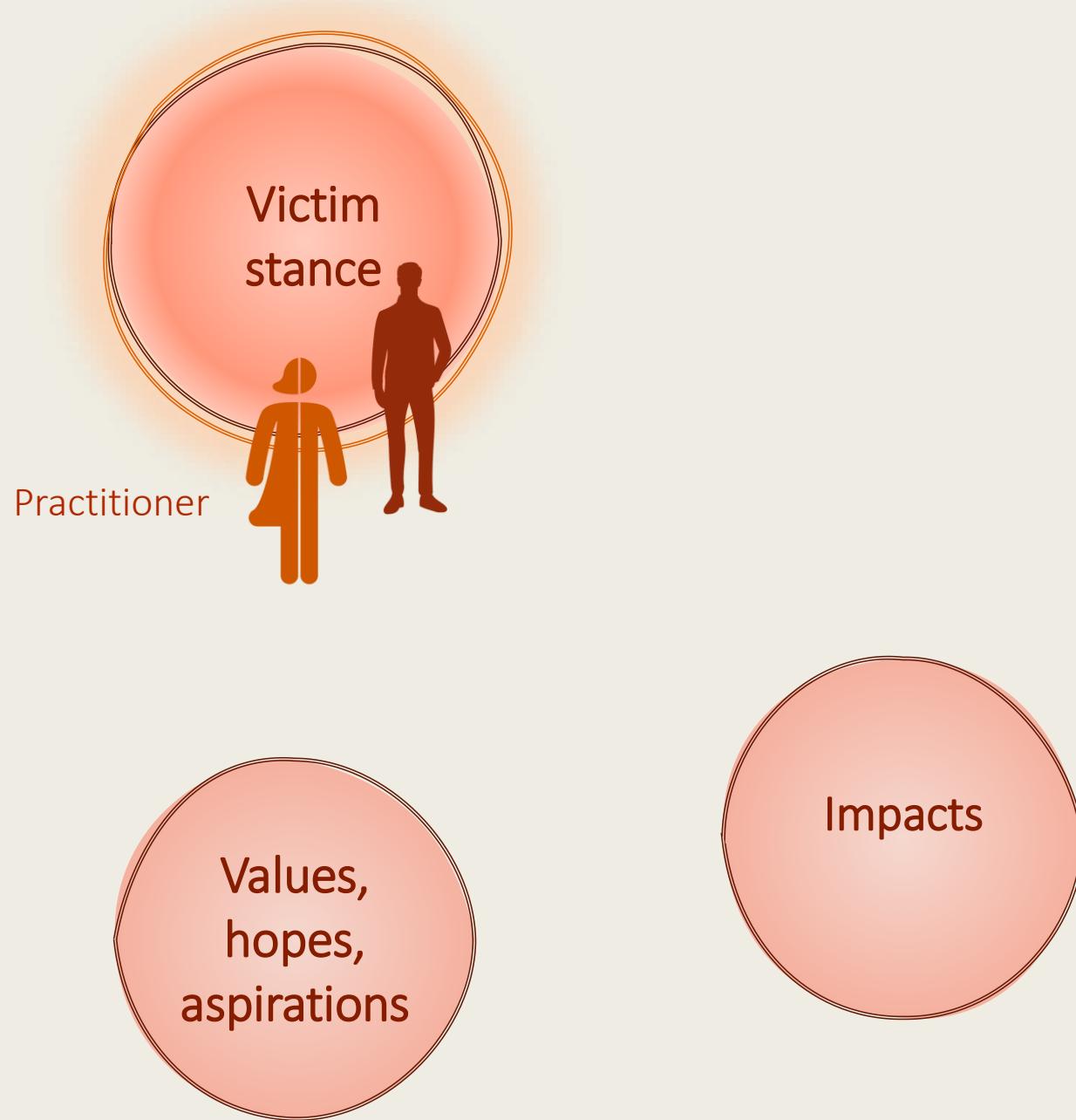
It is quite common for adult persons using DFV to interpret actions by police, courts, corrections, child protection and other authorities in response to their behaviour as an 'injustice'. For First Nations, LGBTIQA+SB folks, and for communities of colour, the structural and systemic violence from these institutions has indeed been colonial and highly destructive (even genocidal). These institutions also respond, however, to attempt to manage risk and build community safety. The accountability and risk management mechanisms enacted by these service system responders often result in the adult feeling more aggrieved as they retreat further into their victim stance.



Adult user of FV



The adult is likely to be very enmeshed in victim stance thinking when a program starts work with him. While some adult users of DFV will deliberately 'play up' their victim stance orientation to win your agreement that they have experienced a series of grave injustices, to a greater or lesser extent, their victim stance thinking is the 'sea that they swim in'. Many adult users of DFV genuinely believe that they have been treated highly unjustly both by their ex/partner and by service system responders.



# Conversational container

One approach is therefore to patiently create a conversational container that scaffolds and supports the adult user of DFV to venture out from his victim stance orientation to a place where he can begin to take a look at his behaviour and its impacts, and to explore his values and aspirational self.



Skills to build and maintain the container

Mid-point skills  
(not collusive, not persecutory)

Invitational practice

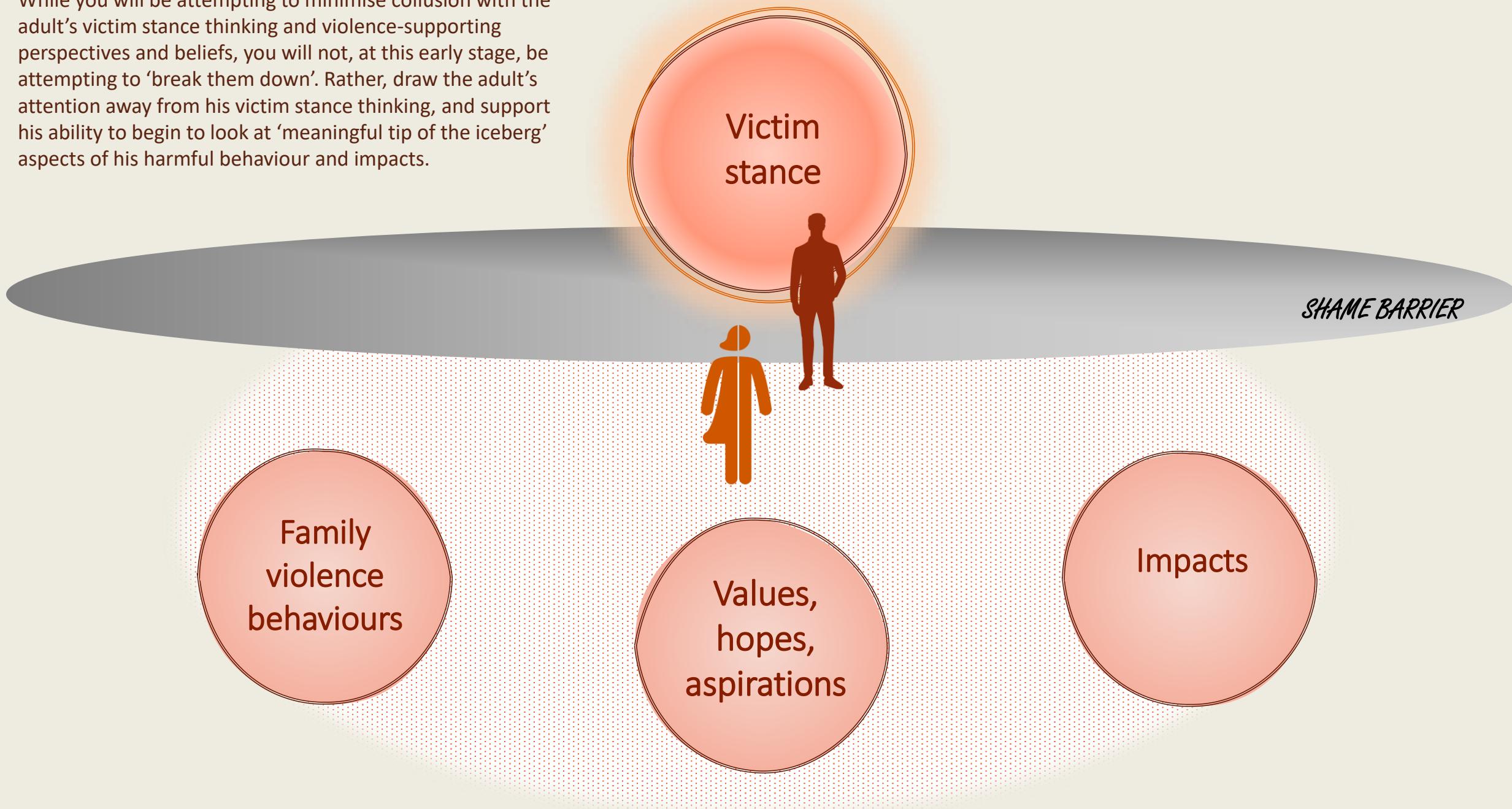
Searching for the contradictions

Scaffolding the client's self-management

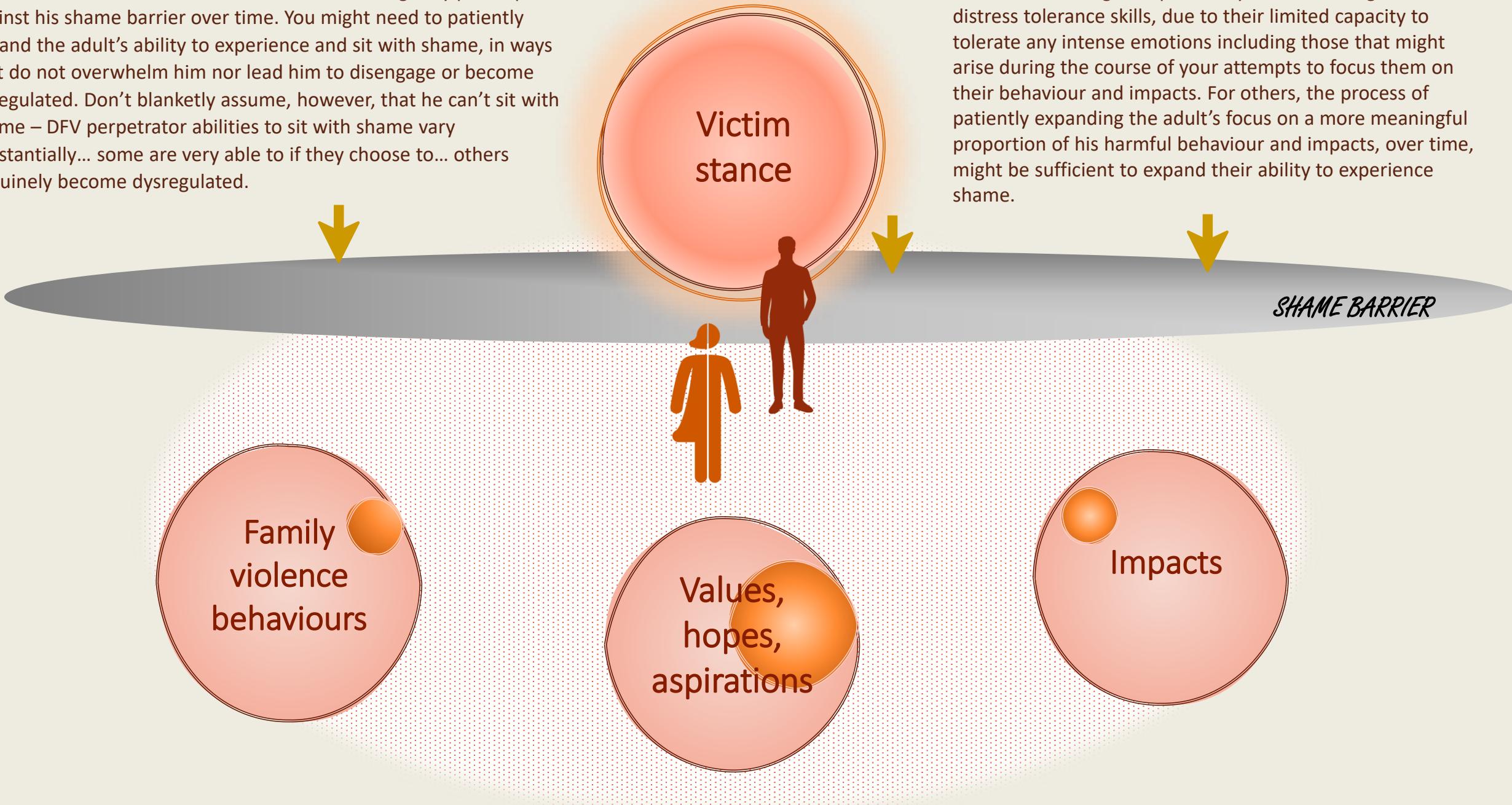
Managing self as the practitioner

Intersectionality, sensitivity and responsiveness

While you will be attempting to minimise collusion with the adult's victim stance thinking and violence-supporting perspectives and beliefs, you will not, at this early stage, be attempting to 'break them down'. Rather, draw the adult's attention away from his victim stance thinking, and support his ability to begin to look at 'meaningful tip of the iceberg' aspects of his harmful behaviour and impacts.

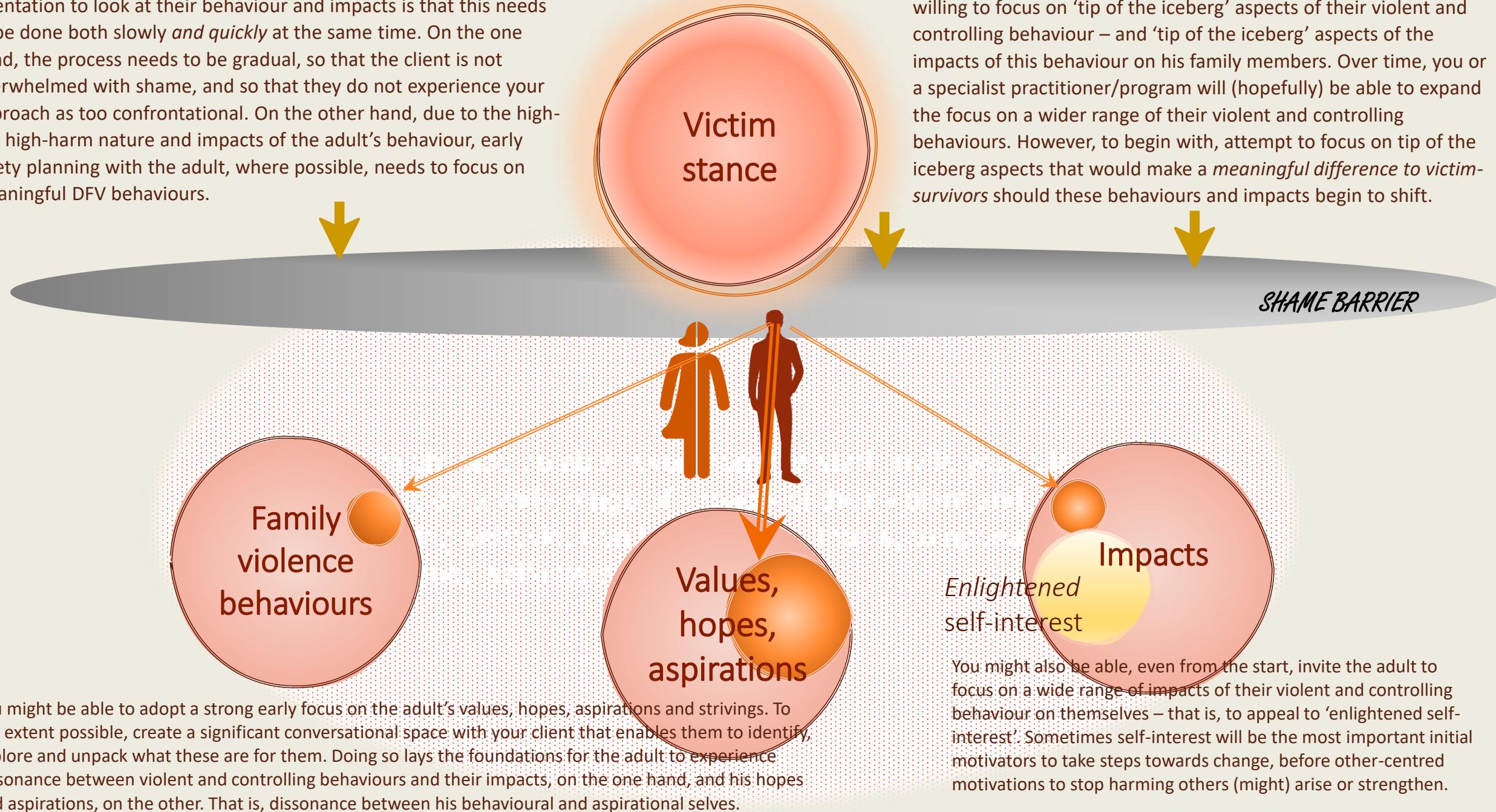


To do so, assess the adult's shame tolerance, and gently push up against his shame barrier over time. You might need to patiently expand the adult's ability to experience and sit with shame, in ways that do not overwhelm him nor lead him to disengage or become unregulated. Don't blanketly assume, however, that he can't sit with shame – DFV perpetrator abilities to sit with shame vary substantially... some are very able to if they choose to... others genuinely become dysregulated.

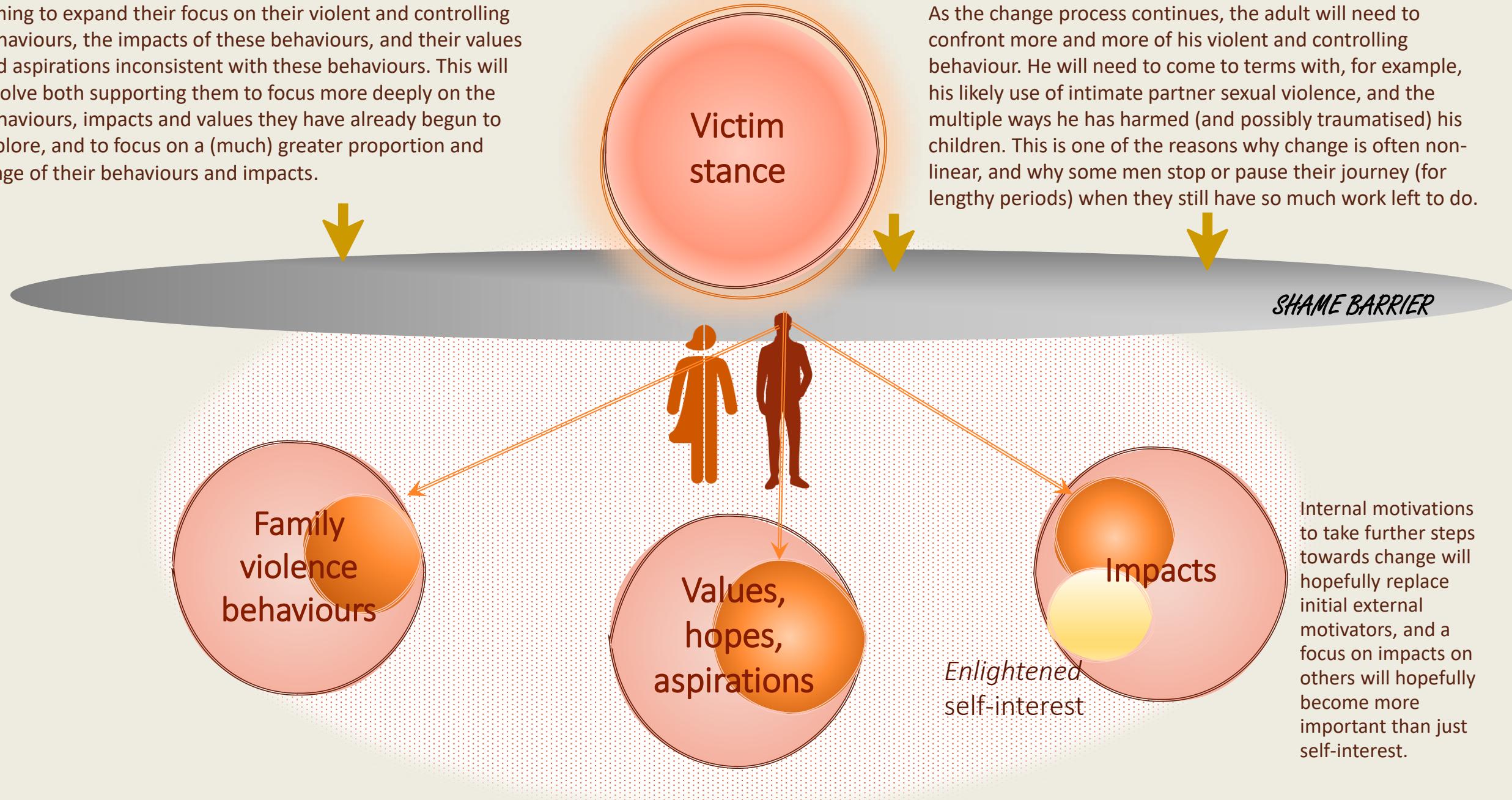


For some, this might require early work to strengthen their distress tolerance skills, due to their limited capacity to tolerate any intense emotions including those that might arise during the course of your attempts to focus them on their behaviour and impacts. For others, the process of patiently expanding the adult's focus on a more meaningful proportion of his harmful behaviour and impacts, over time, might be sufficient to expand their ability to experience shame.

The paradox of drawing the client out of their victim stance orientation to look at their behaviour and impacts is that this needs to be done both slowly *and quickly* at the same time. On the one hand, the process needs to be gradual, so that the client is not overwhelmed with shame, and so that they do not experience your approach as too confrontational. On the other hand, due to the high-risk high-harm nature and impacts of the adult's behaviour, early safety planning with the adult, where possible, needs to focus on meaningful DFV behaviours.

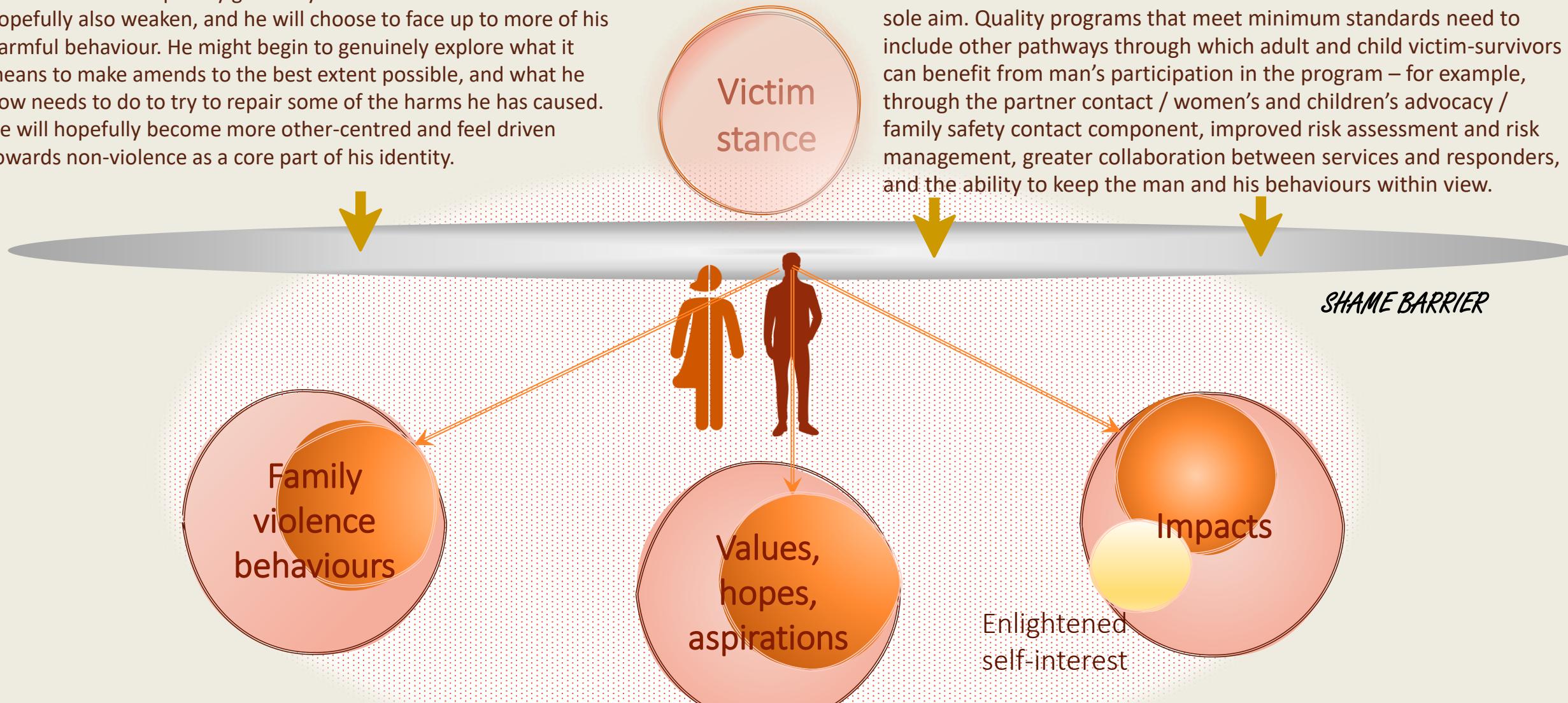


Over time, you or a specialist program or practitioner will be aiming to expand their focus on their violent and controlling behaviours, the impacts of these behaviours, and their values and aspirations inconsistent with these behaviours. This will involve both supporting them to focus more deeply on the behaviours, impacts and values they have already begun to explore, and to focus on a (much) greater proportion and range of their behaviours and impacts.



If he sticks with the journey, his victim stance and violence-supporting narratives and beliefs – and his associated denial, minimisation and justification for his violent and controlling behaviour – will hopefully gradually decrease. His shame barrier will hopefully also weaken, and he will choose to face up to more of his harmful behaviour. He might begin to genuinely explore what it means to make amends to the best extent possible, and what he now needs to do to try to repair some of the harms he has caused. He will hopefully become more other-centred and feel driven towards non-violence as a core part of his identity.

However, many men who participate in a single men's behaviour change program or other specialist intervention don't get this far. This is why these programs can't just be about attempting to change the men's behaviours – the outcomes are too variable for this to be the sole aim. Quality programs that meet minimum standards need to include other pathways through which adult and child victim-survivors can benefit from man's participation in the program – for example, through the partner contact / women's and children's advocacy / family safety contact component, improved risk assessment and risk management, greater collaboration between services and responders, and the ability to keep the man and his behaviours within view.



We are trying to draw the adult user of violence / father away from his victim stance while pushing up gently against his shame barrier → to help him focus on at least tip of the iceberg aspects of the harm he is causing, using the bits of his harmful behaviour he's willing to disclose to create a conversation that builds his focus on values and aspirations inconsistent with the use of violent and controlling behaviour, that unpacks his behaviour to the extent that his shame barriers will allow, that explores impacts of his behaviour on those he cares about (again, to the extent possible), and that works towards preliminary safety planning re what he can do to interrupt/prevent the harmful behaviours he's willing to talk about... all the while listening out for risk → with the ultimate aims to learn more about risk, build upon initial safety planning, engage in multi-agency behind-the-scenes information sharing and risk management actions if necessary/helpful, build motivation or plant seeds for him to accept a referral to a specialist service, and if he takes this step, to supplement the work of that service.



To start off this process with some fathers, you might need to have a strong initial focus on what healthy fathering looks like for him, and from there, **springboard** to a focus on what it looks like when he's not that best Dad

# Creating tension between his aspirational self and his behavioural self

To build these foundations, he needs to experience that his life matters to our service.

He needs to be seen – seen for what he aspires to, seen for what he is trying to make work or make better, seen for the him that wants to receive and provide respect, love and safety.

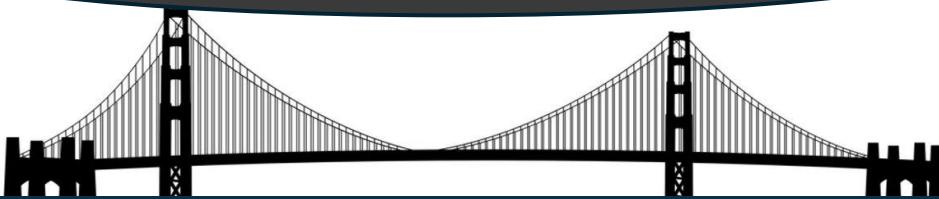
We build the foundations for him to look at, on the one hand, his values, aspirations, preferred identity as a man, a father... and if applicable, his aspirations and responsibilities as part of his community

AND on the other hand, for him to start to look at his behaviour, and the impacts of his behaviour on his family members (and on his extended family and community, if applicable)

**... gradually pushing against and extending his shame barrier (to increase his shame tolerance) as we do so**

At this point in a first meeting with a client, we usually ask about how relationships at home are going. We do this because... ... Is that OK?

Bridge into the conversation in a way that makes sense to him – so that it doesn't come out of the blue and lead him to think "What did she tell you!"



**See the video resource  
Funnelling technique  
with adult users of DFV  
for more detail.**

Can we start with how things are going with your partner Jane – how would you describe the relationship?

It's going OK I guess, we have our ups and downs, like every couple.

Can I ask you about some of the good things in the relationship, that you want to keep hold of?

[Practitioner explores the client's aspirations for his relationship, what a healthy relationship might mean for him, etc., then continues:]

You mentioned that you have some ups and downs, what happens when things aren't going so well?

We have fights over money. She spends it like there's no tomorrow.

I can see that you're feeling financial stress.

Yeah, it's like she's never heard that there's a cost-of-living crisis.

I'd like to ask about these arguments, how things are going at home can really matter for our work together on...

Okay

On a scale of 0 to 10, how bad do some of the worst arguments get?

A seven, I guess

When it gets to a seven, if I was a fly on the wall at the time, what would I see?

Jane just goes off at me when I try to explain why she shouldn't be spending money on shit.

I can see that finances is something that you worry about. When you're feeling really worried about money, and you are starting to argue, what does Jane see you say or do?

She's got such a thin skin, she yells and screams at me and I can't get through to her.

This doesn't sound easy to talk about John, I know you want the best for your family. I'm wondering, when you are feeling this stress, do you ever say or do things you later regret?

Practitioner might now explain that he's asking these questions to see if it's possible that Jane might be feeling unsafe when they 'argue' ...

## Create or wait for an opportunity to scaffold an exploration of any of the following foci as a starting point, and then move to another

But don't skip too quickly from focus to focus... see how far you can go with whatever your starting point is before you hit his shame/resistance barrier, and then move to another focus

"She doesn't let up, I don't want to lose it at her in front of the kids but you just can't reason with her!"  
"Sounds like you were feeling quite worked up?"  
"Yeah, she doesn't give me a break, she makes me feel like a shit Dad in front of the kids"

My guess John is that losing it in front of the kids is not the Dad you want to be? How would you prefer your kids to see you?

What do the kids see you say or do when you lose it like that? Can you take your mind back to the last time this happened?

This is a difficult question, as I know you love your kids. What impacts might it have on them when you lose it like that?

What could you do differently when you are feeling worked up, can we spend some time talking about that?

See the video resource *Responding to openings with the adult user of DFV for more detail*

values  
aspirations  
identity

unpacking  
behaviours

exploring  
impacts

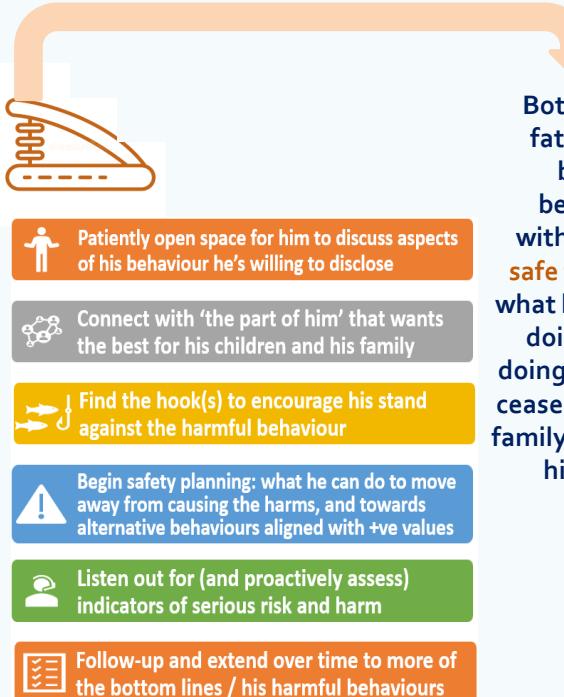
safety  
planning

Continuously assess → indicators of risk, violence-supporting beliefs, shame tolerance, motivational hooks, what he does and doesn't seem to care about, goals for the next session, implications for partnering with the adult survivor, implications for the children and family functioning, implications for information sharing and collaborative work with other agencies

## We need three anchor points when engaging fathers who cause domestic & family violence, and abusive fathering, harm

See the resource  
*Three anchors model for engaging abusive fathers*  
for more detail

Create a positive emotional space for him to see what he can gain through the support you and other services are offering him – engaging him like one would with any father about being the best they can be for their kids



Help him recognise, and be motivated by this recognition, that how he treats the mother of their children, and how he supports her relationship with them, is one of the most important things he can do as a parent



We can springboard toward the bottom lines from an initial focus on healthy fathering and the behaviour that moves him closer to this

# Mid-point skills towards minimising collusion and persecution when engaging adult users of domestic, family and sexual violence



collusive

◀◀ mid-point ▶▶

persecutory

You become matey with the man  
You empathise with his victim stance or criticism of her  
You signal agreement with sexist comments, even if subtle  
You blame his violence on his upbringing, mental health issues, substance use or stress  
You see him as the more 'stable'/'capable' parent  
He feels validated about his behaviour, and there is nothing in the conversation that, even in a small way, invites him to think differently and to take responsibility for at least a bit of his harmful behaviour  
You avoid tension/anxiety about raising difficult issues  
You prioritise your working/personal relationship with him above everything else

You are respectful  
You empathise selectively (not with violence supporting narratives)  
You adopt an invitational approach  
Your tone is based on curiosity, not moralising  
You are sympathetic to and sensitively find out about the oppression and traumatic experiences he might have faced / be facing, but not see these as an excuse / reason for his behaviour  
You focus, to the extent possible, on the safety of those affected by his violence, his responsibility for his behaviour, that violence is a choice, and that he is accountable for the impacts of his behaviour  
You invite him to focus on what it would look like for him to be his best self in the situation

You are oppositional and confrontative  
You butt horns with him  
No empathy  
No listening  
No interest in his life or circumstances  
No interest in the oppression he has faced, or the traumatic experiences he has encountered  
You do not manage your own internal reactions  
The conversation is too tense, or he zones out  
He can stay in defensive mode, focusing on arguing his own 'truth' – by doing so, he doesn't need to think differently about his behaviour  
You feel better by 'making the perpetrator accountable' (but the highly confrontational and moralising approach does the opposite)

Finding the mid-point can feel like a dance. We might veer too collusively at one point in the conversation or become too confrontative at another.

A range of circumstances can also impact where a response to the user of violence might sit on this continuum. In different contexts, the same response might be collusive, in others might sit within the mid-point.

It's OK to make mistakes. Even the most experienced behaviour change practitioners drift or veer too far in one direction and need to correct back the other way.

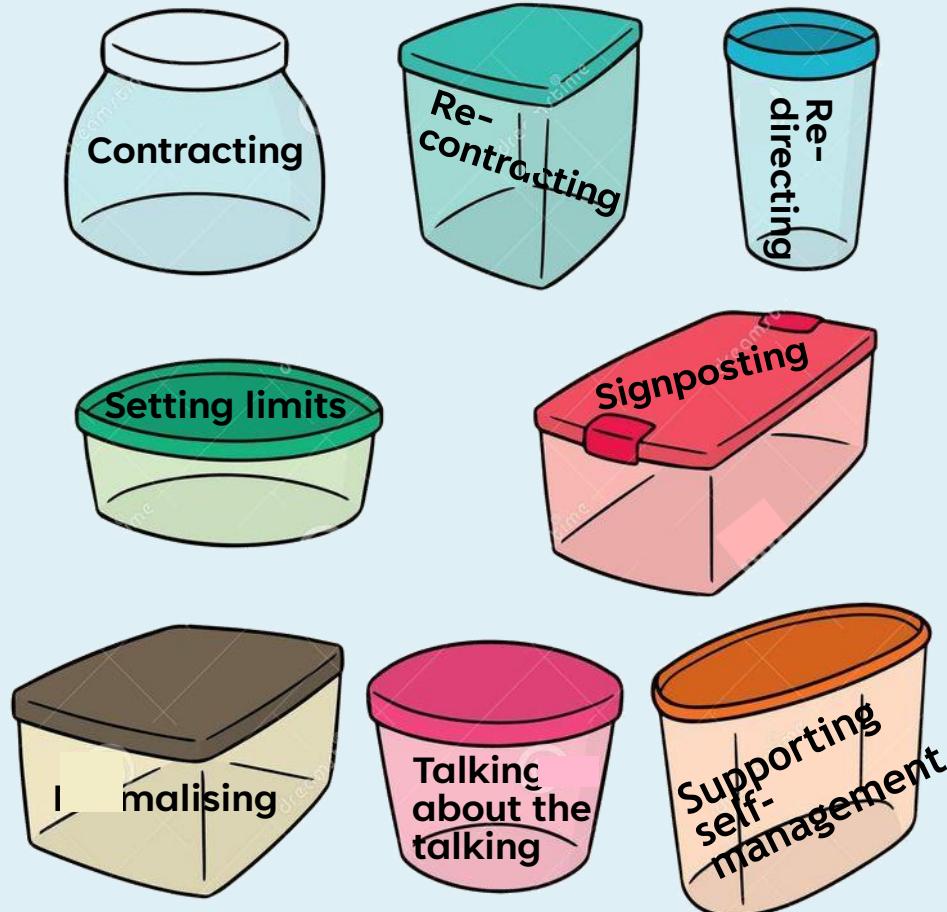


Illustration by Todd Parr

### What might impact on where the mid-point range is?

How much rapport you have / how long you have worked with him	How he presents in the conversation → his mood, agitation, etc.	What you know about his behaviour from other sources... and what he knows about what you know
Where he is at in a behaviour opening or behaviour change process	His current shame tolerance, both globally and in relation to particular aspects of his behaviour	The goals of the current conversation with him about his behaviour
Whether you need to covertly assess risk by giving him space to express what he really thinks and believes	How much time and opportunity you have to repair rupture in the working relationship... and how 'comfortable' he is being 'challenged'	What the risks might be of 'pushing' too hard at this point in time

# Conversational container micro-skills



can help you to stay in the mid-point



This micro-skill can help to set an initial container for the conversation. Explain how you would like to focus the conversation and why, and how he would benefit from this focus.

“Because Sally isn’t here to talk about her perspectives, we can only focus on you. Is it OK if we talk about what you can do to make things better – is that ok John?”



Often we will need to remind him of the focus and respectfully bring him back. If we need to re-contract too often, however, it might mean we are too ambitious about what we hope he will focus on at this time.

“John, do you remember the conversation we had earlier about your urge to talk about Sally – this looks like one of those moments where the urge to talk about her is very strong. Is it OK if we go back to focusing on...”

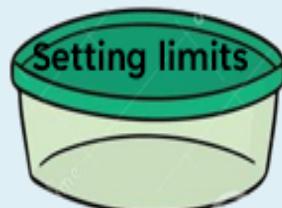
“Is there a way to put aside that urge to talk about Sally, so that we can focus on what you can do to make things better? Can we work on that together?”

“If the urge to talk about Sally starts to win out again, is it OK if I interrupt you so that we can come back to talking about...”



Sometimes when the adult user of violence is being critical of or blames the victim-survivor, we can redirect general aspects of his discourse to focus back on him, in positive, non-shaming and invitational ways.

“You’re telling me, from your perspective, that Sally doesn’t manage stress well. Sally isn’t here to say how she sees this. But can I ask, what do you do to manage the stress you feel, the best you can?”



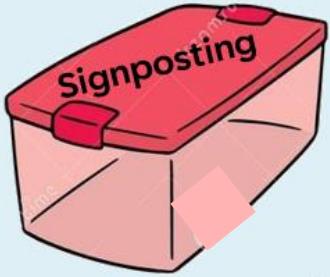
We can interrupt to set limits, or wait for a pause to do so, in ways that do not shame him. Remind him of the benefits of staying respectful. You are inviting him to stay respectful because of these benefits, not because you are scolding him from a ‘politically correct’ position.

“I’m going to need to stop you there, John. I want this conversation to produce things that you can do to help the situation. Talking about Sally in that way won’t help.”

“If I can stop you there, I know there’s some things you want me to understand. Talking about Sally in such a disrespectful way will make it very hard for me to listen.”

“What would it take to be able to stay focused on you for a moment?”

“I hear you want to talk about your partner but it’s going to be much more helpful for you if we can talk about the things you can control.”

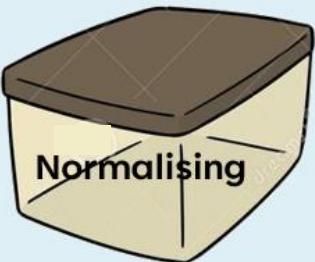


Signal where you are hoping to take the conversation next, rather than just barging into the next bit. He might be more willing to go with your focus if he's not taken by surprise. This can include preparing him that bits of the conversation might be hard.

“John, I think it might be really helpful now for us to focus on... to spend 10-15 mins talking about... is that OK?”

“Some of this stuff is really hard to talk about, it's going to create some discomfort. Are you OK hanging in there for this conversation?”

“Taking about being the best Dad you can be will be both a positive conversation, but also, there'll be some hard bits, perhaps talking about some things you've said or done that you aren't proud of. Are you OK with that?”



Frame the focus of the conversation as routine, so that he doesn't feel that he's been particularly targeted or singled out. This might also help him to become less suspicious about what his ex/partner has disclosed.

“We have lots of conversations with Dads about...”

“How we like to start off these conversations is by... Would that be an OK place to start?”

“I won't beat around the bush, in our experience, having had hundreds of these conversations over the years, you might find it hard to begin with...”



This can be a fall-back micro-skill when other things aren't working, to take a time out and talk about what might make it possible to get the conversation back on track. Try your best to manage your own frustrations!

"Hey, could we take a time out here John. I'm really hoping that we can talk about what you can do to improve the situation, but the urge to talk about Sally seems to keep winning out. Is there a way we can come back to focusing on you?"



There is often a parallel process between a person stepping away from responsibility for their violence through using blame, minimisation, denial and justification, and the person stepping away from responsibility for the conversation about that violence.

"What strategies have you used in the past to hang in there with conversations that are important, but also really hard?" [strengths-based approach – do not assume that he does not have existing strategies/skills]

"It feels like you don't really want to be here? As much as I want to help you and your family, at the end of the day it is your life – how much does it matter to you to be the best dad you can be?... It sounds like you want to be your best for your kids? I'm hearing that they matter a lot to you. What will help you to stay with this conversation about how you can benefit your kids?"

# Selective empathy



If he experiences you as listening to him, you will have more sway to influence the conversation.

Find something you can strategically paraphrase or reframe

to set up a focus on ethical aspirations, responsibility and/or safety.

Strip out the responsibility-minimising and sexist aspects of his narrative in your paraphrase or reframe.

A degree of care and concern in your voice does not mean you are colluding.

“She knows how to hurt me by removing the kids!”

“She was hysterical, she was right up in my face!”

“She wastes all my money buying stuff we don’t need.”

“She’s always going behind my back, I’m sure she’s cheating on me!”

“Being the best Dad you can be means a lot to you...”

“Sally was really upset and she wanted you to know it.”

“Sounds like money is tight, and you worry about what to buy.”

“You’re anxious about keeping the relationship. How do you manage that anxiety?”

## Selective validation



In the understandable desire not to collude, we can rush past opportunities to selectively validate what might be some good intentions of the adult user of violence.

Of course, in many cases, the adult is very deliberately intending to cause the victim-survivor to experience fear, terror, humiliation and degradation. There can still be, 'however', something non-collusive to validate.

Selective validation helps to build a working rapport. It doesn't mean you are taking his side.

**"I just don't know what to do anymore, I can't do anything right in her eyes, she never gives me a break."**

**"I don't trust her, I'm sure she's cheating on me."**

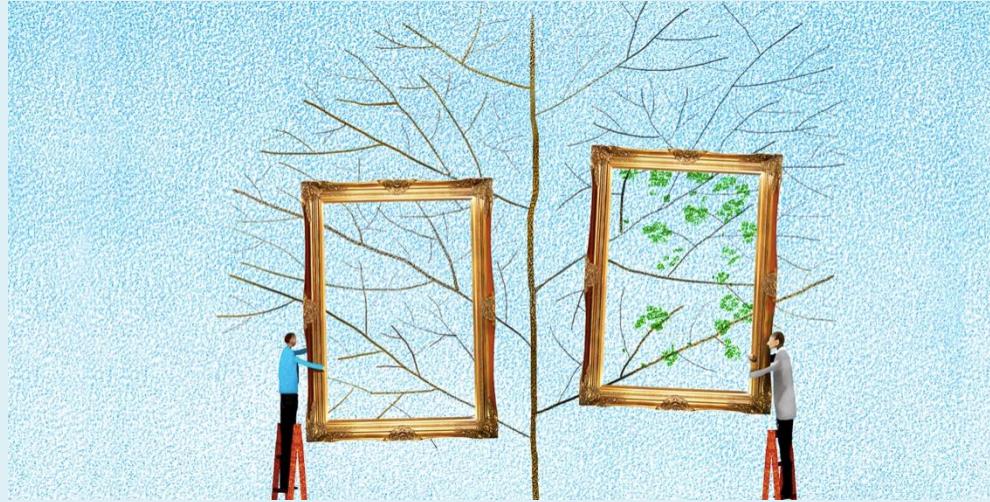
**"It's her fault that I'm here, and the cops didn't help, they immediately took her side and treated me like a piece of..."**

**"You're trying to work out how to make things better, but you're not sure what to do."**

**"The relationship matters to you, and you're feeling anxious about it."**  
[preparing to turn the conversation towards how he manages this anxiety]

**"I can hear that respect is important for you, and that you want to be listened to. Everyone has that need."** [highlighting values/practices of respect & listening → preparing to invite him to consider that his partner needs this too]

# Reframing



Reframing attempts to shift from a negative evaluation made by the user of violence of another person's actions or decisions, to a more neutral one.

It demonstrates that you have heard the adult.

If your reframe is too different from what the person expressed, it might be rejected. It's often enough to strip out the sexist language and meanings in your response.

“She was in my face screaming at me.”

“When she winds up like that there’s nothing I can do to stop her.”

“She nags and nags, it really pisses me off!”

“Sounds like Sally was really distressed.”

“Sally was really upset, even distraught by the sound of it. What do you think she was trying to tell you?”

“You find it hard when Sally wants to make sure you’ve understood something, and you don’t want to hear it.”

## Open, directed questions



Open questions that have their own container that try to 'nudge' the adult into a particular lane in their response.

These questions can also be used to infer key messages – for example, that the adult has a choice in their behaviour, and that the emotion they experience (e.g., anger, jealousy, humiliation) is not the same as the behaviour they choose. Open, directed questions can also be used to invite perspective-taking.

Remember: we can't 'challenge' or invite focus on everything that he says that's sexist, blaming of his partner or of others, etc. → doing so is likely to be too confrontative.

“She made me so angry.”

“She was right in my face – again! – I had enough of her dramas and just could not take it anymore.”

“Look, I said a few things I shouldn't have, but...”

“When you were feeling very angry at that time, what did Sally see you say or do?”

“How did your children see you manage those big feelings of frustration that you had at that time?”

“What did Sally hear you say?”

## Relate to his values and ethical aspirations



Use his blame, denial or minimisation as an opportunity to ask about aspirations or values inconsistent with the behaviour he is avoiding taking responsibility about. This can help you to minimise collusion without him feeling that you are against him. **Find the part of him that does not want to engage in the harmful behaviours (that he might feel shame about) → be on the side of that part.**

“If she hadn’t have... I wouldn’t have...”; “The police got it wrong, I didn’t...”; “It was only a little shove...”

“It sounds like X is something you don’t want to do. Can you tell me why?”

“You’re telling me that doing X is not who you are, I’d like to hear more about that...”

“Chris isn’t here to give their perspective about what they experienced, but you are saying that you don’t consider yourself to have intimidated them. It sounds like you don’t want Chris to feel intimidated?... Could you tell me what’s important about that for you John, that Chris doesn’t feel intimidated by you?...What’s important about that for Chris?”

# Non-verbal communication



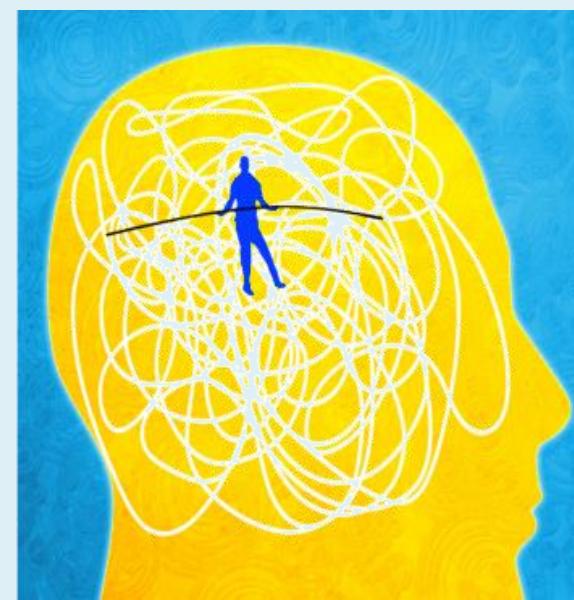
- Be mindful of automatic tendencies to nod, smile
- Remember to use soft eyes if you are risk of glaring out of frustration
- Leave a pause after he speaks
- Being expressive with a particularly warm tone at times enables you to be still when you need to without coming across as robotic
- If in-person, sitting at an even height at a slight angle to each other
- Communicate openness, interest, curiosity

Zero collusion is often impossible. Don't beat yourself up if you find yourself veering in that direction. Notice that you have drifted, breathe, manage your own anxiety, and find ways to return to the mid-point.

## Self-reflection

What might you need to learn or become aware of about yourself that might lead you to drift away from the mid-point?

- your attitudes and beliefs
- prior experiences
- how your performance of gender influences your responses, and how the person might respond to you
- particular adults, or particular situations, where you might either collude or be combative
- what's happening in the moment for you, what just happened before or earlier that day



Take a moment to check in with yourself before engaging the adult user of violence – what might you be carrying that could cause you to veer towards collusion or persecution?

Support your colleagues in your teams – look out for each other and give supportive feedback. Staying in the mid-point is a collective endeavour.

# Redirecting and self-responsibility

Cl: "She..."

W: "What happens for you in that situation?... What do you find hard to manage in that situation?"

I hear you have concerns about [partner's] parenting. I'm curious to understand more about your parenting.

I've noticed that you've shifted to talking about [partner] again. It might be uncomfortable to stay with you and your actions, but I've heard you say that you want to be a [e.g., calmer family man]

I want to make sure I'm hearing you right. Are you saying that if [partner] is [behaviour he alleges she is doing] then it's ok for you to use violence?

How important to you is it that even if your partner is [using behaviour he alleges she is doing] you don't respond with abuse and control?



Limit the space that the user of DFV has to criticise, blame or pathologise their partner – especially when it is repetitive

---

I'm going to need to stop you there

If I can interrupt you there

I just need to understand this a bit more

Can we stay with a focus on you for a moment

What would it take to be able to stay with this for a moment?

I hear you want to talk about your partner but its going to be much more helpful for you if we can talk about the things you can control





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What might you need to learn or become aware of about yourself that might lead you to drift away from the mid-point?

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Examples of questions to motivate a father's readiness to participate in a specialist service... and to assess how willing he is to address concerns stemming from his behaviour (these can also serve as questions to bridge into a conversation about his behaviour)

Could you tell me a bit about each of your children? What do they like doing? What makes them happy? What surprises you about them? What makes you proud about them? ...

What do you want for your children? What are your hopes for them?

What do they find difficult? What things do each of them struggle with, more than other kids their age?

What do you think your children might be worried about?

How would you know if they are worried about or struggling with something?

Tell me three qualities about your partner as a mother?

What things do the children love to do with mum?

What do you hope for as a parent?... How did you hope being a parent would be?... What are the best times for you as a parent? ... What are the hardest times?

How do you invest in your children?... invest in being the best dad you can be?

What do you do to try to keep your children emotionally and physically safe?... What do you do to foster a stable and nurturing home environment for them?

No parent is perfect – what are some of the things that you could change to improve your children's wellbeing and safety?

How do you think your behaviour impacts on your hopes as a parent? And your wishes for your children?

What do your children need from you?

What are some of the things your children would like you to change? What would they say if we asked them?

# Further examples of questions to motivate a father's readiness to participate in a specialist service

How do you manage your big feelings? What do the children see?... What do the children see when you are really worried / angry / stressed...?

How does this behaviour make you feel about yourself as a parent? Does it make you happier?

What is your son learning about how to treat girls and women from you?

What is your daughter learning from you about how women should be treated in a relationship, about what's acceptable?

What will happen if they take these learnings into their first relationships?

How do you support your children's relationship with their mother?... How do you support her parenting, and try to make her role as a parent easier?

How is your behaviour towards the children's mum affecting your relationship with them?... Is your behaviour making you closer to them, or driving them away?

How might your children see you in ten years' time, if you don't take responsibility for your behaviour?

How do you think relating to their mother with respect rather than violence might benefit your kids?

How would your children like you to treat [insert name of their mother]?

How important is it for you to be the best father you can be?

Are you ready to start looking at how your behaviour is getting in the way of that?

What can you do to increase the physical and emotional safety and wellbeing of your children?

# Four column technique

Commence by inviting the father to brainstorm the things that a child needs to feel happy and to have ‘a good childhood’ (e.g. ‘love’, ‘safety’, ‘security’, ‘predictability’...). This sets important foundations for the activity and helps to divert attention away from “my father gave me a flogging and it did me no harm”

Then invite him to consider the following in order, and whiteboard across four columns, one column at a time:

1. “Tell me about your father – how were you fathered /parented by him?” **and** “How did your father treat your mother... what did you see and hear... what didn’t you see directly but suspected about how he treated her?”
2. “How did you feel around him... what were the range of feelings, the good and the bad...?” “What was the impact of the ways in which you were fathered?” **and** “How did you feel about how he treated your Mum... what impact did this have on you?”
3. “How do your children want to be fathered?... How do they want to feel around you?” **and** “How do your children feel about how you treat their mother?”
4. “What do your children need from you as Dad?” **and** “What do your children need from you in how you treat their mother?”

Then, consolidate his explorations of what makes a good Dad / the best Dad you can be to your children... and consolidate his insights into where he does and doesn’t feel equipped or supported to be this Dad.

# Assessing along the way, does he...

- Show little capacity to talk knowledgeably about the children's personalities and current interests
- Have limited insight into the children's needs and what is happening in their lives
- Use a negative or complaining tone when talking about the children
- Have expectations of the children's behaviour that are not developmentally appropriate
- Have a strongly preferred child and/or a strongly least preferred one
- Talk about his children having deliberate negative intent towards him
- Appear to regard children as his property
- Believe his children need to show respect and to be 'taught lessons'
- Blame his (ex)partner if limits have been imposed on his access to the children
- Criticise her parenting style or capacity (for example, says that she is too lenient with the children or that the children are 'out of control' under her parenting)
- Say that one or more of the children do not want to be parented by her
- Focus exclusively or mostly on his 'rights' to see his children.

*Every question is an assessment question!*

# Invitational practice

Not moralising at him, not shaming him, not modelling an ‘I’m right, I have the answers, you’re wrong’ type approach... but rather, inviting him to look at, explore and grapple with things together, based on a genuine sense of curiosity

- Inviting him to look at an idea / concept / analogy / visual prompt ‘off to the side’... energetically or spatially putting the idea/concept/analogy/prompt into a space between you and the client or off to the side, and taking a look at it together
- Means that he is not always feeling ‘targeted’ by the practitioner... that the practitioner is not always ‘at him’, not always looking at him or ‘mining’ him for responses

*“John, is it ok if I put something up on the whiteboard, it could be a better way of us exploring some stuff than just discussing....”*
- “Could it be possible that...?” to invite him to consider and grapple with possibilities (that you might well know to be true) that he finds difficult to be open to
- We can take the intensity down a bit, and help him to feel less targeted, by maybe a pause, a brief look away (as we sometimes do when we are gathering our thoughts), before we present the concept/idea

# Visual conversations

A visual prompt, visual concept, diagram or visual analogy is a way to invite him into explorations of new ideas or concepts... something to hang the conversation off and to aid his memory of and deepening of the explorations over time

- Draw a big genogram that you and the client can refer to together
- Crossing the line between having an argument and using abuse → invite him to list on the left of the line his behaviours if he and his partner are having an argument, but when he isn't being abusive... and to the right of the line, his behaviours when he has crossed the line to being abusive
- Iceberg

“We find the analogy of an iceberg to be really useful with the Dads we work with. Can I draw one here to explain?...  
At the top of the iceberg, above the waterline, is stuff that we find that fathers are often aware of about their behaviour and about how their family members are feeling around them...  
Below the waterline, is a whole bunch of stuff that’s harder to look at, things like the impacts of their behaviour on their children, or the thoughts that go through the man’s mind when he’s feeling really stressed or angry, the types of thoughts that he might stew on that aren’t helpful for him to stay calm and to respond in the best way...  
Looking underneath the waterline is hard, but there’s no way to sugar coat this, being the best you can be for your kids involves hard work as well as lots of personal rewards...”
- Shaking up the coke bottle – it only fizzes out if one takes off the lid (i.e., one can feel a lot of anger but it’s a choice as to whether to ‘lift the lid’)

“If Bec and Noah were overhearing you having an argument with their Mum, what would they hear you say? If they were watching the argument, what would they see you do?”

“If Bec and Noah overheard you crossing the line from having an argument with their mother, to being abusive at her, what would they hear? What would they see?”

To be a partner and father who listens to the views of my family members



An "I'm right, you're wrong" attitude

Focusing only on what I want to say

Calling my partner stupid

Thinking that my daughter is trying to upset me

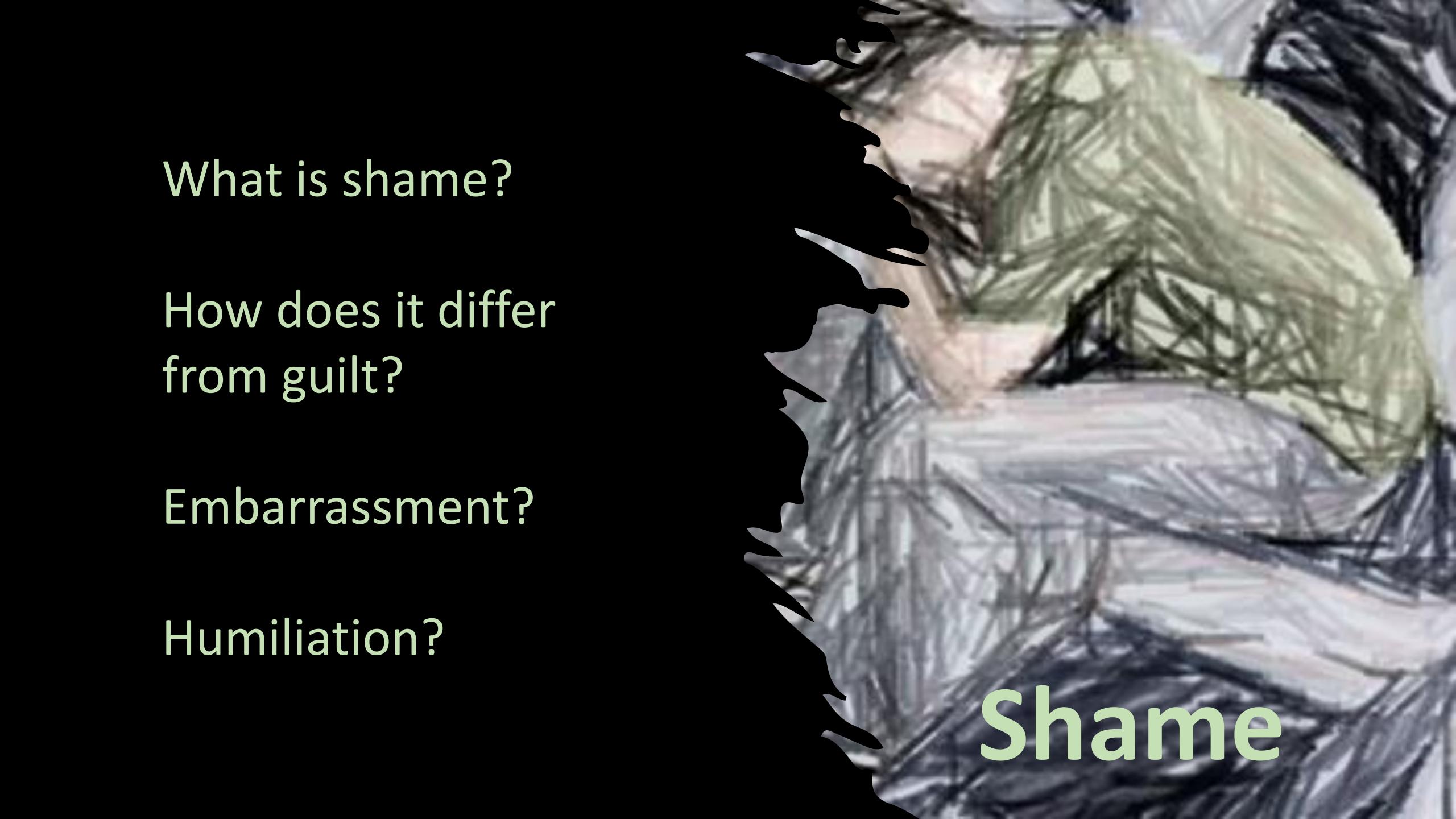
Closer To

Making time to talk with my partner

Reminding myself that if we don't agree on something, it doesn't mean that she's wrong

Asking myself everyday "What is something new I'm learning about how my partner sees the world?"

Thinking what my daughter might be feeling, what she might need



What is shame?

How does it differ  
from guilt?

Embarrassment?

Humiliation?

Shame

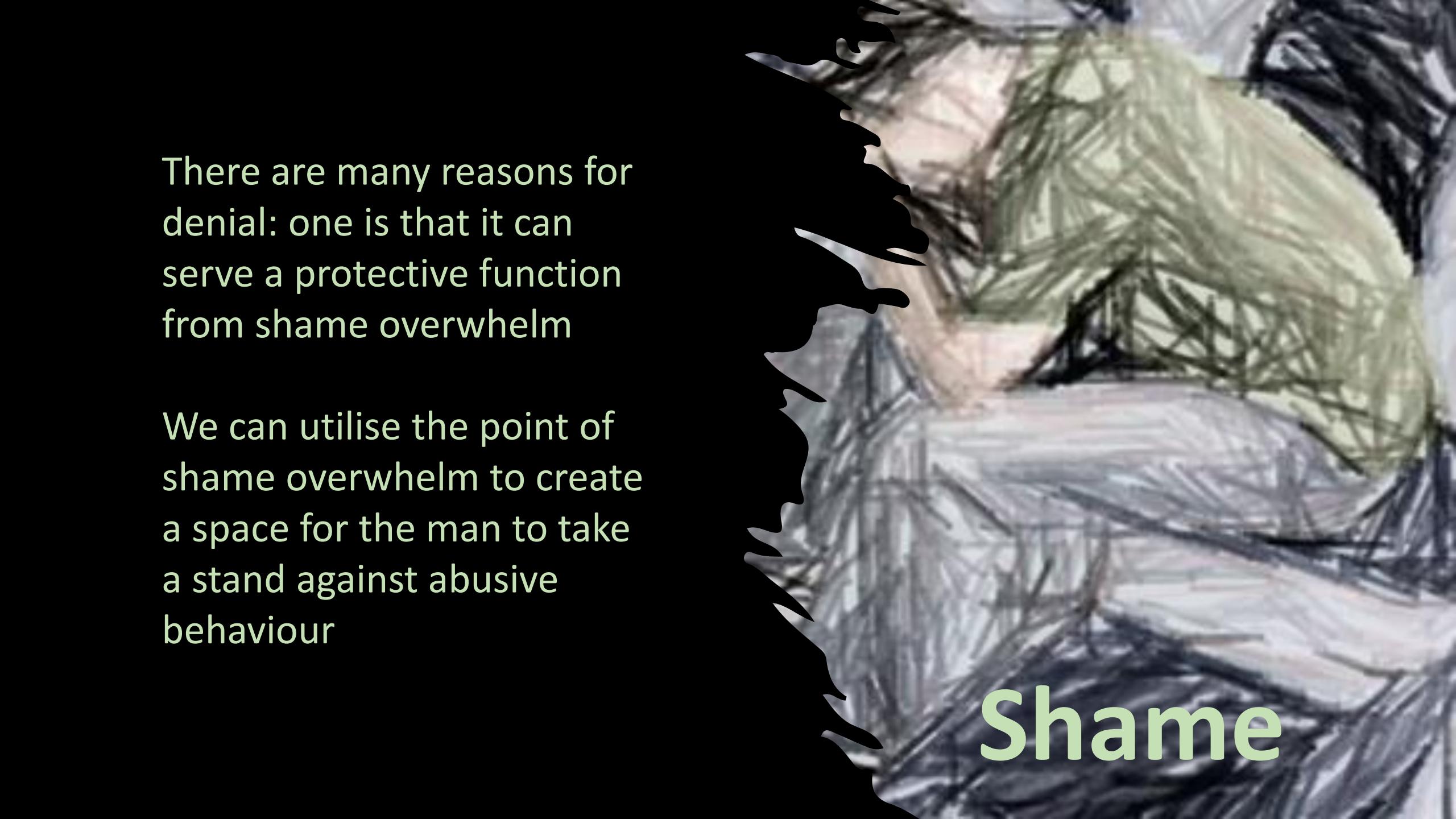
“I feel bad for what I did”  
(guilt)

vs

“I am bad for what I did”  
(shame)

Shame can also be fed by low self-efficacy and a sense of hopelessness (that ‘doing good’ or ‘being good’ is out of reach)





There are many reasons for denial: one is that it can serve a protective function from shame overwhelm

We can utilise the point of shame overwhelm to create a space for the man to take a stand against abusive behaviour

Shame

# Multiple sources of low shame tolerance

Chronic shame

Shame anxiety

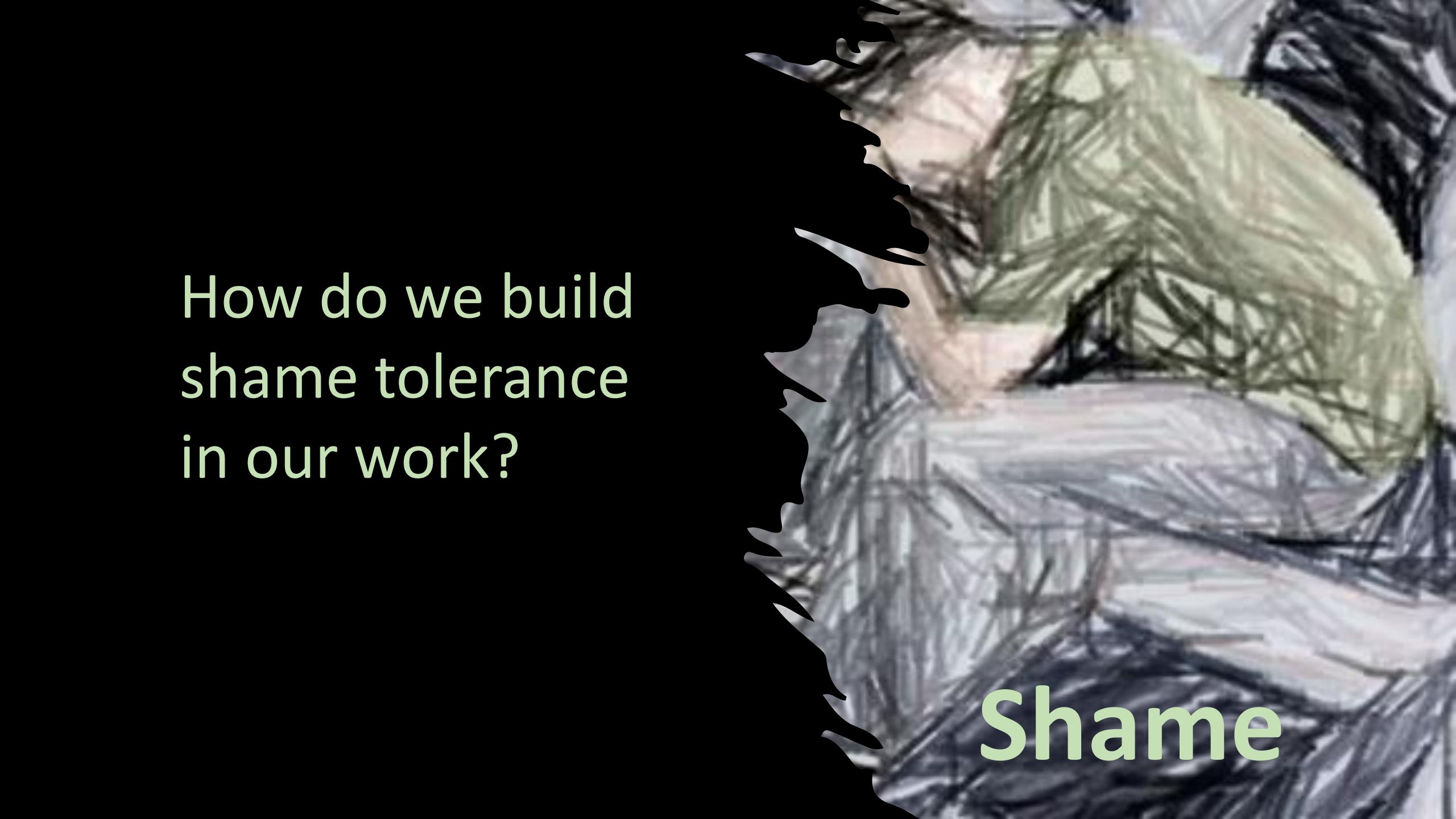
Narcissistic avoidance of shame

Collective shame due to community marginalisation and oppression

Shame (or more like humiliation) due to traditional/intergenerational models of masculinity be(com)ing unattainable

Shame





How do we build  
shame tolerance  
in our work?

Shame

# Three levels of safety planning strategies



## Midstream

Strategies the person can use to interrupt common pathways towards choosing to use violence, when they notice early warning signs. Supports to interrupt build-up towards choices to use violence, or safe distractions.

## Upstream

Changes to the person's lifestyle, habits, related behaviours or complex needs that might make it (somewhat) less likely that they will continue to choose to use certain forms of violent behaviour.

## Downstream

Strategies to use when the choice to use violent or controlling behaviour is close, or when this behaviour has begun.

# Safety planning strategies

## Midstream

Avoiding risky situations

Arrangements to bypass discussion of sensitive matters

Social supports that have ears and eyes open

Strategies to nip winding-himself-up in the bud

Daily reminders about what he's got to lose by continuing to use violence

All three tiers are important – but for users of DFV who are less willing or able to talk 'downstream' about their harmful behaviour, upstream and midstream strategies have a bigger role in the mix (at least to start off with).

## Upstream

Addressing contributing factors (these aren't causal):

- Alcohol and other drugs
- Mental health (depression, hopelessness, suicide risk, agitated anxiety)
- Lifestyle habits and stability

Protective factors

Routines and daily structure

Distractions / interests or goals that draw him away from fixations with the victim-survivor

Enhancing accessibility / reducing barriers to service use

Supports to contact 24/7

## Downstream

'Heat of the moment' strategies

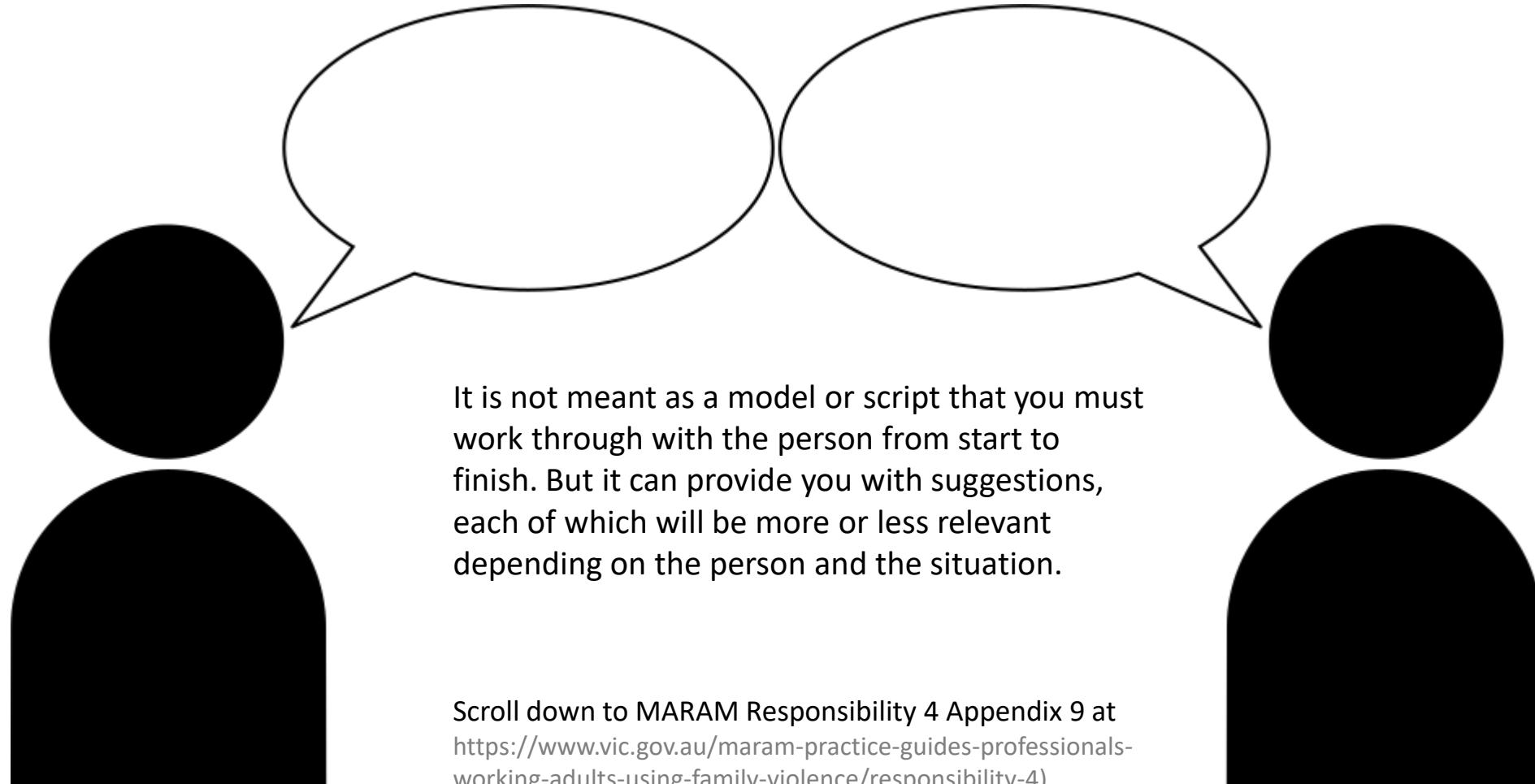
Planning how to behave safely in higher-risk situations

Taking a breather (not mis-applied 'time out')

Circuit breakers

Immediate CBT/DBT strategies

The **Safety Planning Conversation Model** from Victoria, Australia is an excellent resource on how to approach a safety planning conversation with an adult who is causing harm.



It is not meant as a model or script that you must work through with the person from start to finish. But it can provide you with suggestions, each of which will be more or less relevant depending on the person and the situation.

Scroll down to MARAM Responsibility 4 Appendix 9 at  
<https://www.vic.gov.au/maram-practice-guides-professionals-working-adults-using-family-violence/responsibility-4>)

## My safety plan: How I will keep myself and others safe

### Services I can contact

- Men's Referral Service (MRS): **1300 766 491**
- MensLine: **1300 789 978**
- Beyond Blue: **1300 224 636**
- Lifeline: **13 11 14**
- MBCP service provider office:

### Emergency and crisis contacts

Call **Triple Zero (000)** in an emergency

- Other emergency contacts (who I will contact if I cannot keep myself and others safe)

My warning signs (thoughts, feelings, body sensations, behaviours) that let me know I am becoming an unsafe person to be around	
The 'risky' situations where I may become an unsafe person (violent, controlling, abusive, self-harming)	
When I notice the warning signs or situations where I am becoming unsafe, or they are pointed out to me, what are the things I will do to manage my behaviour? What strategies have worked in the past to manage my behaviour?	
What have I been told I have to do for the safety of my family members? Are there any orders I need to follow? What actions can I take to make sure I don't breach my orders?	
What might get in the way of carrying out my safety plan?	
Who will support me to be safe? <i>Note: This does not include your partner. Only list the people or services who will support you to be safe. You might like to share your safety plan with them. List at least three people or services and their phone numbers.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li></li><li></li><li></li></ol>
The safe place that I can go to if I need to leave the situation is (it's important that I tell my partner that I am going and how long I will be gone for):	
Things I will take with me when I go to my safe place:	
I will get to my safe place by (driving, walking, calling a friend to pick me up, etc.):	
When I get to my safe place I will:	
I will know that I am safe to go home or be around my family when:	

**DFV safety plan tool  
for users of violence from the  
Risk Safety and Support Framework  
New South Wales (Australia),  
focusing specifically on some  
downstream strategies**

## CHOOSE TO CHANGE: YOUR BEHAVIOR, YOUR CHOICE



### THE 'CHOOSE TO CHANGE' NETWORK: A GUIDE FOR MEN

A process to help men who choose violence to develop a support network to interrupt their violence and increase safety for other family members

The [Choose to Change](#) Network Toolkit describes a four-step process to help men develop strong, safe support networks to help them interrupt their violence and increase safety for other family members. It includes a Professionals Booklet, Information for Partners and Information for Network Contacts. The Toolkit scaffolds processes for men to identify upstream (check-in), midstream (worry) and downstream (crisis) contacts.

<https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/tools-for-systems-change/practice-toolkits/choose-to-change/>



**A check-in contact** - you are in a good space and want to stay in touch and check in with your network. A check-in contact might be a quick chat on the telephone or a text.



**A worry contact** - you are worried about your mood and thinking, are concerned it may escalate into negative behavior. When you or someone else is worried you may be abusive. A worry contact could include a long phone call or to arrange to meet face-to-face.



**A crisis contact** - you are being abusive or controlling and other people are scared of you. A crisis contact could mean you need the person to speak to you or see you straight away.

# Tension scale tool focusing on strategies to prevent build-up towards a violent or controlling behaviour

This scale is designed to help you begin to notice how tense you are on the way to choosing a harmful behaviour. It is your individual alarm system to warn you when you are getting closer to making that choice. As you get better at noticing what is happening inside you, you will start to recognise patterns of build-up towards choosing harmful behaviour – patterns that you can interrupt and divert towards behaviour you and your family will feel better about.

**I DON'T WANT TO...** text [partner's name] repeatedly when she's out with a friend, grilling her about when she will be coming home

**I DON'T WANT TO BECAUSE ...** I want to be the type of man who can deal with my own jealousy, and I will drive her away if I show no trust

**INSTEAD I WOULD LIKE TO ...** get to the point where I can genuinely wish that she has a good time, or at least resist the urge to repeatedly text her

BODY OR OTHER SIGNS	10	STRATEGIES TO INTERRUPT / STOP BUILD-UP
Picking up the phone, shaking		Phone my crisis contact support person instead of texting [partner's name]
Becoming sweaty, clenching my jaw		Remind myself "I can handle this urge" Put the phone somewhere hard to get to for 30 minutes
Thoughts starting to race		Practice my square breathing Remind myself that I'll feel so much better if I don't blow up at [partner's name]
Pacing more quickly		Sit down. Have a bath. Don't drink, that makes my worry worse. Apply my mindfulness strategies. Acknowledge my catastrophising thoughts, the worrying images in my mind → just watch the thoughts, apply the mindfulness strategy, no need to stew on the thoughts, wait till they start to subside.
Can't concentrate on much else		
Knot in my stomach, feel a bit sick		Phone my worry contact support person Remind myself what I want to model to our son about how to handle worries and big feelings – I don't want him to end up getting into trouble like I did at his age
Get up to pace		
Forehead feels tight		
Start to feel a bit "vague"		Read my goal about trust – <i>I want to be a man who stands with my family, not someone who always fears the worst about them and stands over them</i> Put on some music I like
Enjoying whatever I'm doing, not thinking much about [partner's name]	Safe	Make sure I've got something to preoccupy me while [partner's name] is out

Factors to consider in assessing the extent to which a protection order, corrections or other court order will act as a deterrent for the person causing harm

- The person's knowledge of the conditions of the order
- His attitude towards each of the main conditions of the order
- His understanding of the consequences of breaching the order
- The degree to which he believes that these consequences would arise if he does something that breaches the order
- The degree to which these consequences would matter to him or act as a deterrent
- Any other reasons and motivations that matter to him for not breaching the order
- The likelihood that these reasons and motivations would exert an influence on his decision-making during times when he might be tempted to do something that breaches the order



**Talk with him about the order and its conditions... look for holes and gaps in his understanding of the order... see if you can focus on any of the above to motivate a greater likelihood of compliance**



If we can't take a direct approach, we can safety plan like the multi-headed Hydra → focus on something he is willing to safety plan or work on, that involves skills or strategies that can be stretched towards DFV-interruption... it might not achieve much, but it's a start.

## Covert and indirect safety planning that can be stretched towards a focus on violent and controlling behaviour

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If the person is not willing to enter into a conversation about any aspects of his DFV behaviours, or if the time isn't right to open this conversation up, you can still commence safety planning 'covertly'... consider ways of building in some alcohol and other drug or mental health treatment work or other strategies that, if put into practice, might indirectly help to reduce the DFV risk he poses to family members... strategies that can be stretched and built upon over time to get closer to some of his violent and controlling behaviour... 'life skills' he can use to stay calm or resist urges to be preoccupied by things...

For example, focus on CBT strategies he can use to manage difficult feelings when withdrawing from a substance (as this is often a time when DFV behaviours escalate).

Safety plan on mental health issues, positive (non-misogynist) social connections, daily habits of self-care, or other upstream safety planning strategies.

Maybe he will be motivated to focus on how he can model calmness to his children when experiencing big feelings.

These covert and indirect safety planning strategies won't make him a safe man and won't interrupt most of his use of violent and controlling behaviours but might make a start.

Help him to then stretch these skills closer to his use of violent and controlling behaviours... e.g., towards how he can use them when he finds himself 'getting heated' with his partner... or when he is feeling agitated and has an urge to repeatedly text his partner to check up on her...



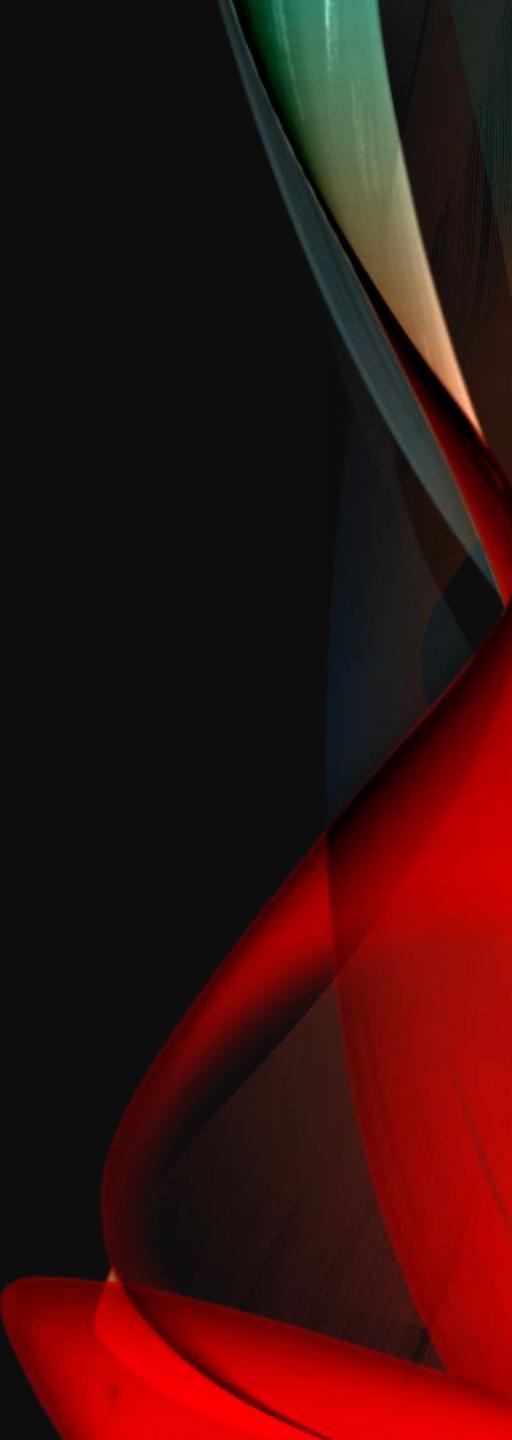
See from minute 18 onwards for twenty highly useful minutes on developing a suicide prevention plan with someone at risk

To the best of our knowledge this is the first study in the UK to estimate the rate of suicide in perpetrators of domestic violence.

In this population of high-risk high-harm perpetrators of violence who are in touch with services, we estimate an annual rate of suicide of **461 per 100,000**.

In 2021 the rate of suicide in males in England and Wales was **16 per 100,000**, and the highest rate of suicide was observed in males ages 45-64 at **20 per 100,000** (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Research from Victoria, Australia shows that DFV perpetrators are **11 times more likely than the general population to seek emergency mental health services**. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38195457/>

The rate in high-risk high-harm perpetrators of violence is **23 times greater** than the highest age specific suicide rate in the general population (Knipe et al., 2023).



# refer to a specialist DFV behaviour change program

- Anger management programs are different from men's behaviour change programs and are not an appropriate referral option. They do not focus on coercive controlling behaviour, are not as focused on identifying and responding to risk, generally do not offer parallel safety support and advocacy for affected family members and are not part of integrated DFV service systems.
- Most private psychologists / psychotherapists / counselling practitioners do not have specialist skills in engaging men who use DFV. Without specific training and experience in this, are likely to engage with perpetrators in ways that compromise the safety of victim-survivors.
- Relationship counselling or family therapy mutualise responsibility for the violence (even if they do not directly focus on his violent and controlling behaviour), and places the victim-survivor in the highly difficult position of either risking retaliation by disclosing his use of violence in front of him and the practitioner, or censoring herself due to this fear (and having yet another experience of being disempowered).
- **Premature** relationship counselling or family therapy work (that is, conducted while he is still using violent and/or controlling behaviour) will end up benefitting him and his power structures at the expense of his family – again, even if the focus is not directly on his behaviour.
- Referring him to a generic parenting program – one that is not DFV-informed – can result in him learning more 'behaviour management strategies' to control his children and in him having more ammunition to criticise his partner's parenting.
  - Refer him to Caring Dads or another DFV-informed program that is based on an understanding of DFV as coercive control, and that will work with him to become more child-focused and to support rather than sabotage family functioning.
  - These programs will also help him with parenting skills – however, his belief system and self-focus on his rights rather than on his responsibilities needs to be addressed first.

Behaviour change can be a long journey... an adult's participation in and completion of a MBCP

is not in itself an indicator of change and reduced risk

**Completion certificates are dangerous!**

[https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CertsAreDangerous\\_paper2142020\\_web.pdf](https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CertsAreDangerous_paper2142020_web.pdf)

**Are there ways you can support, or supplement the work of the MBCP provider or other specialist perpetrator intervention service?**



## Brief Intervention Service

Men can access multiple phone counselling sessions.

During the session:

- Counsellors aim to support men to change violent behaviours.
- A key focus is on the safety of women and children.
- The Brief Intervention Service will also work to connect men with other ongoing services.

*It is important to note that the Brief Intervention Service is not, and does not replace a men's behaviour change program or group.*

 Men's Referral Service  
Operated by No to Violence

1300 766 491

No to Violence and The Men's Referral Service acknowledges First Nations Peoples across these lands; the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters.

We pay respect to all Elders, past, present and emerging. We acknowledge a deep connection with country which has existed over 60,000 years.



Delivered by the Men's Referral Service  
family violence counsellors



Consider the NTV Brief Intervention Service if there is no MBCP referral option available, or to bridge him into an MBCP while he waits for an available spot.

<https://ntv.org.au/sector-resources/how-bis-can-support-your-work/>

 Men's Referral Service  
Operated by No to Violence  
1300 766 491

 Men's Referral Service  
Operated by No to Violence

## Primary desistance

- Behaviour The cessation of offending.

## Secondary desistance

- Identity The adoption of a non-offending identity.

## Tertiary desistance

- Belonging The recognition by others that one has changed, along with the development of a sense of belonging.

## Listening out for indicators of risk

- What you can glean from his narratives, for example:
  - heightened victim stance thinking, blames her excessively
  - hostility towards her
  - dependency, 'can't live without her'
  - desperation, nothing more to lose, his life deteriorating
  - revengeful, 'can't let her win', 'won't let some other fella parent *my* children'
  - fixated on his rights in a way that makes her invisible
  - disparaging about her as a parent, says the kids are better off with him
- Evidence-Based Risk Factors you can directly or 'surreptitiously' assess
  - it is highly unlikely he will disclose EBRFs related to his behaviour, but you might be able to assess psychosocial EBRFs such as mental health, AoD use, employment, major stressors, etc.
  - situational EBRFs (his partner pregnant or has an infant, recent separation, partner isolated, etc.)
- Power imbalances between him and the victim-survivor in addition to gender
  - e.g., he's much older, she's living with a disability, he has more local extended family supports than she has, he has racialised or cis-gendered privilege, has networks and resources that he can utilise that she can't, has status in the community



his  
observable  
thinking

## Listening out for indicators of risk... continued

- What you can glean about coercive controlling behaviours that he might be using
  - from the way that he talks about day-to-day relationship/household/family life, how decisions are made, how he talks about family finances, how he talks about his partner, etc.
- What you can glean about any systems abuse tactics that he might be using
  - pathologises her, tries to influence your narratives about her
  - tries to get services and the system to view her as the perpetrator
  - tries to weaponise involvement of your or other services to his advantage
  - uses family court / family law system to maintain a controlling presence or to punish her
- Major changes in circumstances, new events or stressors, new developments in how the victim-survivor or services/authorities are responding to his violence
- What meaning he makes out of the change in circumstances, new events or responses by others

For further reading, see the resources *20 things we can learn about risk through engaging the adult users of DFSV* and *Responding to users of DFSV who pose a serious to severe risk – updated*.

# How do perpetrators manipulate systems?

1. Making false allegations
2. Exploiting victim survivor vulnerabilities
3. Using status, power, finances and privilege

**Reference:** Mandel, D., Mitchell, A., & Sterns Mandel, R (2021).  
*How domestic violence perpetrators manipulate systems.*  
Safe and Together Institute.