

# TRUE COLOURS

Group work with mothers and children  
who have experienced domestic and  
family violence



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Authors:

Catherine Want

Robyn Galea

Jodie Noblett

Graphic Design : Josene Perri

Edited by: Wendy Cosier & Danielle Bragg

Copies of this publication are available from:

Parramatta Holroyd Family Support

Phone: +61 02 9636 8437

Email: [info@phfs.org.au](mailto:info@phfs.org.au)

Website: [www.phfs.org.au](http://www.phfs.org.au)

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The front cover of this manual is based on a photo which was taken by a mum who attended a domestic violence group as part of this resource development. She shared that after group she had stopped and noticed these two trees.

The trees were side by side and yet one was dead and the other was blossoming. The mum shared how this became a visualisation for her story and how she felt inside.

She went on to share how through the group she began understand domestic violence, notice her strengths and find her voice.

**“Pictures help me. Whenever I need to, I can visualise these two trees and they remind me of where I was and where I want to be.”**

**“Before I came to the group I could not talk about what was happening inside ... I could not express myself. “**

**“Now I can see what is inside ... I can speak... I can choose... I can thrive like the healthy tree...I am strong and I am brave and I will never go back to feeling dead inside.”**



# TRUE COLOURS





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SECTION ONE:  
INTRODUCTION

1



## True Colours: Group work with mothers and children who have experienced domestic and family violence

### 1. Introduction

In responding to women subjected to domestic and family violence, group work has been held as an effective mode of practice amidst the myriad of interventions that include crisis support, safety and protection, counselling, advocacy, and linkages to practical support offered by housing, legal, and financial agencies.

**Group work:** in bringing together women forced into the secrecy and isolation surrounding domestic and family violence, group work immediately challenges those legacies. Effective group work seeks to provide a safe space where participants can come together, share their stories, be listened to, validated and supported. This resource focuses on group work with mothers who have lived with domestic and family violence.

The purpose of this work includes:

- To provide a safe place to break the silence surrounding domestic violence
- To uphold their dignity by the giving and receiving of respect
- To explore how their experiences of the violence have impacted on their sense of self (roles and identity), their children's sense of self, and the relationships between them
- To shift responsibility for the violence away from themselves and locate it within the intentional and planned tactics perpetrated against them and their children
- To identify and share acts of resistance by mothers and children against the dynamics and legacies of violence
- To reveal and share acts of resistance against the violence
- To affirm their role as the primary caregiver for the ongoing well-being of their child
- To acknowledge and strengthen their knowledge, competencies and skills, and sense of agency to strengthen family resilience
- To develop connections, friendships and social supports.

## 2. Foundations of Practice

Any form of practice requires the worker to hold certain principles that constantly guide and support critical reflective thinking. When responding to women and children subjected to the interpersonal nature of domestic and family violence these principles include:

- Interpersonal violence is gendered; perpetrators are mostly male and victims are predominantly females and children
- Interpersonal violence is patterned and planned with the use of deliberate acts to coerce and exert power over others
- Interpersonal violence is a human rights violation and being free of domestic and family violence is a right that all people deserve
- Interpersonal violence operates in a social context at four levels which includes society, community, relationships and individual
- Individuals who perpetrate violence must be held accountable for their actions
- The impact of violence on children is a child protection issue and should never be minimised or excused
- A mother is never to blame for domestic violence nor is she to blame for the effects the violence has had on her children
- Mothers who abuse their own children, (emotionally, physically or otherwise), must take responsibility for those actions and recognise the impact on their child
- Wherever and whenever interpersonal violence occurs there will always be acts of resistance and making that resistance visible is critical
- Empowerment and strengths based practice acknowledges the skills and expertise held by people subjected to interpersonal violence and seeks to enhance those personal resources
- The safety and well being of those subjected to interpersonal violence must be the first priority of any response
- Evidence based practice involves a commitment to being updated with research and balancing that knowledge with the wisdom arising from practice based knowledge and skills
- Reflective practice must be continuous and should happen at all levels of the organisation in regard to service delivery.

### 3. Trauma Informed Practice

Trauma is defined as any experience that overwhelms an individual's capacity to cope and can interfere with a person's sense of safety, identity and self-efficacy.

Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition and memory. A hallmark of traumatic experience is that it typically overwhelms an individual-mentally, emotionally and physically. Irrespective of age, traumatised people commonly feel terror, shame, helplessness and powerlessness.

In the context of violence and abuse, trauma informed practice shifts the philosophical approach from "What's wrong with you?" to "What's happened to you?" In this regard, trauma responses not only make sense but need to always be connected to the operation of the violence itself, including the age at which the abuse started, the severity of the harm, their relationship to the person/s who harmed them, and the degree, (or lack) of, belief and protection they received. As with the social context in which violence situates itself, trauma based responses also hold social and therefore relational context.

The work of Judith Herman (1992) placed trauma inflicted by violence and abuse in a socio-political context and argued that, "The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections."



Development of her model has been successfully achieved in a paper entitled “From Isolation to Connection”. (Child Safety Commissioner, 2009) who developed Herman’s three layered model of Safety, Remembrance and Mourning and Connection into a **“Spiral of Healing” model which includes four streams:**

- **Safety stream: recovery from violence can only begin when a level of safety is established**
- **Telling the Story stream: enabling violence to be revealed rather than trapped in secrecy, shame and isolation**
- **Connection and Empowerment stream: human beings need to form attachments to people and if they are unable to, their emotional and social well being is compromised**
- **Building Relationships stream: encircles all the other streams and involves the development of safe and trustworthy relationships with other people**

In the case of group work with people who have experienced violence, these streams provide a practice map regarding the purpose or intention of any program. Following this map will bring people together in a space that values safety, sharing of stories, recognition of strengths and resilience, and connection.

#### **4. Planning for Group Work**

Unlike other direct work with clients, which is often reactive to the immediacy of the concerns being raised and a mutual agreement as to what issues need to be discussed, group work is at least initially held following a period of planning and programming within the agency.

Group work is crafted by considering and working through the following:

- Origins (what are the events, client determinants, situations, and opportunities that motivate the development of a group?)
- Aims (why are we doing this and what do we want to achieve?)
- Product (what are we going to do and what will it look like?)
- Outcomes (what will tell us and how will we evaluate, whether or not we have been successful?)

- Preparation (including group facilitators, group members, open or closed, number of sessions, location, budget, transport, resources)
- Launching the group (publicising, referral forms, pre-group interviews)
- Running the group
- Reviewing (reflecting on what went well and what was learnt for improvement and change).

(Lindsay & Orton, 2014).

## 5. A Mosaic of Group Work Practice

The purpose for which group is held will determine the type of group that is constructed. It has been increasingly recognised that in the turbulence of women's lives a commitment to a long term group over many weeks may not be possible.

Navigating the ongoing stresses and strains of maintaining safety for themselves and their children, ongoing contact with the perpetrator of the violence, gaining housing and financial independence, seeking immigration permanency, managing the needs of their children, dealing with possible legal confrontations in Criminal, Children's or Family Courts, and a plethora of other issues, takes time and energy and corrodes any other possible commitments.

A group for women which attends to their needs and current life circumstances can provide the support and connection without imposing a set of criteria that only adds to the burdens they are carrying. Often a short term, information based group provides a safe forum for women to initially meet together, maintaining an open attendance so that choices can be made about which sessions to attend and which to miss.

The connections made can then encourage ongoing attendance of a longer term group which will focus more on the personal stories of the participants and enhance safety by being a closed group with the content and structure carefully monitored by the facilitators.

Consultations with women following their attendance at a group have also identified that they need time to reflect on and process the information and conversations that occurred. Often the timeframe of a group program that starts and finishes on certain dates dictates, unintentionally, that this is the space for them to “come to terms” with the violence and move on. This goes against the timeframes and processes women experience and can inadvertently give them the message that they failed or are inadequate because they haven’t achieved certain milestones.

Limited time frames and linear models of recovery do not acknowledge the longevity of the impact of the abuse nor the continued presence and interference of the perpetrator of the violence and can further isolate participants due to them believing they are unable to meet false expectations of recovery. Group content must always consider the messages it communicates to participants, supporting the processes of each woman with validation and respect.

It is valuable to identify that attendance at any group (or groups) is part of their overall story of the many ways that separation from violence occurs, which enables women to take ownership of their experience of the group as only one part of how they are trying to manage and make sense of their experiences.

## **6. Initial Connection with Participants**

Workers will often debate about what a group should be called and whether or not the nature of the group be disguised by a title that does not explicitly name domestic violence. The obvious concerns raised are that if women attend a group that clearly identifies domestic and family violence as the core issue of that group they may choose not to attend as this is too confrontational for them or there may be an increased risk to their safety should the perpetrator of the violence become aware of their attendance at a group.



Whatever the title of the group, whatever metaphor is used to symbolise the core purpose the group, women must be given the respect of being clearly informed of the exact nature of the group being held. Their responses, including concerns or apprehensions, remain their responsibility and their choice to manage.

The importance of pre-group interviews cannot be overstated when providing groups for women who have experienced domestic and family violence. Although a face-to-face meeting between potential participants and group facilitators is the ideal, other options such as emails and telephone conversations can also suffice, prioritising safety when choosing the form of contact.

Pre-group interviews lay the groundwork before the group starts and provide an opportunity for future participants to ask questions, state their ideas regarding their reasons for attending and speak of any reservations they may have. Facilitators can give an outline of the program, likely activities that will occur and consider both practical issues such as transport and childcare as well as the more serious considerations of confidentiality and ongoing safety when women attend.



Questions to consider during this meeting may include:

- What is her story of the violence she and her children have experienced?
- What are her current concerns for her children?
- How did she find out about the group and what are her thoughts about attending?
- Does she have any concerns about coming to the group?
- Has she had any past experiences of group, and, if so, what were those experiences?
- What are her reasons for wanting to participate in this group?
- What does she think it will be like to speak about her experiences with other women?
- What will it be like for her to listen to other women's experiences?
- Does she attend counselling or have any other support from others such as extended family, friends and services?
- Does she have any questions about the group?
- In thinking about coming to the first meeting of the group what are her concerns and how can she be supported to attend?
- Are there any practical issues to consider such as transport, childcare, work commitments etc.?

**It is essential to assess the current safety of the mother and her children and whether attending the group may place her safety or the safety of her children at increased risk.**

Questions to address this issue can include:

- Do you and your children currently have contact with your partner/ex-partner?
- Are there any current safety concerns?
- Has your partner ever made threats to harm you or your children?
- Have the police been called because of your partner's violence?
- Do you have a current AVO against your partner/ex-partner?
- What will you tell your partner about coming to the group?
- Is your partner likely to follow you or locate you at this group?
- Is it safe for you to receive emails at your address/receive messages on your phone?
- Do you believe coming to this group poses any risk to you or your children's safety?
- How will you let me know if your circumstances change?

When discussing current safety concerns, a mistake often made by workers is failing to recognise the knowledge and many skills women currently possess and utilise. It is important to discuss past protective measures used by the woman for herself and her children and not assume that she is unable to keep herself or her children safe. For example, workers need to be mindful that a woman staying in the home has made a decision that this is a safer option than leaving and being at greater risk of harm from an escalation of the offender's violence.

This is not to take a position at any time that women must hold responsibility for their safety and their children's safety in the onslaught of ongoing violence, but it does involve taking a position of seeking their expertise in this matter rather than imposing our ideas on their lived experiences and their acts of resistance. It is also important in this interview to provide information about her rights as a client of the service running the group, the client complaints policy and the necessity of limited confidentiality and mandatory reporting in regard to any child protection concerns raised during her attendance at the group.

## **7. Group Work Facilitation Considerations**

In her writings concerning group work in the context of domestic and family violence, Wendy Bunston (2006) aptly stated that facilitating groups is about "Not knowing but seeking to find out".

Facilitating groups, when the participants have experienced the oppression and powerlessness of violence, requires a commitment to safety, respect and upholding dignity at all times. This concerns not only the exchanges between facilitators and participants but also the interactions between the participants themselves.

Due to the intensity of monitoring and maintaining safety, it is imperative that facilitation is shared by two workers. Furthermore, facilitators can't just "get together and run a group". Time must be given to meet and discuss working together and holding the dynamics of the group in safe and respectful ways.

Practice issues to consider include:

- Tasks as a facilitator and how these will be shared
- Recognising and managing differences in professional power and status such as levels of experience, age, gender, culture etc.
- Theoretical positions, techniques, styles and skills
- Agency relationships and responsibility and possible tensions if facilitators come from different agencies
- Time and space for ongoing planning and de-briefing.

The skills of a group work facilitator are difficult to quantify but there is no doubt that groups are a very different space to occupy as a worker compared to other roles and associated tasks and responsibilities.

A comprehensive list of group work facilitator skills and responses has been compiled by Heron (2001) which provide testimony to the complexity of the task for any worker.

**They include:**

- **Utilise engagement skills with ongoing attention to all participants, reflective listening, soft eye contact, tone of voice and non-verbal gestures**
- **Be interested and explore meanings by using open questions and reflections on what has been said**
- **Value and respect the expression of emotions and stay with the person whilst also holding the rest of the group**
- **Check out the level of information people need to be given and ensure their own expertise and knowledge is not over-ridden by your need to inform rather than their need to know**
- **Don't give advice or prescribe how people should think or react but seek to understand the sense of their thoughts and behaviours**
- **Respectfully raising awareness about behaviours or language is important to ensure safety of the group but seeking understanding or providing feedback must never be seen as judgemental or a personal attack**
- **Interrupting and redirecting domination by someone are important tasks and will be understood better by participants if this is explained at the start of the group when discussing group agreements**

- Drawing out the more silent members is another important task and can be achieved by activities in pairs or the whole group where everyone feels safe to contribute (such as group go-round, brainstorming, and movement)
- Maintain the focus on the group by making reference to how other participants are thinking, feeling, and reacting to what is being said with inclusive questions and non-verbal signals
- Utilise flexibility to “dance with the movement of the group”, adjusting the program in response to the process
- Demonstrate confidence and belief in the group process and convey optimism with the belief in change and hope that things can be different.

Group work processes was noted by Tuckman (1965) in his well-known stages of:

- **Warming:** Planning and preparation
- **Forming:** Meet and greet as a group
- **Storming:** Individual roles and testing the space
- **Norming:** Consolidate group identity with rules and rituals
- **Performing:** Working together and becoming self-sufficient
- **Mourning:** Saying goodbye and recognising the achievements of the group
- **Transforming:** New meanings, noticing changes and ongoing groups

Other authors as well as practitioners have confirmed that groups create their own culture and rhythm as the group continues to gather and form it's own unique identity.

Understanding the depths of secrecy, fear, and shame held by women subjected to domestic and family violence will add other layers of intensity that are separate to group processes. This requires facilitators to consistently display sensitivity, integrity and respect so that safety and dignity for participants are always reinforced.

Practitioners (Lindsay & Orton, 2014) in the field have identified that consistency of process at each group session can enhance participants sense of safety and trust. Therefore, when planning group sessions a consistent map of process should be considered which includes:

- Beginning each session with a ritual of welcoming everyone to the group
- Using a warm-up activity to bring people into the space and connect with each other
- An energy releasing activity to bring focus to the session
- Moving into the theme and work of the session
- Finishing with as closing activity.

## **8. Establishing a Safe Space**

Our understanding of the impact of domestic and family violence in terms of entrapment and captivity (Herman, 1994) must serve as a constant reminder to workers of not only how difficult it must be for women to come to the first meeting of a group which makes visible the violence, but also how much strength and determination it takes for them to step into that space.

The first moment of entry for them must be as welcoming and comfortably safe as is possible and although we can speak about the ambience of the group's physical space, it is the human connection that will have the greatest impact.

Facilitators need to work hard to be welcoming but not overwhelming, to sit with their own anxieties about who will come and how this first session will go, and to emanate calmness, sensitivity and readiness. Most of all, facilitators need to be ready to just sit in the space as the women arrive and not to be busy getting things prepared. It all comes down, at this point, not to workers and their skills but workers and their human kindness.

Housekeeping issues such as where toilets are, smoking facilities, childcare options and transport practicalities need to be discussed. The place of food in a group will differ according to ideas held by facilitators and the participants. Having something available for women as they arrive is usually a positive step and women may feel that a solid break halfway through the session is also helpful. At other times, food and beverages available on a small table throughout the entire time also works.

## 9. Group Agreements

At the first session, time must be spent on reaching group agreements as to how the group will retain safety for all participants. There are some basic agreements which facilitators can present and ask for feedback from group participants. This can include respect, confidentiality, not being judged, use of mobile phones etc.

An introductory activity known as “Hopes and Fears” can also elicit group agreements. Participants are asked to write down on sticky notes three hopes about coming to group today and three fears. The sticky notes are then placed on the wall and time is spent by the facilitators to read each one and shift them into clusters when they have commonalities. Facilitators then ask participants how the group can strive to protect hopes and fears and these ideas can be written on butcher’s paper to form the basis of group agreements or add to existing ones.

The group agreements should be displayed on a wall at the start of every group session and facilitators can regularly “check in” with participants to ensure that the group agreements are being adhered to or if additional agreements need to be added.

Issues of confidentiality and sharing information with others outside the group must be discussed. It is futile to suggest that women won’t discuss the group with people they feel close to but names of other women and identifying aspects of their lives (such as where they live or where their children go to school) need to remain confidential.

It is important that agreements are reached concerning starting and finishing times and the number of weeks the group will be held. Attendance at all sessions is of course the optimum goal but there must also be some leniency, especially for mothers, who often have practical reasons for not being able to attend all the time. Ideas regarding how women will “catch up” if they miss a session need to be discussed and a plan devised (such as the facilitators contacting participants during the week or having a quick review of the previous week as a warm up activity at the start of every session).

Having come through the door to be at this group it is often difficult for women to know how to leave. Some women may leave quickly and others may want to stay and talk with each other. There is really no right or wrong way and women need the space to do what they need to do.

Facilitators need to be clear that the group has finished following the closing activity for each session. If women want to stay for a while and talk with each other it needs to be clear that this is fine but is separate to the group. It seems important to have some space after the group for women to do this and perhaps when discussing group agreements a period of time (perhaps 30 minutes) could be seen as post group time.

Women may also want to talk to the facilitators and if this is seen as important then it is listed as a group agreement so all participants know they can utilise this at their discretion. However, a time limit of up to 20 minutes is also important to clarify, as facilitators need time to meet together and debrief after each group session.





## 10. Documentation

Documenting work that is produced during the different group work activities has been found to be a valuable tool in reinforcing ideas, as well as capturing the many skills and knowledge that exist within the group.

It is suggested that throughout the process of the group, all ideas that are produced be written up and provided to participants the following week. This can be typed and decorated with borders and graphics and can give participants clear messages about the value of the work and their contributions to the group.

Documentation also provides an opportunity for facilitators and participants to reflect on the discussions and ideas about issues raised, and importantly, to take a stand against the fears, secrecy and isolation that violence creates.

## 11. Evaluation

Seeking feedback about the usefulness of a group program is a strongly held principle when looking at service delivery and accountability. This principle applies equally to group work practice as to any other form of intervention.

Facilitators should meet and debrief after every session. This should include recording descriptive notes of what happened during the group session, guided by a series of questions:

- **What was the overall content discussed during this session?**
- **What happened?/What was said?**
- **What didn't happen?/What wasn't said?**
- **Were interventions made by facilitators appropriate?**
- **Who is contributing/being silent?**
- **What steps were taken or could be taken to shift the dynamics?**
- **Is there movement or change occurring?**
- **Are the group's purposes being achieved?**

These notes can then be referred to when discussing the next session and whether there needs to be changes to the program or changes in the way facilitation of the group is occurring.

Aside from just the productive value of any evaluation process in benefiting program delivery, asking women to provide feedback about their experience and ideas for improving the group is also immediately valuable for the women themselves. Evaluation is not only about information gathering but also about providing space for women to gain further ideas about themselves as people of wisdom and worth. In other words, what they think and say matters and this should not be overlooked.

**Questions to consider as part of evaluating a group can include:**

- **What questions/worries did they hold before coming to the group?**
- **What information would have been helpful before they came to the first session?**
- **What do they believe may be the experiences of other women coming to a similar group for the first time?**
- **What could be offered to assist women to feel more comfortable?**
- **What are some things about themselves that they feel were of benefit to the group?**
- **Were there any things that became stronger during the group?**
- **Did they learn anything new about themselves?**
- **Was there anything they heard about themselves from others in the group that was important to them?**
- **In leaving the group what did they take with them that was useful?**
- **How will they keep these messages with them?**
- **What ideas do they hold about ways they can deal with future challenges, given the supports and new ideas they now hold about themselves?**

At the end of a group program it can be useful for facilitators to give each participant a letter which summarises the work of the group, and what stood out as the strengths of the group and of each participant.

It can also be useful to meet again with participants several weeks after the last group session to revisit the group and discuss both memories of the experience and ongoing changes that have occurred for them as part of being involved in the program.

## 12. From Participants to Consultants

As a principle of practice, consultation with clients is a priority. Asking group members to step into the role of group work consultants rather than group work participants shifts both their relationship with the service and the relationship with themselves or between each other.

In enabling group members to settle into the idea of consultation, time is spent discussing the purpose of the meeting and the process that the consultation will take. This will depend on the ideas offered by the women themselves, such as overall evaluation of the entire program or a step-by-step discussion of each session.

The final part of this consultation process is the presentation of a certificate or card that acknowledges the expertise they have shared. A follow-up letter can advise the women of the changes made to the program because of the information they provided.

## 13. Overview of Programs for Mothers

Group work programs can have different structures and content depending on the purpose of the group. This must always be determined by giving consideration to the needs of the participants.

The programs provided in this resource are examples of:

- **An information based program**
- **A therapeutically based support program.**

The programs are seen as complementing each other, as they offer women the space to examine their own experiences of violence against the knowledge base and statistics that research has developed. They can also reflect on their stories of subjection to that violence, the impact on their children and the many ways they and their children have resisted that oppression.

**The main differences between an information based group and support group are:**

- An information group (often referred to as psycho-education) gives participants key information regarding domestic violence (such as the different forms of violence, tactics used by offenders, the impacts of the violence on their lives and their children's lives, safety plans, legal issues and self care).
- An Information group is quite structured with set topics for each session, including at different times "guest speakers" attending to discuss their specific area of expertise.
- A Support group is for women who may have already attended an Information group and now move into a group space where they can more personally and directly voice their thoughts and emotions with other women who have similar experiences.
- A Support group has a level of structure in terms of certain themes and a set process within each session but facilitators mainly follow what participants raise and they utilise key principles of deep listening, reflective questioning, and validation to guide conversations.
- An Information group can remain an open group where participants can come and go at their choosing, depending on the topics being discussed at each session.
- A Support group relies on the development of safe and trusting connections between the group members and therefore needs to be closed, at least after the second meeting.

SECTION TWO:  
INFORMATION GROUP  
PROGRAM

2



## Information Group Program

This information group program is held as a series of sessions that seek to provide information to participants about key issues regarding their experiences of domestic and family violence. Each session has an identified topic and although participants are encouraged to attend all sessions, the group is left as an open group (meaning that people can join the group at any time and also not attend a certain session if they choose).

The key factor to create and maintain in this group is safety for all participants. Although conversations and sharing of stories are encouraged throughout the program, participants can also take different positions of participation depending on their levels of comfort and, therefore, preparedness to self disclose.

The following program outline covers what are considered important topics to include but are not exclusive of others. As with any group program facilitators need to adjust the program according to the identified needs and requests made by participants.

It is important in an information based group program that a level of structure (and therefore predictability) is maintained, especially given the open nature of this program. Facilitators can make room within the program to address issues participants raise but caution should be given not to “wander” too far away from the program. It is important to be mindful that the core purpose of this group is to provide information rather than to open the space to more therapeutically informed work.

## SESSION 1.

### 1. Starting Out

- Acknowledgement of country.
- Facilitators introduce themselves and their hopes for this group.
- Welcome group participants.



Ask participants to say their name and say one thing that they would like to share with the group about themselves or their family

OR

one thing about being here today that has surprised them.

### 2. Group Agreements

Facilitators talk about the group and the reason for women coming together:

- This group is an Information group for mothers who have experienced Domestic and Family Violence (DFV).
- The purpose of this group is to provide information about DFV, some of which you will be very familiar with and some of which may be new.
- This group is here to give you a safe place to meet with other women, be given information and ideas from the facilitators and perhaps guest speakers, but to also gain information and ideas from each other.
- This is not a therapeutic group which asks you to move more deeply into your own experiences and those of your children. It is seen as a starting place for you to explore some of the questions you have about what you have experienced and be supported as you grapple with your own life circumstances.

Before moving on to the topic of today's session, discuss what participants consider are important agreements to have to ensure that everyone in this group feels respected and feels safe.



Brainstorm group agreements on a sheet of paper which is then placed on the wall. Let participants know that agreements can be added to this as different issues arise during the program and that the agreements sheet will be referred to at the start of each session. Ideas may include: confidentiality, respect, ensuring a non-judgemental space, feeling you can safely say anything, feeling supported.

Discuss that this is an open group which means that new participants may come into the group at any session and likewise, existing members can take the option of not coming to a session if they choose not to; however, everyone is encouraged to attend as many sessions as possible because having the same people come together on a weekly basis adds to the consistency and safety of the group itself.

Explain that participants are welcome to stay behind for some time to talk with each other, and that facilitators will be available after each group for about 20 minutes if any participant wishes to discuss anything with them.

Housekeeping issues such as where toilets are, smoking facilities, presence of mobile phones, childcare options and transport arrangements need to be raised.

Hand out folders and explain that these are used to keep all the information and other writings together throughout the program. Participants are asked to keep the folders here while the group is meeting and then they are most welcome to take their folders with them when the group finishes.

### 3. Expectations

Facilitators ask the participants to identify what they would like to discuss during the group sessions and if there is any information they are particularly interested in receiving.

Brainstorm their ideas on the whiteboard.

Hand out the sessions outline and explain that this is the list of ideas that have been identified for the entire program. Explain that there is some room to accommodate any ideas raised by participants in regard to their expectations and then negotiate how that might change the current program.

Facilitators explain that some changes can be made but the sessions in the program are seen as important and it is also important is that the group stays “on track”.

#### MORNING TEA

#### Naming domestic and family violence

Show this definition of domestic and family violence

➔ “Domestic violence is the patterned and repeated use of coercive and controlling behaviour to limit, direct, and shape a partner’s thoughts, feelings and actions. An array of power and control tactics is used along a continuum in concert with one another” (Pitman, 2001).

Discuss this definition with participants using the following questions:

- What does this definition say to you about DFV?
- Does it fit your own thoughts or what you have been told about DFV?
- Where do the issues of control, responsibility, and entrapment fit?

Give out a handout of the Power and Control Wheel (see next page) as an explanation of how domestic violence occurs in terms of ways that the person inflicting the violence maintains his power and control.

A more recent wheel that has been developed is the Technology Wheel which shows the many ways that domestic violence occurs via social media and phones.

**NOTE: Raise with participants the history of the development of these wheels which was primarily the work of Helen Pence in 1987.**

Her work and the ongoing developments of additional wheels has provided a wealth of guidance in regard to the situating of domestic and family violence within tactics of power and control.

**The power and control wheel gives a language and makes visible the tactics of violence.**

**The hub of the wheel is to establish power and control and each spoke represents a particular tactic.**

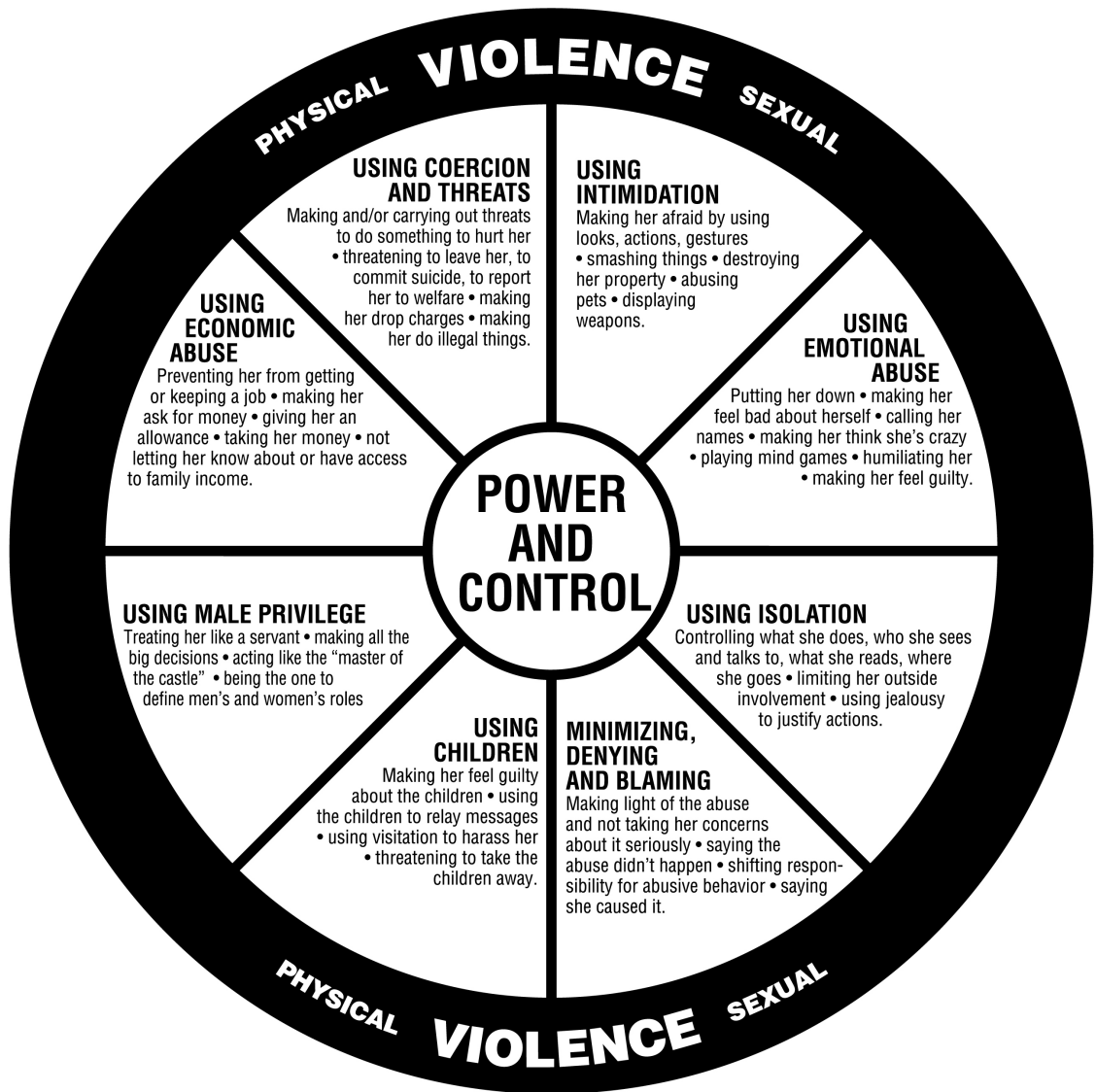
**The rim of the wheel which gives it strength and holds it together is the use/threat of physical abuse.**

Later Pence (2010) was to write, “So I ended up not thinking that men wanted power and control. I ended up thinking on and recognising, I think, that they felt entitled to it”.



Copies of this and other wheels can be downloaded from:  
The Duluth Model, Domestic Abuse Intervention Project,  
Minnesota, [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org).

### Power and Control Wheel



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Points critical to raise also include:

- The wheel was never intended to be a map, to represent the spaces which women occupy on the wheel. It does not intend, and should never be seen, as encompassing the different experiences of each person harmed by violence
- It sought to give women something to grasp onto in the spaces and then represent those spaces with words that were meaningful to them
- There needs to be a further consideration of how the violence sits in a broader social context which includes social disadvantage, racism, culture, sexuality, and disability
- Also, that violence is supported by the broader social constructs which separate male and female identities, power and privilege
- The wheel does not identify resistance and the agency of those inflicted by violence to find ways to resist those tactics of oppression.

Extend the meaning of the wheel by asking participants :

- Do you agree with the segments of the wheel?
- Can you relate any of your own experiences to them?
- What is the same?
- What is different?
- Are there changes you would make or things you would add?

To complete this exercise facilitators provide the following information about what we know about DFV:

- DFV is unilateral and not a mutual/joint action by one person against another/others
- DFV is deliberate and intentional in its execution
- It is about a person being in control and not out of control
- DFV is not an incident (that is, it does not have a start and finish)
- It involves episodes that are part of a series of events
- It has a history and a future
- It is cumulative and an escalating pattern of harm
- Whenever people are badly treated (as with DFV) they will always resist.

Before closing, participants are asked to give their ideas about what has been discussed and where there has been any shifting or strengthening in their understanding of DFV?

Ask them to respond to the question: Was there anything said or heard by you in the discussion today that you believe best connects to your story of DFV?

#### 4. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.



## SESSION 2

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

For any new members, do introductions and give a brief update of what happened last week.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them, or if there is anything they have been thinking about or doing that they would like to share with the group.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support, to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

### 2. Myths and Facts

Give out a set of cards with statements on them that represent common myths about DFV. (See following pages)

Facilitators read each statement aloud and ask the participants to decide whether these statements are true or false.

Participants should be encouraged to share their experiences and perceptions about each statement.

At the end of the discussion about each statement, the presenter can read the answer aloud.

**Statement:****Domestic violence is due to poverty or lack of education****Answer: False.**

Domestic violence is common throughout all levels of society, whether rich or poor. It is often easier to keep the violence hidden when a person has money and important friends, but it happens nonetheless. There is no evidence to support the idea that uneducated or poor people are more likely to abuse their partners than are more educated and affluent people.

**Statement:****Alcohol and drug use is a major cause of domestic violence****Answer: False.**

Although alcohol and drugs are often associated with domestic violence, they do not cause the violence. An abuser may use alcohol as an excuse for the violence, or alcohol may prevent him from realising the level of force he is using, but alcohol is not the cause.

**Statement:****Women who are abused have many legitimate reasons for staying in a violent relationship****Answer: True.**

There are many social, economic and cultural reasons a woman may stay in an abusive relationship. Often, there is no place for her to go. She may not have a way to support herself or her children if she leaves, feel embarrassed or humiliated about the abuse, or fear that her friends, family and community will blame her for the abuse. She may be reluctant to leave for emotional or religious reasons. In addition, leaving entails substantial risks. She may fear that the offender will carry out threats to harm her, himself, the children, friends or family. Women are in the greatest danger of severe or even lethal attacks when they attempt to leave, and she is the only one who can judge when it is safe for her to do so.



**Statement:****Women leave their partners many times.****Answer: True.**

Contrary to many views about women who are abused that say they are helpless or don't do anything but "take it", most women surviving in abusive relationships leave many times and routinely act in conscious ways to try to minimise the abuse directed at them and to protect their children.

**Statement:****Men are victims of domestic violence as often as women are.****Answer: False.**

Research shows that women are victims in 95% of domestic violence cases. To the extent women do use violence, it is generally in self-defense. Reports of violence against men are often exaggerated because abusers will accuse their partners of using violence as a way to avoid or minimise their own responsibility.

**Statement:****Everyone knows a victim of domestic violence.****Answer: True.**

We all know victims. Worldwide, between one quarter and one half of all women experience violence in an intimate relationship. Victims of domestic violence may not disclose the abuse because of embarrassment or humiliation, fear that they will be blamed for the abuse, or the danger of retaliation from the abuser.

**Statement:****Men who abuse are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration****Answer: False.**

Domestic violence is intentional conduct, and offenders are not out of control. Their violence is carefully targeted to certain people at certain times and places. They generally do not attack their bosses or people on the streets, no matter how angry they may be. Abusers also follow their own internal rules about abusive behaviors. They often choose to abuse their partners only in private, or may take steps to ensure that they do not leave visible evidence of the abuse. They also choose their tactics carefully—some destroy property, some rely on threats of abuse, and some threaten children.

At the end of the exercise ask participants if they have been told or heard of those myths.

- Did they hold some of those beliefs themselves?
- Who told them those myths were true?
- Are there any other things they have been told that they know are untrue?

How do these myths make them feel about:

- Talking about what they have experienced?
- Their responsibility for what has happened?
- Their feelings of shame and self-doubt?

Facilitators finish the exercise with the following information:

- **Myths about domestic violence develop in part because it can be difficult to understand why one person would hurt another, particularly in the context of an intimate relationship**
- **Myths about domestic violence generally blame the victim or some other factor, such as alcohol or anger, for the violence. As a result, these myths divert attention from the actions of the abuser**
- **Domestic violence, however, is intentional conduct. It is critical that all responses to domestic violence share a common understanding of domestic violence and focus on the abuser's actions**
- **Understanding the myths and realities of domestic violence can help us focus on the responsibility of the abuser. This focus on the responsibility of the abuser is a critical part of any effective strategy for protecting victims and holding offenders accountable.**

## MORNING TEA

### 3. Stories by Women about their Experiences of DFV

This part of the session focuses on women's experiences of DFV. Show a chosen DVD which tells the stories of people who have experienced domestic and family violence

Examples include:

- "Home is Where the Hurt Is" (McCarthur Legal Centre, NSW)
- "Safer Lives, Better Health" (Education Centre Against Violence, NSW Health)
- "Who's the Loser" (Education Centre Against Violence, NSW Health). Focus on an Aboriginal family.
- ABC You Can't Ask That- Episode 4- Domestic and Family Violence. <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/you-can-t-ask-that/series/4/video/LE1817H001S00>

Following the DVD, bring participants back into the space with a short mindfulness exercise.

Then ask the participants to share their thoughts and reactions to the DVD aided by questions that include:

- **What stood out for you in regard to the women's stories?**
- **Was there anything that resonated for you in regard to your own experience of DFV?**
- **Was there anything that felt quite different?**
- **Was there something any of the women said that had an impact on you? What was said?**
- **If you could say anything in this group about your experience of DFV what would it be?**

### 4. Closing Exercise and Check Out.

- It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still "holding" before they leave.
- Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.
- Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.

## SESSION 3.

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

For any new members, do introductions and give a brief update of what happened last week.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them, or if there is anything they have been thinking about or doing that they would like to share with the group.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support, to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

### 2. Children's Experiences of Violence

Facilitators provide an overview of what we know about children's experiences of DFV:

- Children are not passive witnesses of the violence
- They experience the violence in many ways including:
  - **Directly seeing their mother abused**
  - **Observing their mother's injury or distress**
  - **Living with tension and fear in the home**
  - **Themselves being hurt by the violence either directly or by trying to intervene**
  - **Being used by the perpetrator to "collude" in the violence (e.g. provide information about their mother, criticising their mother)**
  - **Experiencing threats to their mother, other family members and/or pets.**

Children have to try to make sense of the experience and to find meaning for the violence, on themselves and others.

Due to its repetitive nature domestic violence usually results in cumulative harm.

Children and mothers may witness the same violence but their experiences can be different.

Children may not be aware of the extent/severity of the violence.

**Children may not be aware of the decisions mothers make including:**

- **Reasons for parenting decisions and protective responses**
  - **Reasons for action/inaction (not leaving, returning home)**
  - **Reasons why mothers haven't spoken with or made plans with the child**
  - **Such differences are heightened if there is a breakdown between the mother and her children**
  - **Mothers may make decisions thinking about what is in their child's best interests but without talking to their child.**
  - **Often the carrier of any information is the perpetrator of the violence with the mother separated by fear, secrecy, isolation.**
- (Irwin, Waugh & Wilkinson, 2002)

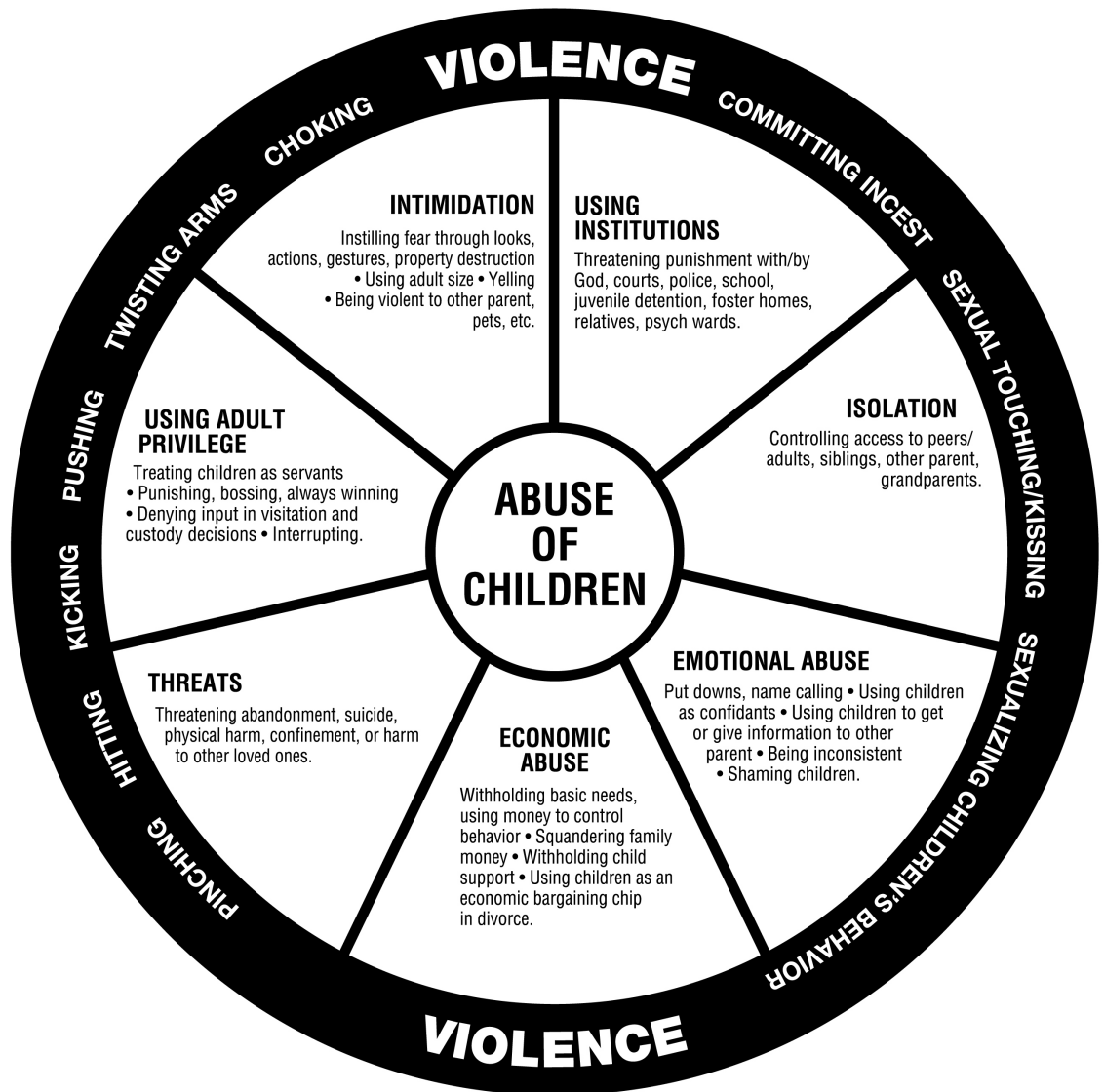
### **3. Abuse of Children Wheel**

- Hand out copy of this wheel (see next page) as an explanation of the ways DFV can impact on children and also on mothering. (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project 2017)

Expand on the meaning of this wheel by asking:

- Do you agree with the segments of the wheel?
- Can you relate any of your own experiences to them?
- What is the same and what is different?
- Are there changes you would make?
- Are there other actions to describe the different segments of the wheel?

### Abuse of Children Wheel



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#### 4. Stories Children Hold about Living with Domestic Violence.

Show the DVD, “Domestic Violence Through Children’s Eyes.”  
(Womens Rights Centre, 2012)

**Note: This DVD can be downloaded from YouTube**

Explain that although this DVD depicting children’s experiences of domestic and family violence, is quite old now it continues to have an impact when shown to mothers and workers.

Following the DVD ask the group to sit with their emotions and thoughts and then sensitively encourage them to speak about the impact the DVD had on them.

Ask them for similarities and differences between what they saw on the DVD and what they believe their children have experienced.

Continue the conversations by asking questions including:

- How does domestic violence impact on the children?
- What did the children say about living with the violence?
- What were the messages they believed people should know about children living with domestic violence?
- In what ways have their children made them aware that they have been impacted by the domestic and family violence? What do they say? What do they do?
- How do they respond to their children when they bring up their worries? What do they say? What do they do?
- If they could say one thing that they believe has helped them as a mother to their children what would it be?

#### MORNING TEA BREAK

## 5. What Children Need: Nurturing Children Wheel

Hand out the Nurturing Children Wheel (see next page) as an explanation of ways children can be nurtured. (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 2017)

Expand on the meaning of this wheel by asking:

- What particular parts of this wheel mean the most to you?
- What are the different ways you try to comfort your children when you know they are worried or you want to talk to them about any worries they may have? What do you do? What would you say?
- What other words would you add to this wheel to better fit who you are as a mother and ways you have found to care for your children?
- Ask participants to add these words to their wheel.

## 6. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.



Nurturing Children Wheel



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## SESSION 4

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

For any new members, do introductions and give a brief update of what happened last week.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them, or if there is anything they have been thinking about or doing that they would like to share with the group.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support, to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

### 2. Recognising the Harm of Violence.

**Facilitators discuss the concept of trauma and what people have heard about it.**

**Provide a list of “symptoms” that are often included when discussing trauma. They include: depression, anxiety, dissociation, low self esteem, disrupted attachment, parenting difficulties etc.**

**Ask the women to read the list. Then ask them what ideas it raises about women in terms of dignity and respect.**

- **Does it make women sound stronger or weaker?**
- **Does it make women sound capable or incapable?**
- **Does it make women sound healthy or unhealthy?**
- **Does it make women sound hopeful or hopeless?**

Now ask the women to think of their subjection to violence.

Use the whiteboard and make six columns:

1. **Feelings**
2. **Thoughts**
3. **Body messages**
4. **Relationships**
5. **Beliefs about self**
6. **Beliefs about the future**

Facilitators ask women to brainstorm some of the legacies held because of the violence.

They are also each given a sheet with the same columns and can write more personal responses.

During this exercise facilitators should "check in" on how people are managing the exercise and use the group to elicit conversations and support from others.

When the sheet is completed ask participants to share anything they wish to with others in the group.

Ask for feedback about doing the exercise and what stood out most for them when completing the sheet.

Finish the exercise by asking the group: What is the difference when we focus on trauma symptoms? (what is wrong with me)? and when we focus on the violence (what happened to me)?

**What changes in terms of:**

- Making the violence visible?
- Making the offender responsible for the harm?
- Shifting responsibility for the harm caused?
- Shifting support to the victim struggling with the legacies of the harm?

(This exercise is adapted from: NCTSN, "What is Complex Trauma". [www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org))

### 3. Reclaiming Me

Have blank sheets for each of the six different areas discussed at the last session.

This includes: feelings, thoughts, body messages, relationships, beliefs about self, beliefs about the future.

Brainstorm with participants the different strategies or resources they have used to get rid of/change some of the legacies due to the violence:

- What did they do?
- How did they learn to do this?
- When and where did they learn this skill?
- Did someone teach them or did they just discover it on their own?
- Is it something they have always used or does it just “sit on the shelf” until it is needed?
- Does anyone give them support when they are trying to manage those moments of feeling overwhelmed/in despair?
- How do they support them?
- Is there anything that you have heard other women say today that you would like more information or ideas about?
- How can we do this as a group?

Facilitators make an inventory of what was shared and then discuss with the group how these ideas can be shared and resourced.



**NOTE:** There are many resources that can be given to women including mindfulness exercises, strategies to manage thoughts and feelings, service contacts etc. Facilitators can have a range of resources available that they consider most appropriate for the participants and specifically relevant to the local area.

Complete this exercise by using cards and ask women to select a card that best represents what we have discussed today about their strengths and resources (e.g. St Lukes Strengths Cards).

#### 4 Closing Exercise and Check Out.

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.



## SESSION 5

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

For any new members, do introductions and give a brief update of what happened last week.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them, or if there is anything they have been thinking about or doing that they would like to share with the group.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support, to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

### 2. Honouring Resistance

Facilitators start this session by reading the following quote.  
**“Whenever people are abused they do things to oppose the abuse and keep their dignity and their self-respect. This is called resistance. The resistance may include not doing what the perpetrator wants them to do, standing up against and trying to stop or prevent violence, disrespect, or oppression. Imagining a better life may also be a way that victims resist abuse”.**

(Calgary Womens Emergency Shelter, 2007)

When people are harmed or oppressed they will always resist.

Ask participants when they think of their “RESISTANCE” when subjected to DFV what words come to their mind.

Facilitators need to encourage participants to stay with this thought as the idea of resisting the violence may be a new and previously unknown concept for them to consider.

Give out the handout: Honouring Resistance to assist in this discussion. (see below)

### Honouring Resistance

WHAT THE PERPETRATOR DOES	THE PERSON SHOWS RESISTANCE BY
ISOLATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· RETAINING RELATIONSHIPS</li> <li>· REMEMBERING TIMES WITH LOVED ONES</li> </ul>
HUMILIATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· THINKING OR ACTING IN WAYS THAT SUSTAIN SELF-RESPECT AND DIGNITY</li> </ul>
CONTROL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· THINKING OR ACTING IN WAYS THAT REFUSE CONTROL</li> </ul>
SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· THINKING OR ACTING IN WAYS WHERE THE PERPETRATOR IS SEEN AS RESPONSIBLE</li> </ul>
MAKE EXCUSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· THINKING OR ACTING IN WAYS THAT SHOW THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR VIOLENCE, AND ABUSE IS WRONG.</li> <li>· REFUSING TO UNDERSTAND THE REASONS GIVEN FOR THE VIOLENCE</li> </ul>
HIDE THE VIOLENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· THINKING OR ACTING IN WAYS THAT EXPOSE THE VIOLENCE</li> </ul>
PHYSICAL HARM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· DOING THINGS TO REDUCE, ENDURE, AND/OR ESCAPE THE PAIN</li> </ul>
UNPREDICTABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· CREATING PREDICTABILITY AND ROUTINE OR BECOMING UNPREDICTABLE THEMSELVES</li> </ul>

Ask participants to think of examples when they have actively resisted against the control and power of the offender, most commonly without him being aware.

Resistance in the face of DFV usually has to be kept silent and invisible from the offender as should he notice or anticipate any acts of resistance he will make plans to stop these actions.

The perpetrators tactics can change and become more unpredictable, instilling more fears by threats of consequences of escalating physical violence, show remorse (which often destabilises mothers and children) or make accusations that the woman is in fact the perpetrator of the violence and they are the victims.

Emphasise that resistance is not about gaining safety.

Resistance is about maintaining a sense of separateness to the entrapment of DFV and the legacies of that violence.

### Resistance is about retaining dignity.

Finish this session by asking participants to say what “dignity” means to them. Write up on sheet to be later recorded by facilitators and distributed the following week as a card/poster.

## MORNING TEA

### 3. Safety First

The safety and well being of those subjected to DFV must be the first priority for mothers and their children.

Brainstorm with participants what “being safe” means for them and their children.

- What things can make children feel safe and unsafe?
- In what ways do children let you know they are safe and unsafe- often without words?
- How safe will children feel if their main carer (protective carer) is also feeling unsafe?

Finding safety is very unpredictable and almost impossible to gain when the violence is still “active” and/the offender still has a strong hold on mothers and their children.

Taking responsibility for safety should never be with the child and the limitations for women to gain safety must be recognised.

It is important to discuss past protective measures used by mothers for herself and her children and not assume that they have in fact been unable to keep themselves or their children safe. For example, workers need to be mindful that a woman staying in the home has made a decision that this was a safer option than leaving and being at greater risk of harm from an escalation of the offender’s violence.



## 4. Safety Plans

Talk with participants about the idea of safety plans and what they can look like.

Give time to discuss some of the concerns held about safety plans that include:

- Women are often not considered to know the best way to try to gain safety for themselves and their children. They can often be told to stop doing what they have done and do something else. This can actually increase the risk of harm to them and others.
- Gaining safety sits in different contexts in women's lives including the degree of psychological entrapment, the usually unpredictable possibility of the offender escalating his levels of harm, the quality of their social relationships, the existence of actual support systems, and their ability and freedom to connect with legal, accommodation and health services.
- “ Without an adequate understanding of a person's wellbeing, experience, resistance and responses to violence may mean that any advice given or action taken by a responder may unintentionally or unknowingly increase the harm and threat that a person may face as a result of not fully understanding a person's situation and context”.

(Domestic Violence Service Management Sightlines 2018)

Ask women to think of things that they have done or thought about to try and gain safety for themselves and their children.

What ideas could be used in developing a safety plan, drawing from experience or thoughts they may have had, even if this hasn't been used in action?

Consider all the places you frequent – not just the home. Examples include schools, the workplace, shopping centres and medical offices.

Consider different aspects of a safety plan including:

- Physical safety (e.g. lock changes, safe room in home, sensor lights etc)
- Cyber safety (e.g. keep mobile on person, change passwords, save emergency contacts etc)
- Support strategies (e.g. let neighbours know what is going on, have a code word for friends and family that indicates you need help, be selective with what information is disclosed to certain contacts)
- Legal safety (e.g. call police in emergency, record incidents, report breaches etc)
- Safety for children (e.g. give ADVO to school/childcare, give mobile devices to age-appropriate children, talk to children about emergency procedures etc).

When thinking about possible aspects of a safety plan ask them to consider:

- Is there someone you might trust with these ideas?
- What services are you aware of that are helpful for women and children?
- Ask the participants to think about or write down the names of people or services they can think of who can support them
- If there are blank spaces what could they do to try and gain this support?
- Participants are asked to share their safety plans, including their concerns about ongoing safety
- Refer to Equality Wheel (next page) for further discussion.

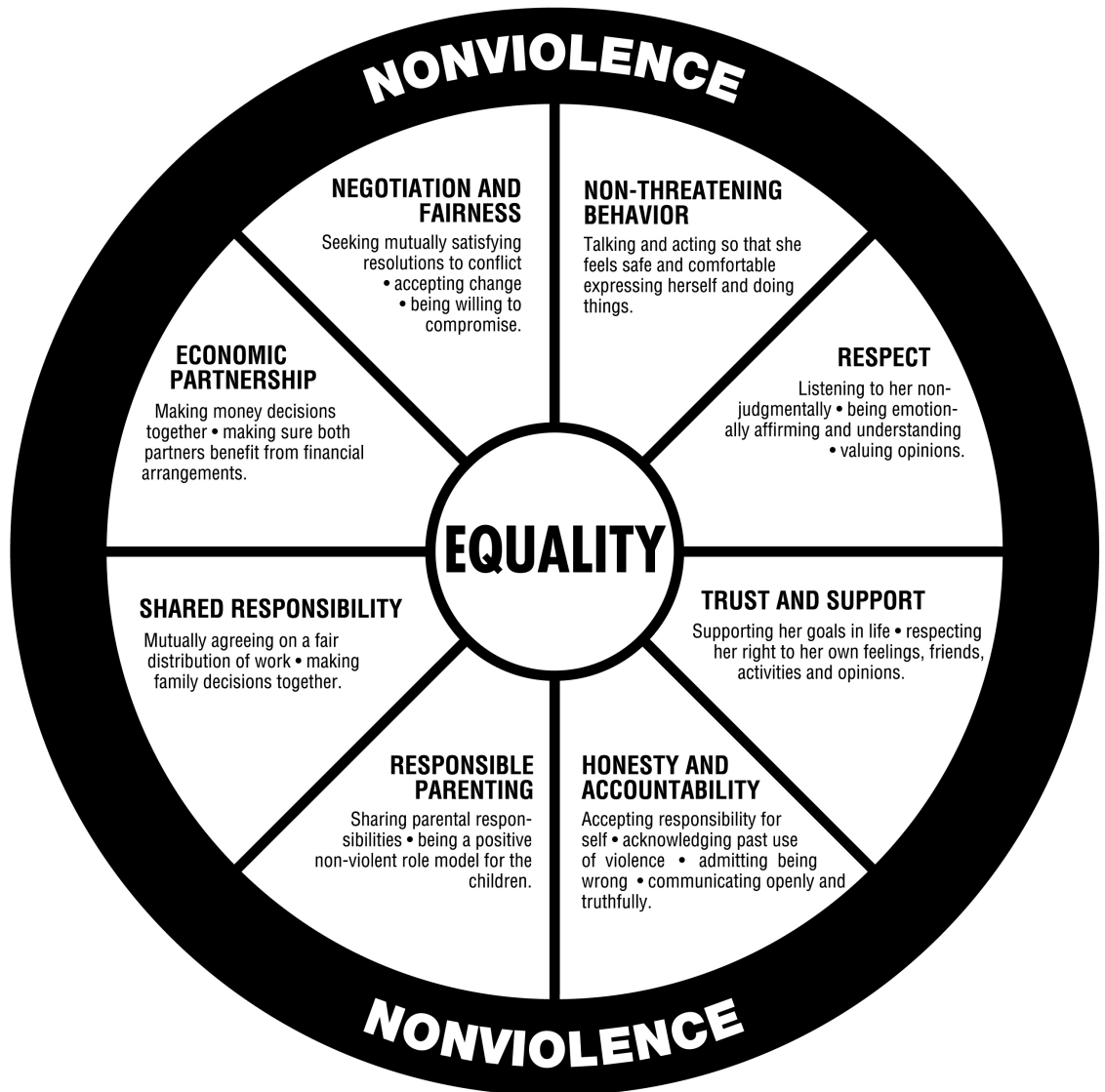
## 5. Closing Exercise and Check out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.

Equality Wheel



## SESSION 6

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

For any new members do introductions and give a brief update of what happened last week.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them or if there was anything they have been thinking about or doing that they would like to share with the group.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

### 2. The Giving, Taking and Receiving of Dignity

Discuss some of the false views that society and people hold about people who have experienced violence and abuse.

Brainstorm messages participants have heard or received themselves. Examples include:

- Why does it keep happening to her?
- She must do something that asks for it to happen?
- Why does she stay?
- She keeps attracting the same men
- There is something wrong with me.

Have blank cards (size of a small envelope) and as each word is given write them up and stick onto whiteboard.

#### **Discuss:**

- What impacts do these messages have on women in regard to responsibility/self blame/shame for the violence?
- How do these responses take away their dignity?
- Have additional blank cards and ask women to think of responses to those statements that would serve to restore dignity.

**Discuss:**

- Did people say things/do things that you felt treated you with respect?
- What would you have wanted people to do/say that would have given you dignity and respect?

Fill in the cards and place over the original cards.

**Discuss:**

- How do they respond to these cards?
- What messages do they give them about women living with domestic and family violence?
- Is there a card that stands out the most for them and ask them to choose one and share with the group.

**MORNING TEA****3. Taking the Lead**

Hand out copies of “Follow My Lead” a series of resource booklets from the voices of women who have experienced domestic and family violence.

**NOTE: The resources can be downloaded from [www.insightexchange.net](http://www.insightexchange.net).**

After reading the book ask the women to share their thoughts as a group:

- What stood out for them?
- What they especially related to?
- If they could write a response to this woman’s story what would they say?

Using craft materials and a large canvas invite the women to make a group collage of how they would like to respond to this woman and her story.

When finished ask the women if there is another message on the board, other than their own, that they want to take with them today.

#### 4. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.



## SESSION 7

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

For any new members do introductions and give a brief update of what happened last week.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them or if there is anything they have been thinking about or doing that they would like to share with the group.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

### 2. The Law and Domestic and Family Violence

Facilitators introduce this session by giving an overview of the legal system and the role they play in the intervention and/or prevention of domestic and family violence.

Many women who have experienced domestic and family violence do not understand and, therefore, underutilise legal avenues.

They also hold many warranted fears about their rights and ongoing safety if they decide to pursue legal pathways.

Facilitators clarify that they have heard many stories from women having extremely negative experiences from their contact with police and the legal system.

This session is not to convince participants of the “rightness or wrongness” of legal pathways.

The purpose is to provide them with accurate information, strategies they can use and supports they can seek to navigate this often complex, unpredictable and unknown territory.

There are no planned activities for this session as it is focused on legal information. Facilitators can encourage questions from participants to aid the discussion.

**Note:** This session could benefit, and have greater impact, by having a guest speaker from a Women's Legal Service to present the information and respond to any of the questions or concerns raised by participants.

**Topics can include:**

**The legal definition of domestic violence**

- What is a personal violence offence?
- What is considered a 'domestic relationship'?

**Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders**

- What are they?
- Types of ADVOs - Interim, Provisional and Final
- Key terminology - PINOP/Victim/Applicant v Defendant/Perpetrator
- What do the orders on an ADVO say?
- How do you apply for an ADVO?
- Police v Private Application

**The Australian Court System**

- Hierarchy: Role of Local Court v role of Family Court
- Who's who in the local court
- Court etiquette
- Court survival tips

**ADVO's and Court**

- Court mentions
- Court hearings



Information handouts and resources to complement this session can be provided and can include:

- Facts sheets (Justice & Attorney General)
- DVRC has several resources that can be download from their website.
- Victims services resources
- Flowcharts from Law Access.

### 3. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.



## SESSION 8

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them that they would like to raise.

Explain that as this is the last session time will be spent reflecting on their experience of being in the group and ideas they hold about the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

### 2. Group Consultation

#### **Reflections on the group.**

Introduce the consultation as being an important part of the group for finding out from participants what was most and least helpful about being in this group and their ideas for ongoing development of the program.

Sheets representing each session (including a brief overview of what was discussed during that session and the associated activities) are placed on the wall as a summary of the group.

Participants are asked to give their feedback about that session, including the strengths and weaknesses of that session.

Ideas for improvement can also be placed on the sheets including different issues to be raised, providing greater support and safety within the group dynamic, and practice issues facilitators need to be mindful of.

### MORNING TEA

**NOTE:** As this is the last session, a longer time spent having morning tea is suggested. In the spirit of meeting places with women, thought needs to be given to marking this time as a ritual of coming together with a more formal setting of sitting together - such as being around a decorated table, set out with flowers, candles, china, and “fancy food”. During this meeting participants can be encouraged to talk more about the group and their thoughts about finishing the group today.

Facilitators can also use this space to give out a more formal thankyou such as a small token of thanks for coming to the group and what each person has contributed.

### 3. Group Activity: Looking Forward

- Lay out a set of cards/photo montage. (St Lukes Resources)
- Ask participants to pick a card with the following sentence in mind: “When I look forward from today, I hope...”
- Participants then share their card and say what it is they are hoping for.

### 4. Saying Goodbye to the Group

- Ask participants to think of one thing they are taking with them from being in this group.
- A basket of small symbols is passed from one person to the other and they take something from the basket when they say what they believe they are taking with them.

### 5. Final Evaluation Forms

Final evaluation forms are handed out and completed by participants. (see following pages)

### 6. Final Goodbye to the Group and Close

## FINAL EVALUATION FORM

### PART 1: Starting with the group

What questions/worries did you hold before coming to the group?

What information would have been helpful before you came to the first session?

What do you believe may be the experiences of other women coming to a similar group for the first time?

What could be offered to assist women to feel more comfortable?

### PART 2: Group content and process

What three words would describe your overall experience of this group?

1.

2.

3.

What sessions did you find the most useful?

What sessions did you find the least useful?

What other topics would you have liked included in the program?

### PART 3: Group structure

Mark your response with a tick (✓)

GROUP STRUCTURE	YES	NO	UNSURE
I FELT THE GROUP WAS A SAFE PLACE TO TALK ABOUT THINGS THAT AT TIMES WERE HARD			
I FELT TREATED WITH RESPECT AT ALL TIMES			
I FELT LISTENED TO AND THAT WHAT I SAID WAS IMPORTANT AND VALUED BY OTHERS			
MY SENSE OF ISOLATION AND SECRECY SURROUNDING THE VIOLENCE HAS DECREASED			
MANY OF THE WRONGLY HELD VIEWS ABOUT MYSELF HAVE DECREASED			
I HAVE FOUND STORIES ABOUT MYSELF WHICH ARE DIFFERENT TO THOSE CAUSED BY THE ABUSE			
MY CONFIDENCE IN TRUSTING MY SKILLS AND RESOURCES AS A PARENT HAS INCREASED			
I ENJOYED COMING TO THE GROUP AND FOUND IT TO BE A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE			

### PART 4: My Own Process

What are some things about yourself that you feel were of benefit to the group?

How did you contribute to the group in terms of safety, discussion and connection?

Were there any things about you and what you thought that became stronger during the group?

Was there anything that you heard about yourself from others in the group that was important?

How will you keep these messages with you?

## PART 5: Moving On

What ideas do you hold about ways you can deal with future problems, given the supports and new ideas you now hold about yourself?

Are there any areas of concern or gaps existing for you that you would like to look at further?

Do you have any thoughts regarding future groups and what they could be about?

Is there anything (experiences, skills, interests) you heard about or saw in other women in the group that might already exist (in you) that you can try and build on for another group program?





SECTION THREE:  
MOTHERS GROUP  
PROGRAM

3

## SESSION 1

### 1. Starting Out

Acknowledgement of country

Facilitators introduce themselves and their hopes for this group.

Welcome to group participants.

Ask participants to say their name and say one thing that they would like to share with the group about them or their family.

OR



Introductory exercise such as Hand Bag exercise:  
Ask members to think of something in their handbag/key ring/jewellery or anything else that they carry with them that is particularly important to them. Introduce themselves to the group and talk about the object of importance they hold/have.

### 2. Expectations and Group Agreements.

Facilitators talk about the group and the reason for women coming together:

**“This group provides the space for women who have lived with domestic and family violence to meet together and share their stories, not only about the experiences of the violence but also your strengths and the different ways you stood up to the violence. Most importantly, this group is also to talk about your children, both your struggles as a mother and your joys.”**

### Hopes and fears exercise

Hand out sticky notes of two different colours.

Ask participants to write down on one colour what Hopes they hold about coming to this group and on the other colour to write down any Fears they hold about coming to this group.

Facilitators gather the papers and place them on the wall, bringing similar ideas together.

They then read out what has been written, asking participants to think about how the group can try to consider what has been said.

### Group agreements

This then leads into a brainstorm of group agreements, asking participants to consider what agreements need to be made to ensure the group stays safe.

Ideas may include: confidentiality, respect, ensuring a non-judgemental space, feeling you can safely say anything, feeling supported.

Let participants know that everyone will be given a copy of the agreements next week for their keeping.

### Group expectations

Ideas generated from the Hopes and Fears are also used to list what participants would like to have discussed in the group.

Facilitators then state they will keep these ideas in mind and look at how they can be included in the group program.

If any ideas really do not fit the program then suggestions can be made as to how these expectations could be met elsewhere such as talking to their worker or counsellor, or facilitators gathering information during the week about other options.

### 3. Practical Considerations

Explain that the group program will run for eight weeks and will always start and finish after two hours. The last week will focus on consulting with participants about their experience of the group and their thoughts regarding strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Participants are welcome to stay behind for some time to talk with each other and facilitators will be available after each group for about 20 minutes if any participant wishes to discuss anything with them.

Housekeeping issues such as where toilets are, smoking facilities, presence of mobile phones, childcare options and transport arrangements need to be raised.

Hand out journals (hard cover notebooks) and explain that this belongs to each woman. They can write down notes whilst group is on, as well as take the journal home with them and use as a diary of their thoughts. If you can get journals with pages that also have some mindfulness drawings in them, the women can colour them in during group or at home.

### MORNING TEA

#### 4. Naming Domestic and Family Violence as Violence.

Place a sheet on the wall (or use a whiteboard) and write the heading: “Violence is violence and that is the problem”.

Ask the group to call out words/phrases that describe the meaning of domestic violence to them.

**Facilitators need to be clear in this definition that DFV is seen as:**

- **unilateral and not mutual**
- **intentional actions by one person against another/others**
- **cumulative and escalating in terms of harm**
- **should not be referred to as DFV “incidents” but “episodes” that entail a series of events**

(Wilson 2015)

## ALTERNATIVELY

Women may be in a place where they have a clear understanding of what domestic violence is and may therefore be more comfortable being able to describe their own experiences rather than staying with a list of words.

The format is, therefore, more conversational than directive with facilitators asking questions to elicit stories from the participants:

- What are the commonalities and differences between the different meanings the women hold about the violence?
- When did they first start to notice and understand that their partner was using violence toward them?
- What were their thoughts at the time?
- What do they think now?
- What has caused them to make this shift?

The length of time needed for participants may also be longer than a directed activity and therefore time needs to be given to allow the flow of stories to be heard and acknowledged.

## 5. Remembering Me

Place a set of picture/photo cards (St Luke's Resources have many different sets that are appropriate) on the floor and ask each participant to select a card based on the statement: What is one belief or value about yourself that the violence never took away from you?

Ask each participant to share the card they picked and the reason for doing so.

In what ways do they hold onto this belief even now?

## 6. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.

A large box (“Staying box”) is used in which women place a symbol to represent what they are leaving behind, and take with them a different symbol to represent what they are taking with them. Symbols can include: stone, crystal, feather, heart, butterfly etc. The symbols are provided by the facilitator.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

They are encouraged to take their journals and perhaps spend some time writing or drawing their thoughts about the group or what thoughts they were left with.



## SESSION 2

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

For any new members, do introductions and give a brief update of what happened last week.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them that they would like to raise.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support, to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

Ask participants if anyone would like to share with the group anything they have been thinking about or writing in their journal.

### 2. Dynamics and Legacies of Domestic and Family Violence

**NOTE: This topic is based on the writings of Lesley Laing (1987) who extended thinking about the dynamics of child sexual assault and explored four key areas illustrating the interaction between the perpetrator and his victim and the resulting legacies of those dynamics. Her work holds similar potency in the area of domestic and family violence.**

Refer to the chart regarding the legacies of domestic and family violence. (See next page).

Ask women if this resonates for them and in what ways?

Add an additional column to the chart and ask women to discuss some of the tactics used against them to create these dynamics and legacies.

**NOTE: Reference can be made to the Duluth Power and Control Wheel when identifying tactics, see page 34.**

DYNAMICS CREATED BY DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE	LEGACIES OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE
ENFORCED SECRECY: WHERE THE PERPETRATOR ENSURES THAT THE VICTIM/S ARE BLOCKED FROM SUPPORT, THREATENING FURTHER CONSEQUENCES SHOULD THEY TELL ANYONE ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING.	ISOLATION DOUBTING THEIR OWN REALITY
RESPONSIBILITY: WHERE THE PERPETRATOR DENIES RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ABUSE SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN WHO ARE HARMED	GUILT AND SELF-BLAME SHAME
PROTECTION/LOYALTY: WHERE THE VICTIM/S IS MADE TO FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF OTHERS, LOSING ANY SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT FOR THEMSELVES EXCEPT WHAT THEY HAVE TO GIVE TO OTHERS, INCLUDING THE PERSON WHO IS HARMING THEM.	SUPER-RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS SELF-ERASURE
POWER AND OPPRESSION: WHERE THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PERPETRATOR IS CHARACTERISED BY HIS USE OF POWER OVER TACTICS, WHICH DISCOUNT HER EXPERIENCE AND CREATE A CLIMATE OF FEAR AND INTIMIDATION.	FEAR SENSE OF VIOLATION POWERLESSNESS

### Questions to ask to add to this discussion:

- In what ways do offenders use controlling/violent behaviour to deny responsibility for their behavior, and enforce fear and secrecy?
- How do these tactics make women/children feel about themselves (women, friend, parent/mother)?
- How do these tactics make women/children feel about their sense of responsibility for violence?
- How do these tactics make women/children feel about their rights to be treated with respect?
- How do these tactics make women/children feel about their rights to be safe?



## MORNING TEA

### 3. My Rights

- Hand out the “My Rights” sheet and ask participants to comment on what is written.
- Ask them about the values they hold about the rights for themselves and their children and add these ideas to their sheet.
- Using the craft materials supplied, provide time for participants to develop their “Family Charter of Rights”.
- They are then asked to share their “Charter” with other participants and asked to consider how they are trying to maintain these rights within their family.

### 4. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.

The “Staying box” is used in which women place a symbol to represent what they are leaving behind and take with them a different symbol to represent what they are taking with them.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

They are encouraged to take their journals and perhaps spend some time writing or drawing their thoughts about the group or what thoughts they were left with.

## SESSION 3

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them that they would like to raise.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support, to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

Ask participants if anyone would like to share with the group anything they have been thinking about or writing in their journal.

### 2. Children's Experiences of Violence

#### **Group activity: Children's experiences of living with violence.**

Place different sheets on the wall which each name a common experience for children who live with DFV.

#### **They can include:**

- **Fear**
- **Anger**
- **Confusion**
- **Guilt and responsibility**
- **Divided loyalty**
- **Loss and grief**

In thinking about their own children ask participants to discuss each of these headings and the ways they recognise they apply do not apply to their children.

To add to the conversation ask questions that include:

- In what ways have your children made you aware that they have been impacted by the domestic and family violence? What do they say? What do they do?
- How do you respond to your children when they bring up their worries? What do you say? What do you do?
- If you could name one thing that you believe has helped you as a mother to your children what would it be?
- If you could name one thing that you believe you have given to your child/ren to support them with their struggles, what would you say?

## MORNING TEA BREAK

### 3. Holding onto Motherhood

Being a mother: Have a large sheet of paper (or three smaller pages) and one of the facilitators to scribe as the women talk.

Invite participants to share their memories of their start as a mother:

- **What fears did they hold?**
- **What challenges did they face?**
- **What joys did they experience?**

Ask the group to share one memory they hold which best exemplifies what they value most about being a mother.

Ask participants to think of ways, even in small ways, they have tried or are trying to “get back” and hold onto those values for themselves and their children? What do they already notice about what they are “getting back” for themselves and their children?

Use a closing activity with cards/photos that encourage participants to share a story about being a mother. For example, the cards from Positive Parenting (St Luke’s Innovative Resources) is a wonderful selection from which several could be chosen for the women to refer to.

#### 4. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still holding before they leave.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.

The “Staying box” is used in which women place a symbol to represent what they are leaving behind and take with them a different symbol to represent what they are taking with them.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

They are encouraged to take their journals and perhaps spend some time writing or drawing their thoughts about the group or what thoughts they were left with.



## SESSION 4

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them that they would like to raise.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

Ask participants if anyone would like to share with the group anything they have been thinking about or writing in their journal.

### 2. Revealing Stories of Resistance to the Violence

#### Show a segment of the DVD “Big Little Lies”. (HBO 2017)

- Look at the segment at the moment when the actress starts to acknowledge that something is not right in her life in regard to the violence.
- What do you notice about the changes for this woman?
- What are some of the messages given to the woman by the counsellor?

**NOTE: Choose another suitable DVD from the titles suggested in the Information Group (page 43) or any others that you and your service may know of.**

### 3. Group Brainstorm

If we were to talk about the ways that women “resist the violence” what words do group participants think would fit this description?

Write their words on butcher’s paper or cardboard.

If they were to think about the ways they resisted the violence would any of these words fit for them or would there be others?

Invite participants to share their words with each other. In the discussion other participants may be able to add to those words for other women.

### MORNING TEA

#### 4. Saying “No” to Violence

Give out sheets with the heading, “Saying No to Violence”.

Ask the participants to write something they thought or did that they know was standing up to the violence.

Emphasise that actively resisting physically or verbally may have been known by them to escalate the harm. Resistance can occur in many other ways.

Give out the handout that talks about acts of resistance in the face of domestic and family violence (Honouring Resistance page 53). When filling out their own acts of resistance there may be ideas on this sheet that resonates for them.

Participants are then asked to share their “Saying No to Violence wheel” with the rest of the group.

**NOTE: A wonderful resource to assist in this discussion is “Honouring Resistance” (Calgary Women’s Shelter 2007). It can be downloaded as a free resource.**

### 5. Group Activity: The Shape of Things.

Have a variety of paper shapes cut out and ready to use. Ask the women to select a paper shape and write the one word that stands out for them from the above discussion.

After decorating this shape they are asked to place it in their journal.

Women can then choose to share their artwork if they would like to do so.

### 6. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.

The “Staying box” is used in which women place a symbol to represent what they are leaving behind and take with them a different symbol to represent what they are taking with them.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

They are encouraged to take their journals and perhaps spend some time writing or drawing their thoughts about the group or what thoughts they were left with.

## SESSION 5

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them that they would like to raise.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support, to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

Ask participants if anyone would like to share with the group anything they have been thinking about or writing in their journal.

### 2. Pathways of Change.

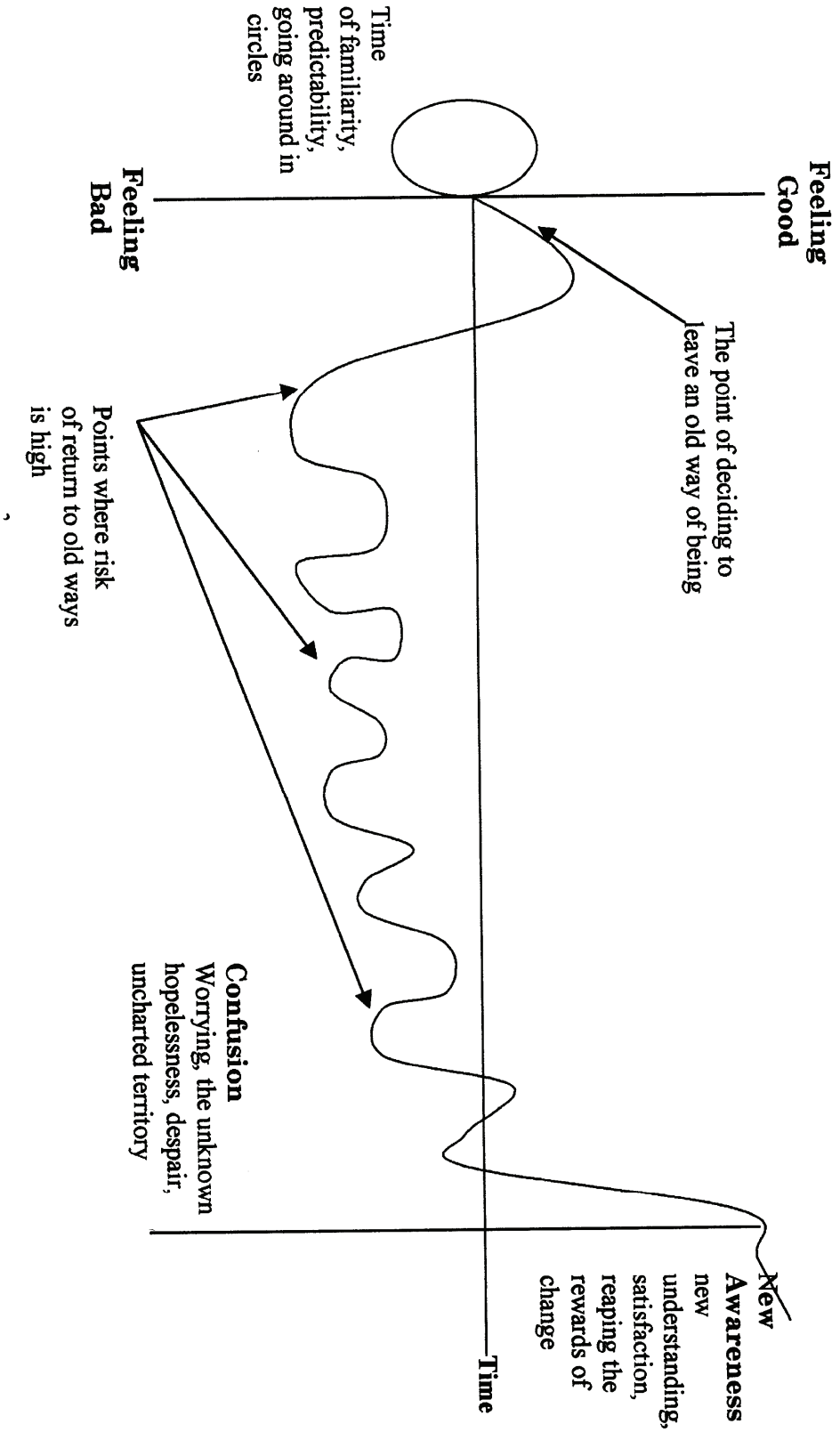
Hand out a copy of the graph which maps a pathway of change for women in regard to the violence. (See next page).

**NOTE: Emphasise that “leaving” has many different meanings and we are not necessarily talking about physically leaving the violence.**

**Research tells us that physically leaving can escalate the violence and increase the risk to the safety of women and children. Leaving is about having a different connection to the violence that they have been subjected to in terms of their understanding of tactics and dynamics, seeing acts of resistance and changed meanings about themselves and their relationships with others.**



# Pathway of change



Talk about the meaning of the map and then ask each participant where they see themselves on the map.

Ask participants to think of all the changes that have occurred for them since “leaving” the violence:

- What things are the same?
- What changes have been the hardest to adjust to? Consider loneliness, safety, financial issues, caring for and disciplining children.
- What other changes do you want to happen next?

Ask the group what are the things that can sometimes make them feel they are being pulled back and how do they manage this?

What do they hold onto to help them resist these struggles?

## MORNING TEA

### 3. Looking to the future



Ask the participants to think about how they see the future, even in only a few months from now.

What would they see as being most important for themselves and their children?

What would be a favourite day for them and their children? What would they do?

How could they celebrate that day?

Spend time within the group developing this plan. What are the obstacles and how could they overcome them?

#### 4. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still holding before they leave.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.

The “Staying box” is used in which women place a symbol to represent what they are leaving behind and take with them a different symbol to represent what they are taking with them.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

They are encouraged to take their journals and perhaps spend some time writing or drawing their thoughts about the group or what thoughts they were left with.



## SESSION 6

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them that they would like to raise.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

Ask participants if anyone would like to share with the group anything they have been thinking about or writing in their journal.

### 2. Giving.

Hand out the poem, “When you thought I wasn’t looking”. (See next page).

Ask participants to share what they thought of the words in the poem.

Ask them to spend some time drawing or writing in their journal what they think/imagine their child/ren would say, “When you thought I wasn’t looking”.

Participants are then asked to share all, or any part, of their writing or drawing to the rest of the group.

## MORNING TEA

## When You Thought I Wasn't Looking

When you thought I wasn't looking you hung my first painting on the fridge, and I wanted to paint another!

When you thought I wasn't looking you fed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking you baked a birthday cake especially for me, and I knew that little things were special things.

When you thought I wasn't looking you said a prayer and I believed there is a God that I could talk to also.

When you thought I wasn't looking you kissed me goodnight, and I felt loved and safe.

When you thought I wasn't looking I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt but that it's all right to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking you smiled. And it made me want to smile too.

When you thought I wasn't looking you cared, and I wanted to be everything I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking ... I looked...And wanted to say "Thank you" for all those things you did,

When you thought I wasn't looking.

Gervase Phinn

### 3. Receiving

Ask participants to think about what their child does well or really enjoys or shows them about who they are as a person. Make a list or write or draw in their journal what they would say about their child/ren and what they receive from them, “When you thought I wasn’t looking”.

Participants are then asked to share all or any part of their writing or drawing with the rest of the group.

### 4. Group activity

Using story cards/photo montage cards (St Lukes Resources) ask participants to select a card that represents one thing they believe they give to their children and another card to represent one thing they believe their child/ren give to them.

Share with the rest of the group.

### 5. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.

The “Staying box” is used in which women place a symbol to represent what they are leaving behind and take with them a different symbol to represent what they are taking with them.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

They are encouraged to take their journals and perhaps spend some time writing or drawing their thoughts about the group or what thoughts they were left with.

## SESSION 7

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them that they would like to raise.

Return to group agreements including respect, confidentiality and support, to reinforce the importance of everyone feeling safe as a member of the group.

Ask participants if anyone would like to share with the group anything they have been thinking about or writing in their journal.

### 2. Circles of Support

Discuss that how other people respond to domestic and family violence makes an important difference to women and children.

Give each participant a large sheet of paper with a series of concentric circles.

Ask them to write down the names of people/places and services who have given them support:

- **The inner circle are people they feel closest to and who are most supportive**
- **The second circle are people who continue to support them but they do not have as close a relationship with them as the inner circle**
- **The final circle are people and places that they know they can contact for support but they do not have an ongoing close relationship with**

**Participants are then asked to share their circles of support with the group.**

Develop the conversation by asking questions such as:

- What are the things people have said or done that have been of significant support?
- Are there any people no longer considered to be in their circles of support because of things they have said or done?
- Do they feel there are gaps in regard to their current supports and what are they?
- Do they or any other group members have any ideas about how those gaps could be filled?

## MORNING TEA

### 3. Holding onto Dignity

What does the word “dignity” mean to women?  
Brainstorm on whiteboard.

Ask participants how they have held onto their dignity when people, including the person who harmed them, have tried to take it away from them.

How do they as mothers make their children aware that they are proud of them and their ability to hold onto their dignity?

How do they show this sense of pride and dignity for themselves?

### 4. Group Activity: Picture this

Provide some craft materials and ask the participants to think about and create a portrait/banner about dignity and pride in regard to their family.

**NOTE: Craft techniques such as scrapbooking/montage can be very effective when creating this picture. To add impact, a frame can be provided to hold the picture.**

When the pictures have been completed ask the participants to share what they have created and to decide on a title for their picture.



## 5. Closing Exercise and Check Out

It is important that participants have the opportunity to talk about their experience of the group and anything they are still “holding” before they leave.

Participants can be asked to say one thing they have gained from the group today and one thing they would like to leave behind.

The “Staying box” is used in which women place a symbol to represent what they are leaving behind and take with them a different symbol to represent what they are taking with them.

Participants should be encouraged to contact their worker/support person or one of the facilitators if they are struggling during the week with any of the content of the group raised today.

They are encouraged to take their journals and perhaps spend some time writing or drawing their thoughts about the group or what thoughts they were left with.

Remind the group that the next meeting is the final session for the group. The focus of this session will be to consult with them about their experiences of being a participant in the group and ideas concerning the positive and negative aspects of the program. There will also be a focus on celebrating having been together and saying goodbye.



## SESSION 8

### 1. Welcome Back

Welcome back group members.

Ask group members how they were after the group last week and if anything stayed with them that they would like to raise.

Ask participants if anyone would like to share with the group anything they have been thinking about or writing in their journal.

### 2. Group Consultation: Reflections on the Group

Introduce the consultation as being an important part of the group in finding out from participants what was most and least helpful about being in this group and their ideas for ongoing development of the program.

Sheets representing each session (including a brief overview of what was discussed during that session and the associated activities) are placed on the wall as a summary of the group.

Participants are asked to give their feedback about that session, including the strengths and weaknesses of that session.

Ideas for improvement can also be placed on the sheets, including different issues to be raised, providing greater support and safety within the group dynamic, and practice issues facilitators need to be mindful of.

### MORNING TEA

**NOTE:** As this is the last session, a longer time spent having morning tea is suggested. In the spirit of meeting places with women, thought needs to be given to marking this time as a ritual of coming together with a more formal setting of sitting together - such as being around a decorated table, set out with flowers, candles, china, and “fancy food”.

During this meeting participants can be encouraged to talk more about the group and their thoughts about finishing the group today.

Facilitators can also use this space to give out a more formal thankyou such as a small token of thanks for coming to the group and what each person has contributed.

### **3. Group Closure: Leave it and Take it**

Ask participants to chose a symbol representing an idea they held about themselves which they no longer hold because of being in this group. They place this symbol in the “Staying Box” to represent that they are leaving this idea behind.

Have a basket holding ribbons or small bracelets or some other items. Ask participants to take one thing from the basket and say one idea or message about themselves they are taking with them because of being in this group.

### **4. Final Evaluation Forms**

Final evaluation forms are handed out and completed by participants. (See following pages).

### **5. Final Goodbye to the Group and Close**

**FINAL EVALUATION FORM**

**PART 1: Starting with the group**

What questions/worries did you hold before coming to the group?

What information would have been helpful before you came to the first session?

What do you believe may be the experiences of other women coming to a similar group for the first time?

What could be offered to assist women to feel more comfortable?

**PART 2: Group content and process.**

What three words would describe your overall experience of this group?

\_\_\_\_\_

What was the best thing about this group for you?

What was the least positive part of this group?

What changes would you suggest for future groups?

### PART 3: Group structure

Mark your response with a tick (✓)

GROUP STRUCTURE	YES	NO	UNSURE
I FELT THE GROUP WAS A SAFE PLACE TO TALK ABOUT THINGS THAT AT TIMES WERE HARD			
I FELT TREATED WITH RESPECT AT ALL TIMES			
I FELT LISTENED TO AND THAT WHAT I SAID WAS IMPORTANT AND VALUED BY OTHERS			
MY SENSE OF ISOLATION AND SECRECY SURROUNDING THE VIOLENCE HAS DECREASED			
MANY OF THE WRONGLY HELD VIEWS ABOUT MYSELF HAVE DECREASED.			
I HAVE FOUND STORIES ABOUT MYSELF WHICH ARE DIFFERENT TO THOSE CAUSED BY THE ABUSE			
MY CONFIDENCE IN TRUSTING MY SKILLS AND RESOURCES AS A PARENT HAS INCREASED			
I ENJOYED COMING TO THE GROUP AND FOUND IT TO BE A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE			

**PART 4: My Own Process**

What are some things about yourself that you feel were of benefit to the group?

How did you contribute to the group in terms of safety, discussion and connection?

Were there any things about you and what you thought that became stronger during the group?

Was there anything that you heard about yourself from others in the group that was important?

How will you keep these messages with you?

## PART 5: Moving On

What ideas do you hold about ways you can deal with future problems, given the supports and new ideas you now hold about yourself?

Are there any areas of concern or gaps existing for you that you would like to look at further?

Do you have any thoughts regarding future groups and what they could be about?

Is there anything (experiences, skills, interests) you heard about or saw in other women in the group that might already exist to try and build on for another group program?





SECTION FOUR:  
CHILDREN'S GROUP  
PROGRAM

4

## Groupwork with children who have experienced domestic and family violence

### 1. Introduction

In the field of domestic and family violence there has been increasing recognition of children's exposure to this harm. It has been relatively recent that the language and, therefore, the understandings concerning children and domestic violence has shifted from them being seen as passive witnesses of the violence to experiencing the breadth and depth of emotional, physical, psychological, economic and spiritual harm that has most commonly been focused only on mothers.

It is evident that if children are kept invisible and, therefore, not assisted to integrate the impact of the violence they can remain disconnected from the acute nature of their experiences often resulting in an ability to remember events but not describe their own feelings and thoughts and understandings. Such disconnection can result in ongoing anxiety, fear and chronic tension, presenting as either internalising behaviours (numbing, avoidance, flat affect, intrusive thoughts) or externalised behaviours (aggression, impulsivity).

The ongoing legacies of such trauma result in what has been described as cumulative harm leading to a child's inability to trust (themselves or others) and a lack of safety and security, even if their environment does eventually provide safety and nurturance.

Children need to be given the opportunity to talk about and share their experiences, to make real the often mistaken version that adults carry about them that they aren't affected or aren't involved or don't need to worry about it. Consequently, the rights of children to be listened to and be acknowledged, has gained increasing momentum in the sector.

It is also clear that children are often seen as passive recipients of violence and not only are not impacted by what happens in front of them and often to them, but that they also do not need to be asked what they think about what they have experienced. This deficit discourse further situates children as not being agents of change themselves and passively “putting up” with what is happening and “waiting for others to make things change”. Not only do they have beliefs and responses to the violence they experience but also actively seek protection for themselves and others with whatever resources are available to them.

## **2. Groupwork with Children in the Context of Domestic and Family Violence**

The value of group work for children is offering a space for them to talk about themselves, their families and their understandings of the violence according to their experiences. Group work can challenge the legacies of the violence such as secrecy, shame and fear by bringing together children who can share similar stories about what they have experienced, and their views about this and how they responded.

The first meeting of any group clearly brings such commonality to the foreground and names, for all children, the existence of domestic and family violence outside their immediate family, to include many other families and many other children.

Children dealing with many sources of family stress and turbulence somehow have been forced to bypass many parts of normal childhood living and learning. Their attendance at groups however honours the strong story that, no matter what they are dealing with inside and outside their family, they are first and foremost children. The emphasis is therefore for all groups to give children a sense of belonging, safety, fun and connection.

Consultations with children about the value of groupwork for them always brings the finding that it gives them the opportunity to meet with others and share similar experiences, to find out that they are “not the only one” and that many “normal” children have also experienced violence.

We have often spoken of the possibility that a group could simply involve the step of arranging children to meet together with food and some enjoyable activities on hand, enabling them to take care of the process of getting to know each other and sharing stories about themselves without adult intervention. The meddling adult in us still insists that we “write a program” but the reality is that we often find ourselves an invisible part of the process.

### 3. Practice Framework

Groupwork is considered a valuable therapeutic response to the needs of children, young people and families impacted by violence and abuse.

As with any therapeutic approach to the work, groupwork must be supported by adherence to a strongly built and evidence informed therapeutic framework. Certain aspects of that framework will be guided by the exact nature of the service holding the group, the client target group, and where groupwork in itself fits within the service. From that place the timing, structure, content, length of sessions, participants and key themes are then developed to further shape the unique nature of groupwork as it sits within an organisation or across partner agencies.



Drawing on both literature and practice based evidence the following foundational practices must be considered. In this summary it is noted that the limited space provided here in acknowledging these factors does not give adequate credence to their integrity to the work and further reading is encouraged to ensure their importance is embraced by workers.

- **The gendered nature of violence where perpetrators are mostly male and victims are predominantly females and children**
- **The utilisation of power and control with patterned and repeated coercive and controlling tactics to limit, direct, and shape the thoughts, feelings and actions of others**
- **Subjection to domestic and family violence is a human rights violation and for children this includes their right to safety, to be cared for within their family and to be free of abuse and neglect**
- **An Ecological model in understanding that all forms of violence are the result of factors operating at four levels which include society, community, relationships and individual. Consequently, interventions must also be inclusive of those four levels.**
- **A trauma informed understanding of the ways people subjected to domestic and family violence respond to their experiences of that violence**
- **An adoption of trauma informed principles of intervention such as those advocated by Judith Herman 1992 (safety, telling the story of violence, connection and empowerment) and Howard Bath (safety, managing emotions, and connection)**
- **Acknowledging that a trauma model of recovery is encircled by the significance of relationships and, for children, involves helping children form ties with people to build safe, respectful and strong relationships, developing their social relationships, and reducing their isolation, and sense of disempowerment. (Child Safety Commissioner 2009)**
- **Understanding the neurobiological development for children (Perry 1994) subjected to violence and abuse which shifts from the totalising medical model of “damage” to a position that the brain responds to the social world and, therefore, positive social responses to children can help promote positive brain development in children.**

- **Strengths-based approaches which acknowledge the capacity for self-determination and survival of the integrity of human identity despite the debilitating impacts of being subjected to domestic and family violence.**
- **Response-based contextual analysis which identifies a person's very real sense of personal agency and active willpower to seek protection, safety and stability, for themselves and others, with whatever resources are available to them.**

In regard to children, such responses may naively be viewed as children just trying to “cope with what is happening as best as they can” but this ignores the very real active stance they take in regard to their views about the violence that is occurring and what they can do about it. They know it hurts, they know it causes distress, they know it impacts on every member of their family and extended family in clear ways and they don't like it and want it to stop.

#### **4. Groupwork programs: Content, structure and process**

Despite the clear advantages and rewards of groupwork when working with children it can be a very different and, therefore, challenging space for workers. In working with individuals and families there is usually a two way sharing of space between clients and workers but in the structure of a group setting there is the opportunity for multiple pathways of interaction, between group participants and facilitators, between participants only and between facilitators only.

When holding groups for children the dynamics and interactions are also influenced by the many unique characteristics of children being children, with their responses most commonly behavioural and facilitators needing to “guess” and then respond to “what they think is happening and, therefore, what they think they need to do”. The trepidation of this “unknown territory” for facilitators often means they hold tightly to the script of a devised program. Group programs are absolutely important in setting a blueprint for facilitators and participants as to the purpose of the group, the different themes that will evolve and a range of activities to support this pathway.

The “unknown territory” that is predictable in any group requires facilitators to also be flexible in either stretching or reducing the content of the program according to the “rhythm” of the group. This is particularly inevitable when working with children who will have their own individual rhythm (fast, slow, carefree, exact, interested, bored) which when combined with the other individual rhythms of the rest of the participants, somehow needs to be brought together to develop a united group process.

A starting place when developing any group program can be guided by what is now known well known as “SMART” Principles.

- **SPECIFIC** about what you want to achieve
- **MEASURABLE** about evaluating whether you achieve your aims
- **ACHIEVABLE** about what can be accomplished within a given time scale
- **RELEVANT** to the service function and needs of the target group/s
- **TIMELY** in fitting to an achievable time scale and if the timing of the group is right.

From this starting place the building of a program can be developed by utilising a “tried and tested” template such as described by Wendy Bunston who is recognised in the field for her groupwork with children and families in the context of domestic and family violence.

Group structure for each session can include the following:

**Making space and time**

- Begin each session with a ritual such as a hello activity

**Warm-up: To support participants to be present in the group**

- To connect participants with each other
- To psychologically warm-up to be in the group space

**Release of energy: To focus on the session**

- To release the energy children bring into the group space which can be termed “the remains of the day”.
- Then move into settling space

**Themes: Produce the goods**

- Themes introduced
- The work of the group is done
- Can be cognitive, emotional, psychological, creative

**Bringing it all together: returning as one group**

- Individual or dyad work joins to the group as a whole
- Share stories, what have done, what think.
- Journal work, group collage, placing a summary on a central object such as a tree or group wall.

**Closure: Ending the session**

- Ending activity
- The coming together of all group members signals the ending of the session

**5. Further Important Considerations**

Some of the following issues will usually rise when deciding to facilitate any group for children but there are also further considerations specifically related to groupwork with children who have experienced violence and abuse.

**Acknowledgement of violence and harm and the extent of that discussion**

The common debate when working with children who have been harmed is the extent to which the stories of violence are revealed and hovered over and the extent to which those stories are restricted.

If we avoid the topic, are we telling children that the violence they experienced is not to be discussed in the group? If we focus the work of the group by asking children to talk about this abusive history, are we forcing them into a discussion that they do not necessarily want to do or see as important?

We believe it is important to spend a short amount of time during the first session to discuss the fact that all children attending the group have experienced domestic and family violence at some point in their lives. Our early input to parents and carers before the start of each group is another way of letting children know that all group members are attending the service because they also have experienced similar harm.



After this point, it is then left to the children to take responsibility for other information they decide to share in the group setting. This is done either by informal discussions with other group members or sharing information through the activities of the program. If we take the position that what they decide to share or not share is based on their assessment of what is safe or right to do so then we need to trust their agency and respect their decision making in this process.

### **The place where children stand in terms of leaving the violence**

The focus on supporting women and children to increase their safety from the violence must always be the priority of any response. For many families, the perpetrator of the violence is also the father of the children being harmed by their exposure to his violence. His place in the ongoing lives of his children does not disappear. What that future relationship looks like, sounds like, feels like for children is for most of them unknown at the time we come into their lives. But it will eventually need to become known: sorted out, worked out, disagreed upon, mediated upon, legislated upon, and acted upon.

We do not pretend to only invite children to groups who are in totally safe situations to the groups. Our experience from working with children and their families, tells us that this is often a fragile existence. But “sufficient safety” for children must be assessed in consultation with their mother prior to attending a group as it is an unfair and potentially unsafe predicament to create for children by inviting them to a group regarding domestic and family violence while they are still in close contact and, therefore, under surveillance by the perpetrator of that violence.

In seeing a purpose of groupwork as being a resource that can be useful for children, we believe that it can offer new information about them and their close relationships that are alternate views to those being promoted by the violence they have witnessed.

But groupwork cannot keep children safe. Groupwork with children cannot predict what adults around them will do and cannot control what may happen. Groupwork cannot give promises that may not occur or may easily unravel. Groupwork cannot cause any potential increased harm for a child by having conversations, challenging beliefs or suggesting different responses to their experiences that at this point in a child's life may further risk their safety.

An advantage of groupwork is its ability to bring attention to children who are still experiencing some form of harm. Their interactions with other children, statements they make during the sessions, and difficulties at managing emotions and self-regulation, are ways that ongoing protection issues are brought to notice. Our belief is that such revelations can become more visible in groupwork than in the format of family counselling where the restraints surrounding the violence can remain quite strong.

The response when such harm is discovered must sit outside the membership status of the group, including the membership of the unsafe child. It is possible that the child can still attend the group but careful consideration would need to be made by facilitators as to ongoing content and structure.

Children who feel chronically unsafe experience that lack of safety everywhere and this includes being in the group. Their fears, confusions, anxiety and dysregulation signify responses that ongoing harm is occurring and this must be acted upon. The group cannot hold this lack of safety to the degree that is required and not only will other group members be impacted, the group itself and most importantly the child, will suffer the consequences of the infiltration of feeling unsafe.

Undertaking risk assessment in consultation with the mother, returning to family based counselling, seeking practical protection strategies and working toward increased safety for the child must be prioritised. Groupwork for this child can wait.

## Practicalities including group space, group membership, length of sessions, transport, food and resources.

### 1. Group Space

When children come to a group they need to enter a space that is waiting for them and welcoming of them. Therefore, preparation of the space prior to the group starting and packing up when the group finishes, is important.

Group agreements at the start of the first session will help to strengthen their sense of safety and belonging but in reality it is the role of the facilitators, supported by the physical space surrounding the group, that holds the safety.

There is no doubt that children respond to environments that are welcoming. Open spaces with room to move and few restrictions on noise level and movement are necessary ingredients for children to feel comfortable, relaxed and enthusiastic. When planning a group it is important to consider appropriate venues in terms of safety and freedom for children's natural energy. If work centres are not ideal, considering other locations within the community may be necessary, including school halls, community centres, and other services which can provide that space.

The need to provide adequate resources is constant and can be expensive. Children's capacity for creativity can often be measured by the amount of materials they can expend in a five minute period.

Providing variety in sufficient amounts, without the need for free access to all resources, maintains a flow of work without depleting the entire groupwork budget in one session. To maintain structure and focus in the group, it is important to ensure that all resources are securely stored away (cupboards, boxes, baskets) until required.

The one rule always remembered by children is to provide what was promised at a previous session.

## 2. Group Membership

In considering the knowledge and skills of each potential group member as equally valuable, the usual rules about age and gender seem irrelevant. We believe that it is valid to invite all clients to a group, as long as the purpose of the group and respective program appears relevant and developmentally appropriate to each child concerned. That decision of “relevancy” belongs to the child and family in close consultation with their primary worker or the facilitators.

Pre-group meetings with parents and carers can provide valuable information about the unique needs of each child, discussing ways certain qualities (very young children, children who are hearing impaired, children who carry a diagnosis of ADD, children from other cultures, etc.) can be catered for by the group.

Additional activities that can break up the main work of the group, allowing space for children who either cannot sustain the attention needed for certain tasks or require further time to complete the work to their satisfaction, are also important.

It is also valuable to include material that addresses the different life stories of participants, especially in regard to culture, enhancing the depth of knowledge gained by everyone during the group.

## 3. Involving Parents and Caregivers

An important consideration is the role of caregivers and other family members in the group program. Traditionally, groups for children have been held outside the domain of parents or carers, their participation limited to providing transport to and from sessions and perhaps quickly checking in with facilitators about their child's participation.

It is also important, when working with children impacted by domestic and family violence, that work practices do not inadvertently reflect tactics used by offenders to ensure secrecy, isolation and a division between children and mothers.

The format for participation can vary for each program, depending not only on the planning of sessions but also after consultation with mothers as to their ideas about their preferred level of involvement.

There are different ways that openings for parents and carers can occur, determined by the structure and content of the group and the timeframes available to invite parents and carers to be more involved:

- Ensuring the group is transparent by meeting with parents prior to the group, half way through the program or at the end
- Inviting parents and carers to attend certain sessions with the children or part of some sessions (although care needs to be taken that this does not alter the “flow” of the group as children’s usual levels of participation and comfort can be affected when a parent or carer is present)
- Having some activities which children can “take home” and do with their parent (eg: children interviewing their parent, joint craft activity, bringing things to group that belong to the child)
- An invitation to carers and family members to attend the final group session as guests. They provide both an audience to a discussion of the work achieved during the group and share in the celebration of the group’s closure.

#### 4. Length of Sessions

Most group sessions are two hours in length, allowing one and a half hours for solid work. Spare time is needed for late arrivals, food and toilet breaks, basic cleaning up and a closing activity.

Children usually arrive within the first fifteen minutes, so it is important to have an introductory activity that everyone can start and late comers can catch up with.

Ideally, half an hour before and after the group time is important to allow workers to set up the room, prepare activities and collect children needing transport.

The value of wind down time for workers at the end of each session cannot be overstated. The information provided during each group session must be reviewed with care, discussion often altering the program to better suit the character of the group or to develop an important theme that the children have raised. We have also found that our adulthood takes from us the non-stoppable energy of children and keeping pace is taxing on mind and body.

## 5. Documenting Work

It is considered important that the knowledge generated by the children is recorded so that it remains accessible information to not only themselves but also family members, support people and perhaps others attending the service if the group develops a resource:

- Group storywall: a series of sheets (calico/butcher's paper/cardboard) are successively hung around the group room at the start or end of a session. They may contain drawings, messages or group collages that depict information produced during the group session, providing an immediate and visual representation of the work being achieved
- Resource folders: At the start of each group, a resource folder (folder with plastic sheets, envelope folder, notebook) can be given to the children for the purpose of storing and recording their work. Personal recordings, drawings, information sheets, summaries of ideas raised during the previous group session, letters and notes from family members are all included in the folders. The safest rule is "keep everything" unless the children discard it themselves. All work is the property of the child concerned and what happens to that material is their decision
- Group letter: At the end of a group program we have at times, given each child a letter which summarises the work of the group, information we gathered about that child as to their special abilities, interests, qualities and stories or incidents that marked something important in the group. These letters are taken by the child as one record of their participation during the group.

- Photographs/audio & visual recordings: The use of photographs and audio and visual recordings are very powerful tools for documentation. Children respond to hearing their voices and seeing themselves with great enthusiasm. Care and caution are fundamental elements when using these tools, respecting confidentiality and being sensitive to the possible invasiveness of this technology.
- Recordings must be individualised so that the voices and pictures of other children are not included when recording one child. All participants and parents and carers must be involved in the decision of whether or not to use recording equipment and permission is usually obtained in a written consent form. That form stipulates the way in which material will be recorded, that all material will be destroyed at the closing of each group, unless a request is made by a child for segments that were focused on their participation.
- Keeping copies of work: We have sometimes sought permission from the group to keep copies of work they have done. Workers need to ask themselves the purpose for keeping this work and if it is really necessary. That purpose then needs to be stated to both the children and their parents or carers so everyone is clear as to how the material will be used. The different ways this valuable documentation can be used include making it accessible to other clients of the service, children attending other services and workers who also work with children.

## 6. Transport

This is always a difficult issue and it is important for workers to make a decision about their ability (in terms of time) to provide transport for children who would otherwise be unable to attend. There is no doubt that not having to provide transport is a relief when facilitating a group and gives that valuable time needed at the start and closing of a group.

## 7. Food

The place of food during group sessions is the other constant issue. Our evaluations with children after groups have proven that food is a valued element to every group session. The best procedure we have found is to have a formal sitting together once all the children have arrived and sharing food before moving into the group activities. The food is then put away or the children moved into a space away from the food.

Groups for children usually occur after school and they naturally need some food after a day at school. Small plates of food shared around the group works well but we have also found it helpful to have small plastic containers like lunch boxes for each child particularly at the first session to make children feel at ease. The best rule is trial and error until the option that works best for the group is found.

## 8. Group Agreements

Group agreements should be discussed at the start of the first session and regularly returned to and revised throughout the rest of the program. This exercise should be short and simple, encouraging children to stipulate the rules they feel are important. Discussing the appropriateness of certain rules above others sets a tone for the group that, although encouraging respect and self care, is not a rigid classroom setting.

Important rules to stipulate include:

- Confidentiality: Children attending the group may also attend the same school or live near each other. We talk about the importance of keeping information raised in the group private from others, especially teachers, peers and neighbours
- The pre-group meeting with parents or carers can raise this issue, discussing concerns and agreements about the level of confidentiality expected. Our experience with groups has not shown this issue to be problematic, children and family members always honour the rights of others to maintain their privacy



- Staying safe: Set out the physical boundaries for the group, pointing out certain areas that are not accessible, such as office areas where other staff are working, computer areas and outside areas. If children want a break from the group, or don't want to participate in certain activities, they can sit out on cushions, rugs and chairs in the immediate area
- Physical contact: Children are asked not to push, hit or hurt another child in any way. Rough play is also discouraged, some children often getting distressed if someone grabs them or tries to tickle them in "fun"
- Follow the same rules about language that are at school, in terms of "put downs" and swearing. This is not related to our need for "proper" behaviour but the fact that words when used offensively are abusive and can be distressing to children, particularly if certain expressions resemble words that they associate with harm.

## 6. Evaluation

Evaluation is a critical part of any group program. We need to know if holding a group reached some if not all of the intended objectives and did if it had a positive impact on participants.

The difficulty with evaluating children's groups is often the reluctance by group members to see the importance of evaluation and also the generosity children overwhelmingly show concerning their participation in a group as a positive experience.

Examples of evaluation forms for children are provided in this program. There are also several valuable resources available, all accessible via the internet.

Examples include:

(Children and young people's IAPT Tracking Outcome. 2011)

(Evaluating Participation Work: The Toolkit, 2008)

(Evaluator's Cookbook. National Evaluation of the Children's Fund)

For facilitators, evaluation needs to occur after every session, to discuss if the group is “working” and if there need to be changes to structure, content or both.

Evaluation can occur informally, measured by the consistent numbers attending and their responses to the different activities. Maintaining contact with children and families on a more personal basis, be that via counselling sessions, letters or phone contact, allows us to review the experience of the group for them and ways that they are finding it useful or enjoyable, both or neither.

The final session of all groups provide the opportunity for members to share with an invited audience their different experiences in the group and answer questions “from the floor” about certain activities and achievements.

A much more productive way of evaluating the nature and worth of a group is by a formal consultation process, usually held several weeks after the group has finished. As a principle of practice, consultation with clients reflects principles that acknowledge their expertise, is empowering and strengths-based and invites transparency of practice and accountability.

All members of a group are invited to return for the purpose of discussing their memories of the group and ideas they hold about changes that could benefit future participants.

Apart from the evaluation of the group process, additional questions are asked about their own process, before, during, and after the group:

- **What questions/worries did they hold before coming to the group?**
- **What information would they have liked to have before coming?**
- **What do they imagine might be the experiences of other children who were attending a group for the first time?**
- **What could be offered to make that child feel more comfortable?**

- What are some things about themselves that they feel were of benefit to the group?
- Were there any things that became stronger during the group?
- Any new discoveries about themselves?
- In leaving the group, what did they take with them that was useful?
- Was there anything they heard about themselves from others in the group that was important to them?
- How will they keep these messages with them?
- What ideas do they hold about ways they can deal with future problems, given the supports and new ideas they hold about themselves?

The final part of this consultation process is the presentation of a certificate that acknowledges the expertise they have shared and a follow-up letter can advise the participants of the changes made to the program because of the information they provided.



## An example of a group program for children.

### 1. Objectives of the Program

- Provide a place of safe connection where children can meet to share their experiences of violence and stand away from the legacies of isolation and secrecy, fear, guilt and powerlessness.
- Identify and acknowledge aspects of children's lives which are seen by them as important and valued.
- Conceptualise the idea of resistance and applying their personal meaning to it.
- Connect with their personal history (including people in their lives) in a positive and affirming way.
- Identify the qualities of important relationships (within and outside their family) and the values they hold within those relationships.
- Share the problems and worries still generated by the violence they experienced, and encourage continued resistance to these restraints.
- Identify the experience of the group as a resource, the sharing of skills and knowledge, encouraging participants to give further meaning to who they are which is separate to what they have experienced.
- To celebrate their strengths and document the work achieved by the children during the time of this group program.

## 2. Session outlines



**NOTE: Each session outlines different activities used throughout the program. There are often more activities described than are possible within the time allocated. Different activities will fit different groups, depending on the energy within that group and their preferred choice for craft activities, artwork, or group discussion.**

### Pre-group meeting Children and Parents/Carers

This session involves an informal meeting between children and their parents/carers to introduce the group program to potential participants.

This session can be held in several ways: meeting only with the adults, meeting with each child and parent/carer in a family session, or a large informal gathering.

We have used all three methods and ultimately believe the decision comes down to, sometimes personal preference, but more commonly, time constraints.

#### **Whatever the format, this session involves:**

- An invitation to children and parents/carers to attend the introductory session.
- A meeting where the program is described, including some tasks which the child will be asked to do during sessions.
- Questions asked and also suggestions offered by children and parents/carers taken up and, if possible, the program modified.
- Practical issues regarding transport, appropriate clothing, starting and finishing times, etc. can reduce future problems when the program starts.

- The role of parents/carers as guardians of the children's work is encouraged by asking them to talk with their child about the group, look at the work taken home and support their child if there is anything raised during the group that becomes a worry for them.
- We also ask parents/carers to contact us if their child mentions any difficulties with the group or is showing signs that the group has raised any issues that need to be discussed outside the space of the group. Arrangements need to be made for follow-up family work if necessary.



## Session 1:

### Welcome and Introductions

Facilitators welcome everyone to the group and thank them for coming to this first meeting.

Facilitators hand out name tags for themselves and each child.

Having the tags in a basket gives some order to the start of the group and can also be a closing activity of the tags being returned to the basket when the session finishes.

The facilitators then introduce a name game, explaining that this is a way of getting to know everyone's name.

- This name game asks everyone to say their name but put a word in front of their name that starts with the same letter and says something about them.
- Facilitators start the game such as saying: My name is Smiling Sarah/ Happy Harry/ Dancing Dina etc.
- The next person is asked to repeat the name of the person who went before them and then add their name to the group.
- For example: This is Happy Harry and my name is Smiling Sarah. The game continues until everyone has had a turn.
- Children may be hesitant to say their name or give themselves a word. Facilitators can encourage other children to offer suggestions. The child with the name can give a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" if they like or don't like the name.

### Group discussion: The reason why we are here.

- Ask the children what they have been told about coming to this group.
- Explain to them who you are as facilitators, where you work and why you have been asked to run this group.

#### For example:

**“We work at a service which talks with children about different worries they might have and try to help them with these worries. For all the children we see, a lot of their worries are about things that have happened to them and their family. Those worries are about people in their family being hurt by someone else in their family. You have all been invited to come to this group as everyone in this group has had similar worries about people, sometimes also yourself, being hurt by someone in your family and perhaps outside your family. A lot of the things we are going to talk about and do together in this group have come from other children who have also had similar things happen to them.”**

- This doesn't have to be a long introduction but just enough so that the group is open about the reason this group is being held and why they have been invited.
- Children would have already been told, either by their parent/ carer or a worker but it is important to name it again at the start of the group so that children are reassured that everyone coming to the group has had similar experiences. They are not the only child who has experienced domestic and family violence and they are not alone.

### Group agreements

A brief discussion about agreed rules for the group should be discussed and recorded on cardboard and placed on the wall in the room.

#### **Group rules should include:**

- Everyone in this group should feel safe all of the time. This means that we have to keep away from some unsafe physical contact (pushing, hitting or rough play) and some unsafe words (swearing, put downs).



- Confidentiality or keeping secrets. The things that are said or written about in this group are really for the group members only. However if there is ever a time when we hear or you hear something that makes us concerned someone is unsafe we will need to speak to someone such as your mum. No one in this group should be made to keep a secret about anyone being unsafe.
- Everyone needs to stay in the group until it is finished. If you need to leave the group (leaving early, using the toilet) you must tell one of the group leaders. If you need a break from the group we have a mat you can go to and do the activity on your own but it is important that you don't leave the room. We have to know where everyone is all of the time until the group is over.

### Activity: Name Plaque

Facilitators hand out name cards for each child made beforehand. Each card has the child's name and the meaning of their name. The cards are read out and meanings discussed amongst the children. Children are invited to share information they may have about their name: Why they were called that name?/ Who named them?/ What they like about it?/ Do others in their family or outside their family share that name?/ Do they have a nickname?/ What name they would like to be called in this group?

Children are then asked to make a name plaque, paint their name and a design on the plaque. The plaques will be hung up in the group room during the time the group is on, a way of stating membership to the group.

The plaques are simply made by painting heavy rectangles of cardboard, craft foam or purchasing wooden plaques from craft stores. Ribbon or string is used to hang the plaque on the wall.



**NOTE: It may be necessary to contact parents/ carers prior to this exercise for the meanings of uncommon names. We have found the history behind these names, in terms of why children were named, interesting and special news to discuss with the children.**

### Activity: This is Me

The children are asked to tell us about what it's like being who they are at this time in their lives.

Give out large pieces of cardboard divided into four squares to each child. Alternatively, squares of calico can be used with markers.

For each square they are asked to write &/draw something about themselves they would like to share with the rest of the group.

The four squares can include:

- Someone I like to be with
- Something I like to do
- Somewhere I like to go to
- Something about me that is important to me

Each square is then put together using tape/velcro and placed on the wall as a group mural.

### Finishing Game: What's My Name

- **Children sit or stand in a circle and one of the facilitators has a soft ball/bean bag.**
- **One of the facilitators starts the game by throwing the ball to the other facilitator and saying their own name at the same time.**
- **When the other facilitator catches the ball they say the name of the person who threw it. They then throw the ball to a child in the group, saying their own name.**
- **The child who catches the ball says the name of the person who threw to them. They then throw the ball and say their name.**
- **The game finishes when everyone has been involved.**

NOTE: A large mat or children's play parachute are perfect to use for all group activities. They provide a meeting place that becomes familiar to all the children as the group progresses.

### Group closure

- Facilitators close the group by a final goodbye activity of simply asking the children to place their name tags in the basket before they leave the group space.
- If children are waiting for parents/carers to pick them up who may be running late it is a good idea to have another space away from the group space where children can colour in or read while they wait.
- Facilitators can start to clear the group space, signaling that the group has ended.



## Session 2: Finding Safety.

### Welcome back and Introductory game

Hand out name tags from the basket.

Children stand in a circle and a light ball or bean bag is thrown between them to see if they remember everyone's name as well as how the child described themselves the previous week.

### Reminder of group rules

Return quickly to group rules as a reminder from last week.

Ask if there needs to be any new rules and if so write them on paper stickers and place on the cardboard.

### Group activity: Safe Place

Facilitators ask children what "being safe" means to them.

As the children call out words and they are written on a large sheet.

Further questions can be asked and written on the sheet including:

**What does feeling safe mean?**

**How does your body tell you that you are not feeling safe?**

**How does your body tell you that you are feeling safe?**

**When do you feel most safe?**

**What are places where you feel safe?**

**Who are people who make you feel safe?**

**Do you have pets or favourite things that make you feel safe?**

Ask children to think of a place that feels safe for them. It can be a real place or a place they can imagine.

They first draw their safe place and then can make it as a diorama using cardboard boxes and craft materials.

A diorama is a three dimensional creation, simply made in a shoe box or other suitable container. Children are usually familiar with this art form and take over their creations, providing sufficient craft materials (craft paper, glue, scissors, crepe paper, felt, toothpicks, wool, etc.) are provided.

Ask the children to make a figure of themselves and place it where they feel they are the safest.

When the dioramas are finished, the children can describe their safe places, using the following questions to encourage discussion:

- What is the name of your safe place?
- Where is it?
- What is it about this place that makes it feel safe?
- Are you alone in this place or are there other people?
- Who are they?
- Is there anyone you would like to be there with you?
- If you need to think about this place, what is the first thing you remember about it?

Photographs of each diorama can be taken, again as a record for their folders.

The dioramas are then placed on a table or somewhere safe while the group continues.

### Island of Safety

- Start this activity by doing a movement activity with the children.
- Starting with the head or toe, encourage the children to make movements with different parts of their body.
- Wriggle toes/shake hands/roll head/sway from the shoulders/jump/turn the body/walk forward/ backwards/sideways.
- For the final movement ask the children to pretend to melt down, sinking to the ground and lying still. Place their hands on their stomach and notice them going up and down as they breathe.
- Facilitators count slowly backwards from 10 and ask the children to lie as still as they can, taking deep breaths in and out.
- At the count of 1 they can sit up and take a big stretch with their arms in the air.
- Children are then asked to sit together again on the circular mat/parachute as we are going to take a journey to a safe island.
- To assist with this imagination exercise sounds of the ocean can be played.
- A large piece of stretch material can be loosely wrapped around the circle to represent their boat.
- Each child is then given a small drum or other instrument so that we keep in time as we row to the island.
- After a few minutes of rowing facilitators call out that we have reached the island.
- Using guided imagery the facilitators take the children through a journey onto the island.



**NOTE:** Although there are many guided imageries that can assist this exercise, facilitators can also write something that best fits the children in the group. This exercise is really about facilitators improvising with the group such as naming one of the things that each child has already named in their safe place from the previous exercise as being part of this island.

Finally on this island they reach a treasure box and inside this box is something that belongs to each child. It can be a person, a pet, something they own, something they think is important to them. Whatever is inside their box makes them feel safe when they think about it.

Small cardboard treasure boxes are handed out to each child and using the craft materials they are asked to draw/make this item and place it in their box. When they are finished the boxes are closed and placed inside a larger box that belongs to the group.

The imagery continues by the children getting back into the boat and rowing back to where they are sitting now.

Facilitators lift the box into the centre of the group and each child takes out their box.

They can choose to share what is inside their box with the rest of the group or not.

Each box is then tied with ribbon and returned to the larger group box for safe keeping.



**NOTE: Our experience has been that children respond differently when asked to think about safety and safe places. Some children, because they now feel safe, have no difficulty taking the concept and eagerly name places in their lives that feel safe for them. Other children struggle with the 'Safe Place' exercise, both in the real world and their imagination.**

**We have found it useful to continue the concept of safety in this session by relying on children's imaginations. This is not to pretend that imagination replaces the real world rather that it has the power to change stories and constructs that the child feels restrained by. It develops a view of difference, of possibilities and of change.**

### Closing activity: Postcards

- Supply coloured cards, the size of a postcard. Stickers serve well as stamps.
- Ask the children to send a postcard to someone important to them from their safe place.
- They are asked to write a message or draw a picture of something they really appreciate about their safe place. It may be a part they enjoy/something they do there/something magical that happens there.
- Children then take turns showing their postcards before they are placed on a sheet of paper or pinned to a pinboard.

### Group closure

Facilitators close the group by a final goodbye activity of simply asking the children to place their name tags in the basket before they leave the group space.

If children are waiting for parents/carers to pick them up who may be running late it is a good idea to have another space away from the group space where children can colour in or read while they wait.

Facilitators can start to clear the group space, signaling that the group has ended.





## Session 3: My Tree

### Welcome back and Introductory activity

Hand out name tags from the basket.

Welcome all group members and ask them to take turns saying one thing that happened this week when they did something for someone that made them smile. It could be a member of their family, a friend, a teacher, a pet.

### Guided relaxation exercise: Tree Sway

- Imagine that you are a tree standing tall.
- Your roots go deep into the earth.
- Imagine these roots reaching down through your legs, through the bottom of your feet, into the earth, right into the centre where they are firmly planted.
- Reach out your arms as the branches of your tree - see how far they can go.
- A gentle breeze has come and you begin to sway - wider and wider.
- Now you are settling down as the breeze goes.
- Reach high with your arms into the air - take a deep breath and then drop your arms quickly saying "whoosh" as your arms go to the floor.
- Repeat this last action several times.

### Activity: My Tree

Facilitators introduce this activity by talking about family trees.

Family trees have the names of people in our family, including our ancestors.

This tree is somewhat different.

Different people in our lives give us different things: food, clothes, a place to live, being cared for, sharing fun times, etc.

Ask children to add their own ideas as a brainstorm and write them up on butcher's paper as ideas are called out.

Explain that this tree is about all the things that different people who are important to you have given you, including the ways they helped you when wrong things were happening.

When people found out that there was violence happening in your home they may have said things or done things that told you that it was wrong that you and other people in your family had been hurt.

Children are given green sticks (available from nurseries) which are used as branches and leaves and are asked to make their tree by writing the names of people and things that have been helpful in making them feel that they were listened to and made to feel safe.

Their words are written on leaves, pieces of green cardboard or felt cut out in the shape of a leaf. The leaves are then placed on the branches and a tree made by placing the sticks in a pot of clay (margarine or ice-cream containers are ideal as pots).

Ask children to then share some of the people and things they placed on their tree.

### Closing activity: Tree Dwellers

- Children are asked to think of what they might be if they lived in their tree.
- Using craft materials they can then make that symbol (e.g. butterfly, bird, star) and glue it to their tree.
- Alternatively, children can be directed to imagine they are a butterfly/bird living in their tree and make this figure. On the wings of their butterfly/bird (or other symbol) they are asked to write some of the qualities they bring to their tree.
- The trees are then placed on a table or somewhere in the group space for safe keeping.
- To finish this activity hand out copies of the book "My tree is Me" for each child and read the book. (Rosie's Place 2016)

### Group closure

- Facilitators close the group by a final goodbye activity of simply asking the children to place their name tags in the basket before they leave the group space.
- If children are waiting for parents/carers to pick them up who may be running late it is a good idea to have another space away from the group space where children can colour in or read while they wait.
- Facilitators can start to clear the group space, signaling that the group has ended.

## Session 4: Dealing with Worries

### Welcome back and Introductory activity

Hand out name tags from the basket.

### Charades

Have a set of cards with different actions.

Children take turns reading the card out loud and then doing a charade to fit what it says.

The other children in the group copy the action.

Cards can include:

- Tasting: sand/strawberries/ice cream/vinegar
- Seeing: the stars/spider/ sunshine/monster
- Hearing : laughter/favourite song/loud bang/scratching a black board
- Touching: soap/soft blanket/sharp needle/mud
- Smelling: flower/lemon/popcorn/disinfectant

### Group activity: Dealing with worries

Hand out the book, "I Wish for a Rainbow" to each child. (Rosie's Place, 2012)

Facilitators either read the book or ask children if they would like to read a page each.

Explain that the book was written after talking with children who had lived with domestic violence and wanted to have a say about some of those experiences.

When you have to live with violence in your family there can be lots of worries.

- **Worries about all members of your family**
- **Worries that people might get hurt**
- **Worries that people might get into trouble**
- **Worries that you might have to leave your house.**
- **What children told us the most was that they spend a lot of time listening, watching and worrying about what had happened or what was going to happen.**

After reading the book ask children what they thought about the book.

- Were there any pages in the book that they particularly felt they could relate to their own experiences?
- Ask the children how it is for them to talk about these worries?
- Does it make them bigger or smaller?
- Does it help to share these worries with other children who understand?

### **Group exercise: Shake it off and move it around**

Ask participants to stand up and give their bodies a shake. Start with their hands, then legs, then head and then put it all together.

Then ask them to take some deep breaths, right from the bottom of their stomach and breathe out, counting slowly to 3.

Repeat this three times.

Have another shake.

### **Group activity: Making Plans**

Facilitators discuss with children that people find ways to deal with their worries as best as they can.

Sometimes they try to think about other things, or get busy doing something they like to do, or talk to people about their worries.

Having a plan about what to do with worries can help people not feel so anxious or alone.

Each child is given 10 footprint shapes and a large piece of paper (butcher's paper or cardboard). On the first footprint they draw a picture of themselves when they are worried.

NOTE: Bear cards (St Lukes Resources) can be used instead of children drawing themselves.

On the next 8 footprints they are asked to write down or draw some of the ways they deal with worries.

The final footprint is a picture of themselves without worries. Again Bear cards can be used instead of children drawing themselves.

Facilitators work with the children to name and draw their worry plans.

At the end of the exercise the children share what they have written. Where there are similar ideas the footprints are gathered together.

The final group picture becomes a "Plan for dealing with worries" which is a compilation of all the ideas the children have raised. This plan can then be placed on the wall for the rest of the group program.

NOTE: This final plan signifies a hoped for outcome for when worries disappear. How do they imagine things would be different/ are different for them when the worries are no longer around. Usually there are children in the group who are no longer bothered by worries at this stage. This exercise signifies the things that have already changed for them, evidence to others that worries can disappear.

### **Closing activity: Walking the room**

Ask the children to walk around the room at their own pace and in their own patters.

Walks can include:

- Trudging through mud
- Walking on hot sand
- As if you have a string attached to your nose
- As if you had a string attached to your fingers
- As if you are walking on clouds
- As if you are carrying a big rock
- As if a hundred balloons are carrying you
- As if you are worry free
- As if you are really proud of yourself.

## Group closure

Facilitators close the group by a final goodbye activity of simply asking the children to place their name tags in the basket before they leave the group space.

If children are waiting for parents/carers to pick them up who may be running late it is a good idea to have another space away from the group space where children can colour in or read while they wait.

Facilitators can start to clear the group space, signaling that the group has ended.



## Session 5: Body Maps

### Welcome back and Introductory game

Hand out name tags from the basket.

Children think of a way to say hello that is non-verbal.

Facilitators start the game by saying: My name is .....and something I can do with my body is ... and does an action.

The next person repeats what the person before has said and done and then says their own name and does another action.

The next person has to repeat the names and actions of everyone who has gone before them and then state their own name and do an action.

Each time a movement is shown the entire group repeats the movement.

The game finishes when everyone has had a turn.

### Body outlines

- Hand out copies of the gingerbread person for each child.
- Ask the children to brainstorm all the different feelings we have inside our body.
- Write them up and then decide what colour, shape, symbol etc to use.
- Hands out copies of Jellybeans and Popcorn (Rosie's Place 2017) to help them.
- Ask them to fill in their body shape according to where in their body these different sensations/feelings are.



How do I feel and what happens next?

Place large sheets on the floor to represent different colours to match feelings.

They can be :

- **RED** for angry
- **GREEN** for calm/happy
- **YELLOW** for worried
- **BLUE** for sad.

Read out some of the different scenarios and ask the children to ask what the child might FEEL has happened.

- Ask them to stand on the coloured paper for that feeling.
- Then ask them what the child might THINK has happened.
- What then could the child do?

## SCENARIOS

1. You are standing in the playground and a classmate keeps staring at you but not really showing a face, angry or friendly...just staring.
2. You have just got a new bike and you want to give it a try. Your mum warns you to be careful on the road. A big truck speeds up behind you and you panic and hit the curb. You have hurt your knee but worse your front wheel is bent.
3. You are walking home from school with a friend but you are thinking about an argument you had with your mum this morning. Your friend asks if you have any stickers to swap but you don't answer. Your friend gets really angry and says to you, "Just get lost. Some kind of friend you are".
4. Your whole family has over slept and you are late for school. You just make it into school as the bell rings and then you realise that you have forgotten to bring in your homework again. You know your teacher told you there are no more chances.
5. Your brother is really annoyed with you. You have lost his spinner and he slams his door and tells you that you are a loser.

6. Your teacher has given you an afterschool detention. She says that you spoke rudely to her and she is going to ring your mum. You know this will cause more stress for your mum who is already doing too much and is already stressed.
7. You have made something special at school for your mum. You take it home and hand it to her but she says she is tired and will look at it later.
8. You have just finished a drawing in class that you are pretty proud of. Your friend at the next table looks over and rips it out of your book. She just laughs at you and says, "What's this?"
9. You come home from school, drop your bag and rush out to play in the street with the neighbours. Your mum calls you back and asks you, "What about your homework?". As you are almost out of the door you answer back. "I haven't got any" but you know this isn't true.
10. Two classmates are standing in the playground. As you walk past them they burst out laughing.

### **STOP...BREATHE...THINK...DO**

Give out a pre written sheet explaining steps to calm down. The typical steps are STOP...THINK...DO but add an additional step of STOP...BREATHE...THINK...DO.

- Use pictures downloaded from internet to add meaning to the steps.
- Practice the steps with the children several times.
- Return to the scenarios when the children went into the yellow or red zones and ask them
- to use the calming down sequence sheet and practice how they could move from the red or
- yellow zones to the green.

Finish with the “Breathing for Diving” activity.

Have everyone stand in a circle and read out the following instructions:

- Pretend that you are about to jump into the water and dive to the bottom
- of the pool.
- You need to hold your breath for 3 seconds
- Count in your head by thinking: one hundred, two hundred, three hundred.
- Then quickly swim to the top of the water and breathe out slower this time, count to five seconds.
- Repeat diving to the bottom and swimming to the top for five times.
- At the end of the activity ask the children to pretend they are getting out of the pool
- and have to shake off the water.
- They then lie down on their pretend towel and just rest.

### Group closure

Facilitators close the group by a final goodbye activity of simply asking the children to place their name tags in the basket before they leave the group space.

If children are waiting for parents/carers to pick them up who may be running late it is a good idea to have another space away from the group space where children can colour in or read while they wait.

Facilitators can start to clear the group space, signaling that the group has ended.

## Session 6: Being myself

### Welcome back and Introductory game

Hand out name tags from the basket.

### Strengths Concertina

- Have a set of the St Luke's Strengths Cards (St Luke's Resources) and place them around the floor.
- Ask each child to select a card that they think describes something about them.
- They then take turns showing their card and the strength they have selected.
- They are asked to give one example of something they have done that tells them this is a strength they have.
- After the first child has started the next child must remember what the previous
- child said and repeat it.
- They then show their card, the strength they have selected and give
- one example of something they have done that tells them this is a strength they have.
- As the game continues each child must repeat the name and strength of the previous children and then state their own name, their strength and one example of something they have done which tells them this is a strength they have.
- The game finishes with the last child repeating the names and strengths of all the other children and then their own strength.
- During this last round the facilitator can write each child's name and their strength on a large sheet of cardboard and place on the wall.

### Group exercise: Hopscotch

Hand out templates of a Hopscotch for each child.

For each square there are different things written to reflect the ways families, including children, move away from violence in different ways.

1. **Having safe places to go**
2. **Having safe people to talk to**
3. **Trusting when my body tells me how I feel**
4. **Finding ways to deal with worries**
5. **Finding ways to stay calm when upset or anxious**
6. **Being with friends**
7. **Letting adults know the things I don't like**
8. **Treating people with respect**

Ask the children to fill in their own hopscotch, facilitators assisting with this process. When everyone has finished ask the children to share their hopscotch with the rest of the group.

Facilitators then place a large sheet of calico on the floor which has a hopscotch drawn on it.

Ideas already stated by the children are then called out and written on the calico. The children then take turns going over the hopscotch.

### Group exercise: Letting people know

- A set of cards are in a box held by the facilitators.
- The box is passed around and children take turns selecting a card.
- They are asked to show the action/feeling that is written on the card.
- The rest of the group have to guess what feeling/action is being displayed.
- Everyone in the group then copies the action.
- When the right guess is made another child then selects a card and the same process continues.

**NOTE: There are different cards from St Luke's Innovative Resources that can be used for this exercise as well as movement and similar activity cards.**

Alternatively, cards can be produced by facilitators that could cover: different animals, different feelings, different jobs etc.

If using action cards, examples can include:

- Waking up late for school and having two minutes to get to the bus stop.
- Peeling and eating an onion.
- Trying to find a needle in a haystack.
- Catching stars as they fall from the sky.
- Keeping a small lizard in the palm of your hand.
- Being bitten by a crab
- Lazing in the sun as a sleepy cat
- Having an itchy back

The facilitator closes the game by choosing one final action that involves body movements, such as being someone who is going to run as fast as they can on the spot: this involves stretching to get ready, taking deep breaths, waiting for the "go" signal, running as fast as they can, getting to the finish line and celebrating their win, bending over and again taking deep breaths before getting applause from everyone around them

### **Group closure**

Facilitators close the group by a final goodbye activity of simply asking the children to place their name tags in the basket before they leave the group space.

If children are waiting for parents/carers to pick them up who may be running late it is a good idea to have another space away from the group space where children can colour in or read while they wait.

Facilitators can start to clear the group space, signaling that the group has ended.

## Session 7: Being Proud

### Welcome back and Introductory Game

Hand out name tags from the basket.

Group game: A proud moment

Facilitator starts the activity by saying “My name is ... and something that makes me proud is...”

As with previous games the next person repeats what the facilitator has said and then says their own name and something that makes them proud.

The game continues, building on the being proud list until everyone has had a turn.

### Group activity: Supports of Strength

Children are asked to think of the things they possess in their lives which give them support. Developing the idea of moving away from material possessions to more personal attributes should be encouraged in this discussion.

Such strengths can include: things they like, people, pets and things that make them feel safer or stronger at times when they need support, dreams and hopes they think about, keepsakes, special skills, interests, achievements, awards or certificates that recognise their skills.

The following activities are some ways their ideas can be documented.

Frame It: Using magazines, drawing pictures, craft materials, words, etc. children make a picture of their supports in a collage form. The collage is then made into a picture and framed by a cardboard frame. Inexpensive frames can be found in disposal shops to finish the work.

Bunches of Flowers: Children are asked to make a flower for each person or possession or strength they have described. They can illustrate the answer as they wish or write words to describe that support.

Children may also make a flower to represent themselves. The flowers are then tied into a bunch with ribbon. In group sharing time children may choose one flower and talk about it - what might this possession or person say about the child?

Children write their descriptions of each flower on the central circle of craft paper. Preparation beforehand, in terms of pre-cutting the paper and wire ties, make this exercise flow easily and produces multi- coloured flowers in mass abundance.

**NOTE: The flowers can be made as follows: Fold several squares of crepe/tissue paper in half, and then half again to make a smaller square. Fold again, on the folded corner to make a point. Cut out a curved petal shape opposite the folded point. Open out. Place a smaller circle of craft paper on the top of the sheets. A thin piece of craft wire/untied paper clip is placed through the centre of the papers to tie them together. The wire is then tied around a thin stick and fastened with sticky tape.**

Mandala: either individually or as a group mandala.

- If their many supports could be drawn as one thing what would it be?
- Using craft materials, children can then make this representation into a mandala.
- Tying two sticks together as a cross can easily make a mandala.
- String, wool or ribbon can be wound from one point to the next, resembling a spider web.
- From the string lines different symbols can be tied (feathers, pictures, ornaments, etc.) to express strengths identified by each child. The main point is that each mandala is unique to its creator.



## Group activity: My Adventure

Children are asked to think of an adventure they would like to take in the future, including the people they would choose to take with them.

Small canvas bags are handed out to each child and they are asked to pack for this adventure.

Apart from people, they are only allowed to take five things with them.

Using craft materials they make their five things and place them in their bag.

They then take turns describing their adventure to the group.

Questions to encourage ideas include:

- **Where would they go?**
- **How would they get there?**
- **Who would they take?**
- **What is it about them and their relationship with you that you would take them?**
- **What would they take with them?**
- **What is the best thing about this adventure?**

Pieces of cardboard can be given out resembling postcards. The children are asked to draw a picture of themselves and their fellow travelers on this adventure.

What is one message they would write on this postcard about being in this future picture?

Children then take turns taking out their postcard.

The postcards are then pinned onto a board in the group space.

## Group closure

Facilitators close the group by a final goodbye activity of simply asking the children to place their name tags in the basket before they leave the group space.

If children are waiting for parents/carers to pick them up who may be running late it is a good idea to have another space away from the group space where children can colour in or read while they wait.

Facilitators can start to clear the group space, signaling that the group has ended.

## Session 8: Endings and Beginnings

NOTE: This session is extended a further 30 minutes, parents/carers and other guests are invited to the last half hour.

Welcome back and Introductory game

Hand out name tags from the basket.

### Group game: Everyone Who

- Cushions are placed in a circle at the edge of the mat/parachute.
- As with musical chairs there is one cushion less and a facilitator stands in the middle of the circle.
- The start the game by saying: "Everyone who... (and adds a description, e.g. everyone who has brown hair).
- Everyone who fits that description has to move to another cushion.
- They are not allowed to sit on a cushion either side of them but move across the room or a few cushions away from them.
- The person without a cushion then stands in the middle and calls out the next description.
- Descriptions can include: everyone who has blue eyes/brown hair/ ate breakfast this morning/ likes singing etc.
- Facilitators are encourage to change the tone of the statements to things more attuned with the group and what is has achieved: Everyone who has shared their worries learnt how to slow down their breathing/work out plans for staying calm/ know they have strengths/are proud of who they are.

## Group Activity: Knowing My Rights

Facilitators introduce the concept of Children's Rights.

Hand out copies of the Convention of the Rights of a Child (United Nations, 1989) which have many child friendly versions.

Facilitators discuss how this group has talked about the ways that violence in the home takes rights away from children and ask the children to name what some of those rights might be.

Brainstorm with the children what they see are important rights for children who have experienced domestic and family violence that they should never have taken from them.

Hand out squares of calico and ask each child to take one of the rights and make it into a picture.

Using velcro, the squares are then joined to make a banner.

Use a wooden dowel to hang the banner in the room.

## Finishing group activities

We have found the following activities meaningful ways to close the group at this final session.

One or more can be used, depending on time constraints and personal preferences.

### Star Gazing

Read out the "The Children's Star" (Peled & Davis, 1995) (See page 157.) Hand out gold stars with each child's name and ask the group members to write anything they would like to say to that child on each star.

### Star Qualities

A separate sheet is handed out and children fill it in, giving their ideas about what they will remember most about everyone who attended the group.

## Friendship Bracelet

Wooden beads are given to the children. They are asked to paint and decorate the beads, giving a single bead to every other child in the group. The beads are then strung together to form a bracelet.

## Final evaluation

It is important for children to give their feedback about the group. An example of an evaluation form is at the end of this program. Children may choose to do this as a whole of group activity or individually.

## Sharing with an audience

At this stage parents/ carers and other invited guests arrive for the final goodbye ceremony.

In turn, each child is asked to talk about one of the things we have discussed/made in the group and present it to the audience.

Members of the audience are encouraged to ask questions of each child about the group, giving their thoughts about what they have heard and have been shown by the group members.

Certificates of Achievement for completing the program and a small "gift" that represents something they feel about the value of the group and all participants is handed out.

Party Time!!!!

### “The Children’s Star”

(Adapted from *Groupwork with Children of Battered Women*,  
1995 Einat Peled & Diane Davis)

Once upon a time, in a far away and mountainous country, lived many children. Each child lived in a house with his or her family.

Because the land was so very steep, it was dangerous for the children to wander or play too far from their homes. This meant that none of the children could ever play with other children outside their family.

It became very lonely. If people in the family were fighting with each other, there was no where to go. No one else to talk to. One night, a beautiful coloured light appeared in the windows of all the houses of all the families in the mountains. This wonderful light awakened the children. They got out of bed and were very surprised to find that none of their mums or dads were awakened by this light. So the children went outside to see the beautiful light. It was so strong that some children could see other houses and even other children. Forgetting that it was night and how they had all been told never to wander away, the children started walking toward the light.

Now the shimmering light was really a star that had come very close to the mountains, over a valley. Children came from all over the mountains to the valley, drawn and guided by the light. They all played and danced and sang. Each one felt very happy and safe and, most important, not alone.

As they were leaving, the star burst into a thousand million little pieces. Each of the children took a piece of the star as they headed home in the early light of dawn.

Each child quietly went back to bed. Some of the children woke up in the morning and thought they had dreamed about playing with other children under the beautiful light of the star. But then, they all found the pieces of the star they had taken with them and knew that this wasn't a dream and they weren't alone anymore. And each time they looked at the star pieces, they remembered being together with the other children, and how happy that was.

**APPENDIX: EVALUATION FORMS****Children's Group Evaluation Form-Pre group**

What do you think about coming to a group?

Really good

Good

Not sure

A bit worried

What are three things you would like to do or talk about at group?

Are there any things you would not like to do or talk about at group?

How would you describe how things are at home for you at the moment?

Really good

Good

Not so good

Poor

What might be some worries you have at the moment?

Do you know any other children who are going through the same kinds of things as you?

Just circle the one that fits for you.

A few

Not many

Someone

No one

How many people would you say you can talk to about the things in your life that worry you?

Just circle the one that fits for you.

A few

Not many

Someone

No one

How easy do you find it to say what you are feeling?

Easy

A bit hard

Really hard

Impossible

Do you find it easy to make friends and keep friends?

Easy

A bit hard

Really hard

What are three things that you think are good things in your life?

How would you like things to be better for you?

Can you tell us one thing you like to do or are good at that we might be able to bring into the group?

## Weekly Group Evaluation Form

Did you enjoy the group today?

Really enjoyed      A bit enjoyed      Not sure      Didn't enjoy

How much did you learn?

Lots of things      A few things      A little bit      Nothing new

Did you make new or different friends?

Yes      No

Did you feel safe in the group?

Yes      Sometimes      No

Did you feel like you were part of things today?

Yes      Sometimes      No

How easily could you say what you wanted to say today?

Yes      Sometimes      No

Did you feel the workers listened to you?

Yes      Sometimes      No

Thank you for your time



## Children's Group Evaluation Form-Post group

Group: \_\_\_\_\_ Term: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel about being in this group?

Really enjoyed    A bit enjoyed    Not sure    Didn't enjoy

What did you enjoy the most?

Did you make new or different friends?

Yes

No

Did you feel safe in the group?

Yes

Sometimes

No

Did you feel the workers listened to you and respected what you said?

Yes

Sometimes

No

Was there anything about the group you didn't like or would want to change?

Yes

No

What changes would you suggest?

Thank you for your time

**GROUP STRENGTHS & STRESSORS: WORKERS' PRE-POST OBSERVATION**

Start Date :

Finish Date:

Child's Name:

**+2: Clear Strength, +1: Mild Strength, 0: Adequate, -1: Mild Stressor, -2: Serious Stressor**  
**To do so, circle the appropriate factor at intake and at case closure. Complete these**

**ratings within 1-2 weeks of intake and again within 1-2 weeks of service termination**

	START					CLOSURE				
	STRESSOR		STRENGTH			STRESSOR		STRENGTH		
<b>SAFETY</b>										
+ CAN IDENTIFY 3 SPECIFIC ADULTS OUTSIDE HIS/HER HOUSEHOLD WHO HE/SHE CAN TALK TO IF FEELING UNSAFE	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ CAN IDENTIFY POSITIVE STRATEGIES TO INCREASE SAFETY	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
<b>STRENGTHS</b>										
+ CAN IDENTIFY PERSONAL STRENGTHS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ CAN DESCRIBE PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ CAN IDENTIFY STRENGTHS IN OTHERS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
<b>SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM</b>										
+ DISPLAYS PRIDE IN OWN WORK/ ACHIEVEMENTS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ WORKS INDEPENDENTLY	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ CAN DESCRIBE WHAT HE/SHE HAS CREATED	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
<b>INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION</b>										
+ INTERACTS POSITIVELY WITH PEERS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ INTERACTS POSITIVELY WITH ADULTS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ FOLLOWS INSTRUCTIONS FROM LEADERS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ PROBLEM-SOLVES POSITIVELY	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ TAKES TURNS AND WAITS WHEN NECESSARY	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ INTERACTS COURTEOUSLY	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
<b>FEELINGS</b>										
+ WAS ABLE TO IDENTIFY FEELINGS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ WAS ABLE TO TALK ABOUT ANY WORRIES OR CONCERNS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ FELT HEARD AND BELIEVED	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
+ INCREASED CONNECTION WITH SELF AND OTHERS	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2

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