



COURAGE GROUP

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COURAGE GROUP

**Helping Veterans Who Have Experienced
Military Sexual Trauma Move Forward Together**

VETERAN WORKBOOK

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Original 1995 • Revised 2020

This manual was supported by a clinical educator grant from the VA South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC). The contents of this manual do not represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or the U.S. government.

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SESSION 1

UNDERSTANDING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

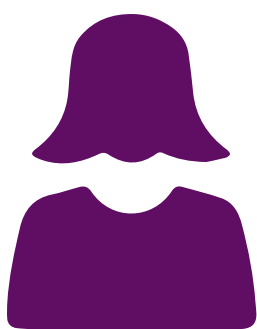


Veterans of all genders and ages, ranks, branches and eras of service have experienced military sexual trauma (MST). It is a senseless act that can cause emotional and physical pain. Healing takes time but is possible.

SESSION 1

UNDERSTANDING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Military sexual trauma (MST) is any sexual harassment or sexual assault that occurred during a Veteran's military service.



1 IN 4

WOMEN



1 IN 50

MEN

— VETERANS —
REPORT A HISTORY OF MST

COMMON STRUGGLES ARE



Strong Emotions



Anger/
Frustration



Shame/
Embarrassment



Family & Relationship
Problems



Difficulty
Trusting Others



Physical
Problems & Pain



Sexual
Concerns



Avoidance &
Isolation



Work / School
Problems

**MST IS
NEVER
YOUR FAULT**



**MST HAPPENS TO VETERANS OF ALL
GENDERS • RACES • AGES
SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS
RANKS • BRANCHES
SERVICE ERAS**

HELP IS AVAILABLE

VA has free MST-related services for Veterans. You may be able to receive these services even if you are not eligible for other VA care. No documentation of MST is needed. Visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp to learn more about MST-related recovery programs and services at VA.

SESSION 1

UNDERSTANDING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Healing from the Impact of MST

Survivors may have different reactions to experiencing MST. Healing from the effects of MST also varies for each survivor and may depend on:

- **Your premilitary experiences** (*who you are, how you live, prior trauma, and how you deal with stress*)
- **The experience of MST** (*relationship with offender(s), timing of MST during military service, repeated exposure*)
- **Social support** from chain of command, peers, family, and friends
- **Access to medical, mental health, and legal services**
- **Society's beliefs about sexual trauma** (*such myths as, "Only 'certain' kinds of women get sexually assaulted," "Men can't be raped"*) **and blame from others**
- **Self-blame** (*having beliefs like "It was my fault," or "I caused this"*)

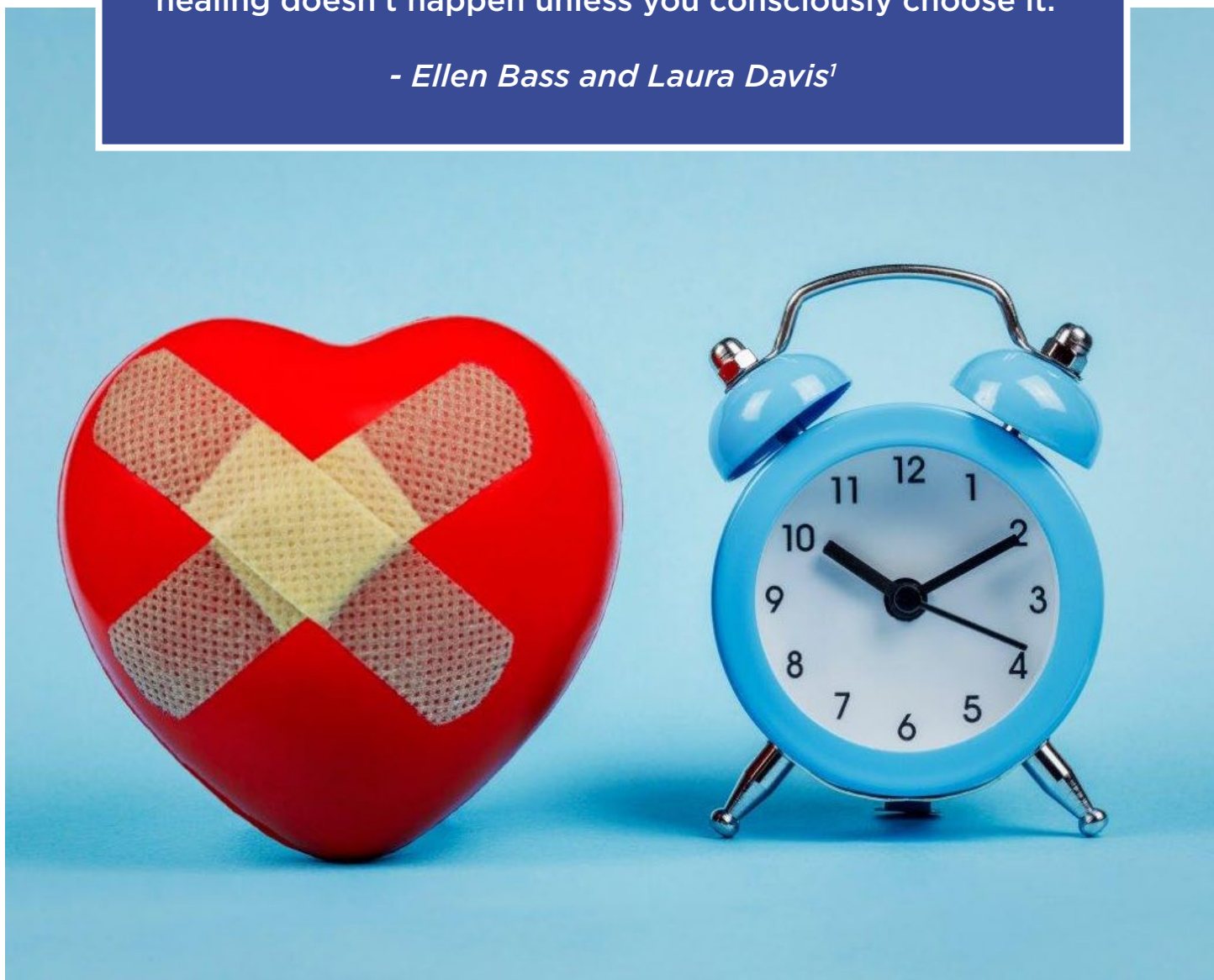


SESSION 1

UNDERSTANDING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

“People say that time heals all wounds, and to a certain extent that’s true. Time will dull some of the pain, but deep healing doesn’t happen unless you consciously choose it.”

- Ellen Bass and Laura Davis¹



¹ Bass, E. & Davis, L. (2008). The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, Fourth Edition. New York (NY): Collins Living. p. xxiv

SESSION 1

UNDERSTANDING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Finding the Courage to Heal

The Courage Group is based on cognitive and behavioral therapy. This group will help you:

- **Learn coping skills** that promote emotional healing, healthy habits, and the pursuit of a meaningful life without limits.
- **Discover something new about you.** There is something powerful about sharing your experiences and hearing the stories of others.



SESSION 1

UNDERSTANDING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

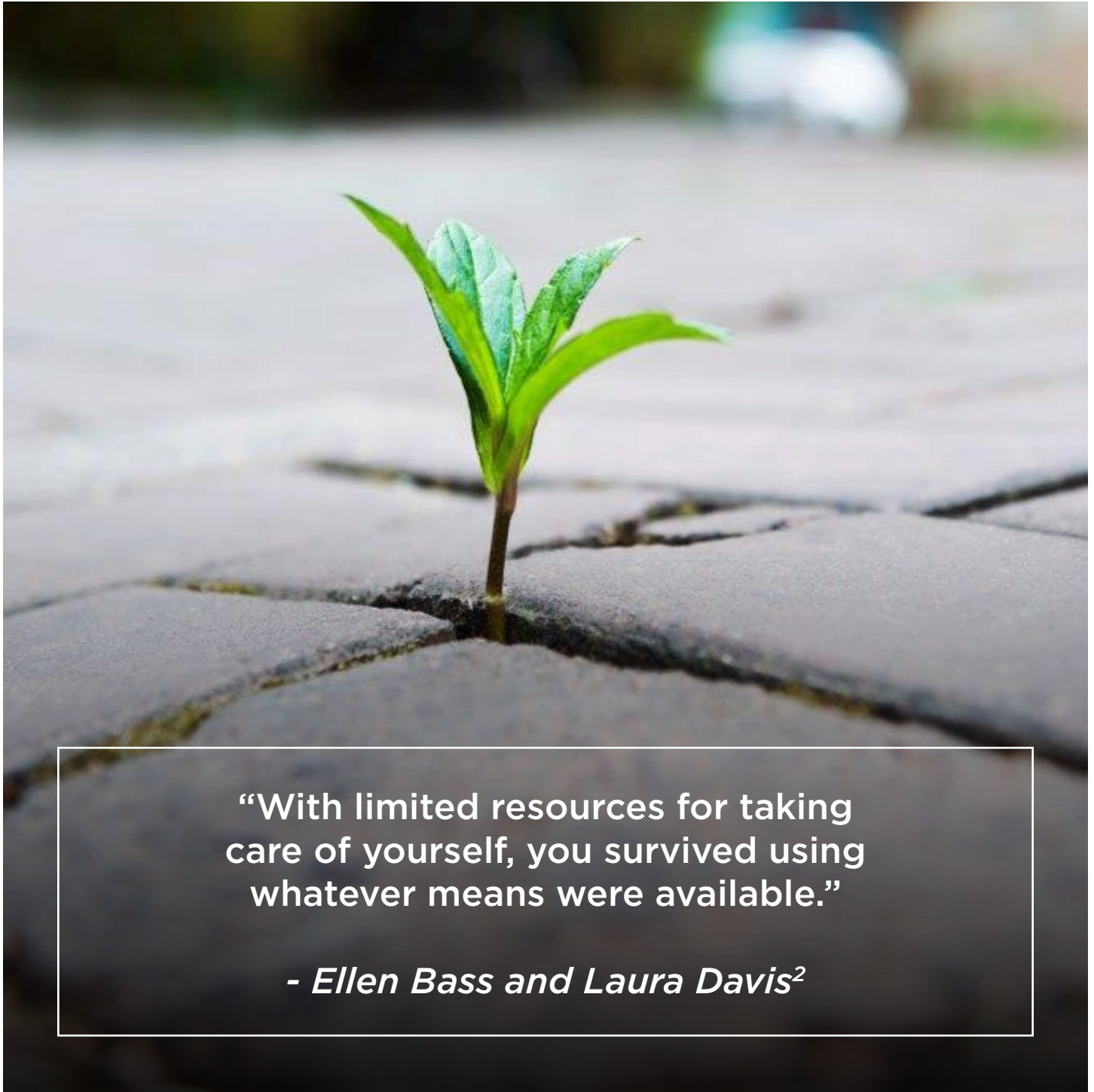
Planning Your First Steps

Think about how the experience of MST has changed your life. Consider your health, relationships, work, and daily life.

What do you imagine your life could be like a few months from now? How do you think this group might help you?

SESSION 2

SURVIVING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA



“With limited resources for taking care of yourself, you survived using whatever means were available.”

- *Ellen Bass and Laura Davis*²

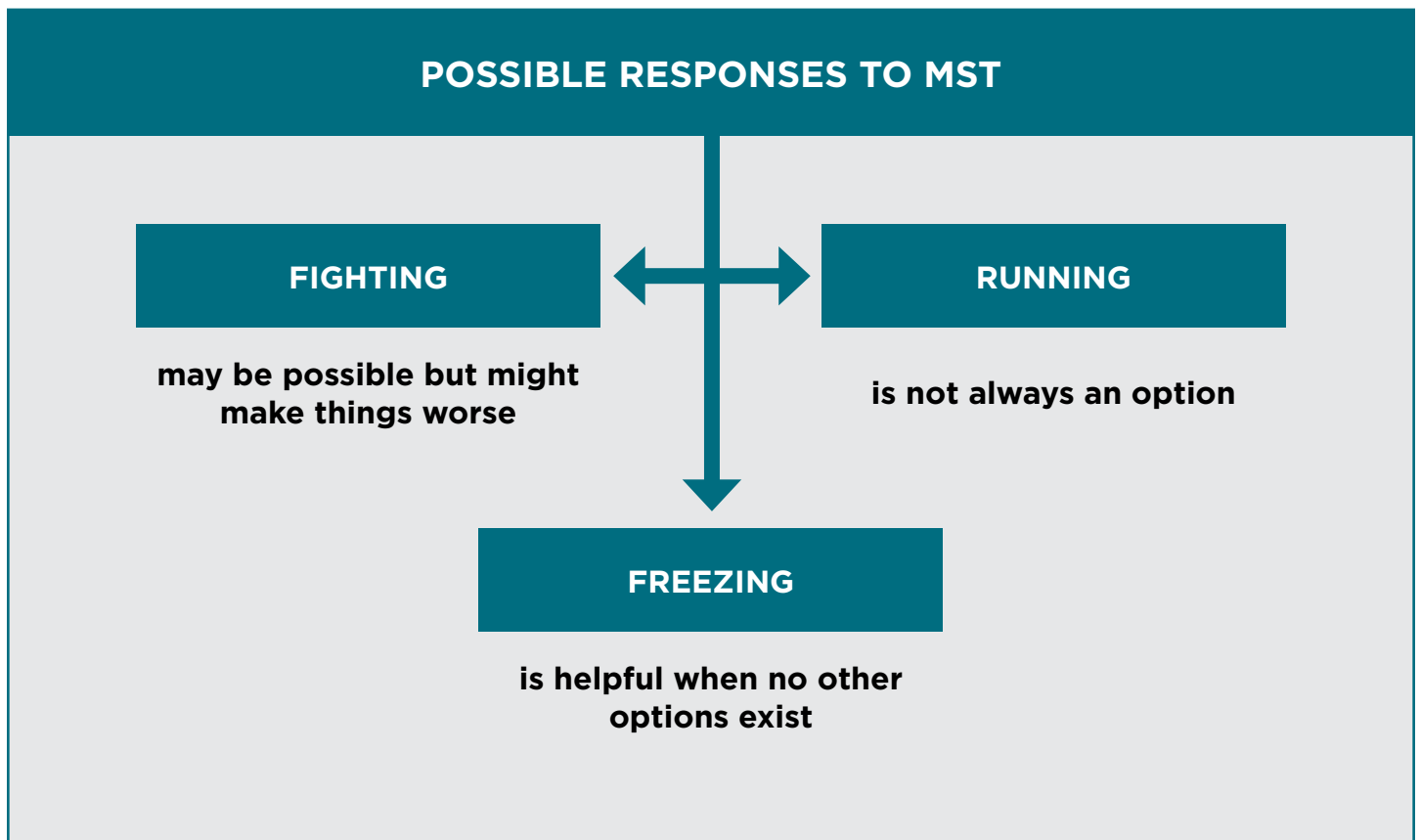
² Bass, E. & Davis, L. (2008) *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, Fourth Edition*. New York (NY): Collins Living. p. 12

SESSION 2

SURVIVING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Following Your Instincts

When we are in danger or afraid, our brain starts our **fight-flight-freeze** response. It is a **fast-acting** response, meaning that we may act before thinking. This helps us try to get out of situations with as little pain as possible.



SESSION 2

SURVIVING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Coping with the Impact of MST

Think about strategies that you may have used at the time to cope with the impact of MST. Circle all that apply. Feel free to add anything else that isn't listed.

DENIAL

*acting as if something
didn't happen*

MINIMIZATION

*saying something
wasn't a big deal*

HUMOR

*using laughter to
hide how you feel*

FORGETTING

*trying not to remember
distressing memories*

SPACING OUT

*not being present
in the moment*

DISSOCIATION

*disconnecting from your
body to lessen the pain*

RATIONALIZATION

*giving reasons for why
something happened*

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

*thoughts of hurting
yourself to escape pain*

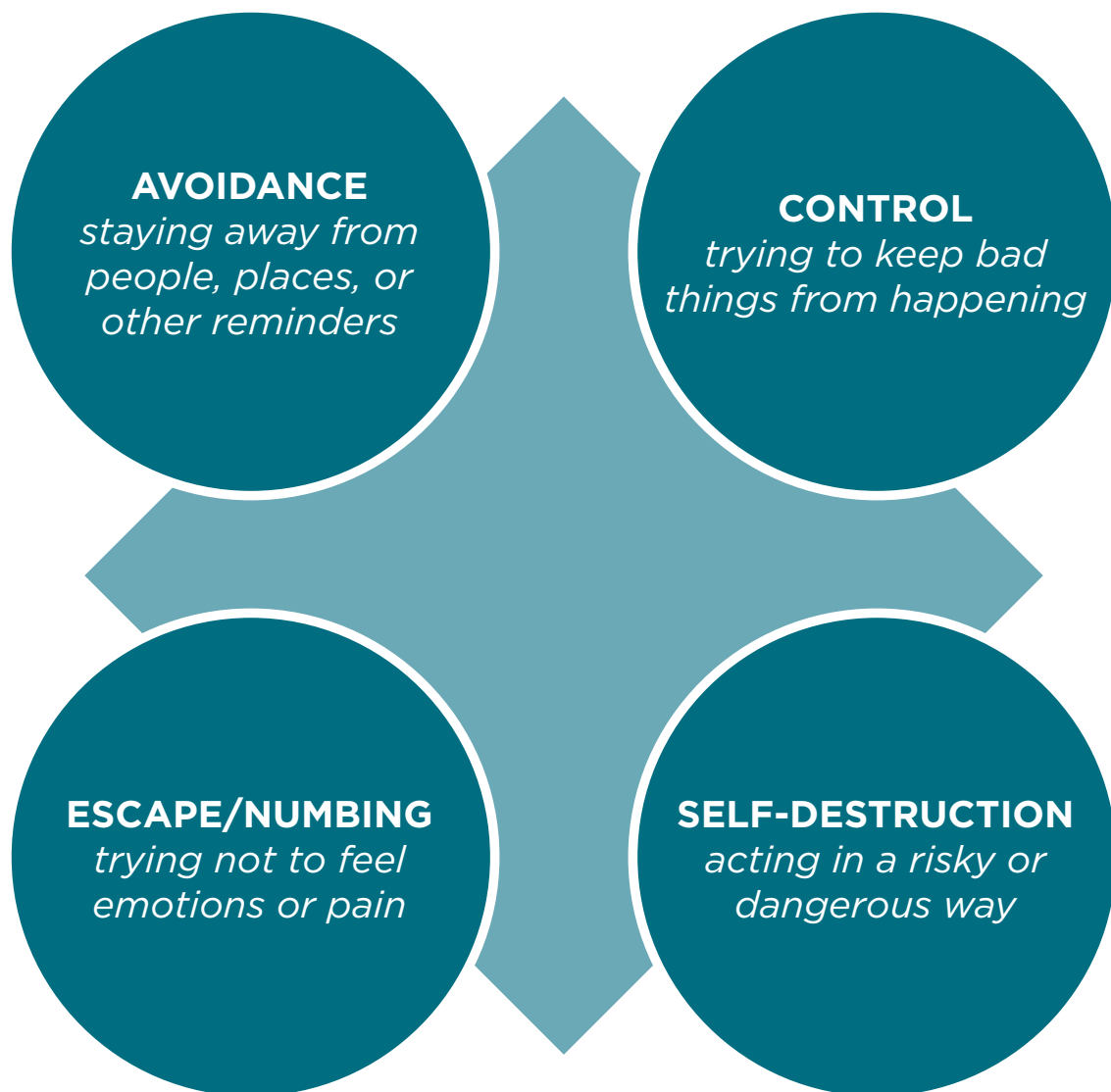
Other strategies (please specify):

SESSION 2

SURVIVING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Protecting Yourself After MST

These are ways that survivors of MST may try to protect themselves from being hurt or feeling pain. **Have you tried any of the following behaviors to protect yourself?**



SESSION 2

SURVIVING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Honoring Your Inner Strength After MST

Write at least three inner strengths that have helped you deal with the experience and impact of MST.

1) I am _____

2) I am _____

3) I am _____

4) I am _____

5) I am _____

6) I am _____

TRY THIS!

Over the next week, practice saying your inner strengths to yourself in the mirror. Think about how it makes you feel. Keep track of whether these feelings change.

SESSION 3

COPING WITH STRONG EMOTIONS



It is natural to want to get rid of “bad” emotions and keep the “good” ones. On the basis of your military experience, you may also feel pressure to “control” or not show how you feel. While you can’t control how you feel, you can choose how you react.

SESSION 3

COPING WITH STRONG EMOTIONS

Purpose of Emotions

HAPPINESS

Happiness draws you close to people, activities, and things that matter.

SADNESS

Sadness comes after a loss or a blocked goal.

FEAR/ANXIETY

Fear/anxiety warns you about danger or threats. They signal the need to take action to keep yourself safe.

ANGER

Anger is a response to being attacked, threatened, or mistreated. You may also feel angry when you're kept from doing something important.

LOVE

Love tells you when someone or something is attractive. This draws you toward the person/object.

SHAME

Shame tells you when something about you or your actions seems not right. What is "right" depends on your beliefs or the beliefs of others.

GUILT

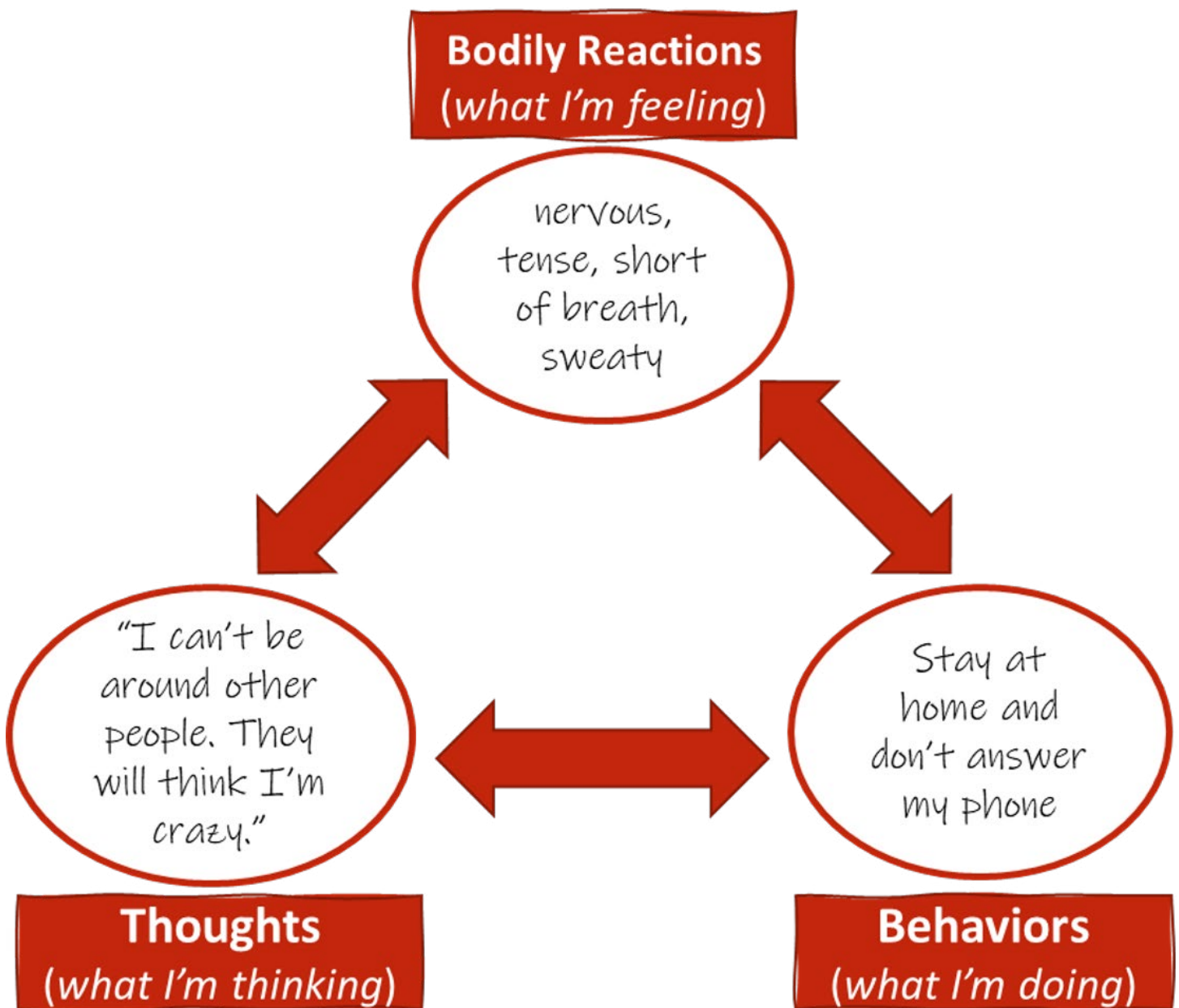
Guilt tells you when your actions don't fit what you believe or value.

SESSION 3

COPING WITH STRONG EMOTIONS

Identifying How You Feel

An emotional experience can be divided into how you *think*, *act*, and *feel*. Each part influences how you react to a situation. Sorting an emotional experience into these three parts can make you feel less overwhelmed.



SESSION 3

COPING WITH STRONG EMOTIONS

Staying Ahead of Stress

What reminders of MST make you feel anxious or stressed?

| EXTERNAL TRIGGERS | INTERNAL TRIGGERS |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| | |

How can you cope ahead of time? Circle all that may apply.

| HEALTHY DISTRACTION | PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES | SELF-EXPRESSION | RELAXATION |
|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Texting a friend• Playing video games• Watching TV• Listening to music | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Walking/Running• Gardening• Riding motorcycle• Fishing | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Doodling• Cooking• Dancing• Singing | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deep breathing• Meditation• Yoga or Tai Chi• Massage |

Other ways to cope:

SESSION 3

COPING WITH STRONG EMOTIONS

Changing Your Emotional Experience

| SITUATION | HOW I FELT | WHAT I THOUGHT | WHAT I DID | DID IT WORK? | WHAT ELSE CAN I DO? |
|--|--|----------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Example: car cuts me off in traffic</i> | <i>mad, sweaty, face red, racing heart</i> | <i>"What a jerk"</i> | <i>blew my horn and yelled at driver</i> | <i>no just made me madder</i> | <i>take deep breaths or listen to music</i> |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

SESSION 4

UNDERSTANDING IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT



Many survivors believe that MST is their fault when it isn't. It is never okay for someone to abuse their power or use violence to hurt another person. Still, you may feel some responsibility. Exploring what happened is one way to combat feelings of self-blame.

SESSION 4

UNDERSTANDING IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT

The (Self-)Blame Game

There are many reasons why a survivor of MST might blame himself or herself. For example:

- Victim-blaming is when others (including offenders) say it was your fault.
- You might have been punished when others found out or they didn't believe that it happened.
- You may believe you could've stopped it.



SESSION 4

UNDERSTANDING IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT

Finding A Place for Blame

When you blame yourself, you may focus on what you “could have, would have, should have” done differently. It may be hard to see the many things you had to do to make it through the incident(s). The next exercise will help you think about your experience of MST and where blame may fit.

BLAME VS. RESPONSIBILITY

The difference between responsibility and blame is intention.

1. Thinking about the people involved, were they trying to harm you?

2. Thinking about your actions, were you trying to get hurt?

3. Could chance or unknown causes have played a role in what happened?

SESSION 4

UNDERSTANDING IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT

Finding A Place for Blame Continued

ROLE OF THE OFFENDER(S)

There are some common reasons why offenders target their victims, but survivors may never know why they were chosen.

1. Are you 100% sure that you know the motives of your offender(s)?

2. What may be other reasons this incident(s) happened?

NATURAL RESPONSES DURING TRAUMA

Your body may have reacted with pleasure, but that does NOT mean that you enjoyed it.

1. How did you respond (or usually respond) when it happened?
Did you fight back, run away, or freeze?

2. If your body experienced pleasure during the trauma, were you expecting that?
Did you want that to happen?

SESSION 4

UNDERSTANDING IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT

Finding A Place for Blame Continued

IMPORTANCE OF MILITARY CONTEXT

There are some common reasons why offenders target their victims, but survivors may never know why they were chosen.

1. What were your reasons for joining the military?

2. When you were in the military, were there things that made it hard to deal with the impact of MST or tell someone? *Consider where you were, why you were there, and how women and men were treated.*

SESSION 4

UNDERSTANDING IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT

A New Understanding of Blame

Thinking about the last exercise, has your view on blame changed?
Complete the following sentences.

What I learned in today's group is _____

I did not have responsibility for _____

Next time I start to blame myself, I will _____

SESSION 5

GRIEF AND LOSS



Grief follows loss, and loss may come with trauma.

In the military, there is a focus on putting the mission first. This may have left you with little room to process when a loss occurred. It's also hard to talk about loss after the experience of MST. The topic may make others feel uncomfortable.

SESSION 5

GRIEF AND LOSS

What It Means to Grieve

THE 5 STAGES OF GRIEF



SESSION 5

GRIEF AND LOSS

Grieving for What Should Have Been

Think about what you may have lost because you experienced MST. Consider how MST may have changed your military career plans, health, ability to work, and relationships.

Next, imagine what your life might have been like if you had never experienced MST.

TRY THIS!

If you have suffered any losses, focus on them for a moment. Notice what feelings show up and think about where you might be in the grieving process.

SESSION 5

GRIEF AND LOSS

Honoring What You Lost



What are some things you can do to honor what was lost, destroyed, or taken away? If it helps, you can also think about what you have gained since experiencing MST.

SESSION 6

ANGER



Anger is a common reaction to the experience of MST. Survivors may feel angry at the offender(s) for what happened. Or they may feel angry with themselves for not being able to stop the incident. Anger is a powerful emotion that can help or hurt the healing process.

SESSION 6

ANGER

The Price of Anger

Anger can be a powerful healing tool. It can also become destructive when it is turned inward or used to lash out at others. This is when anger can hurt those closest to you.

Can you think of a time when your anger *helped* you or others?

What about a time when your anger *hurt* you or someone else?

SESSION 6

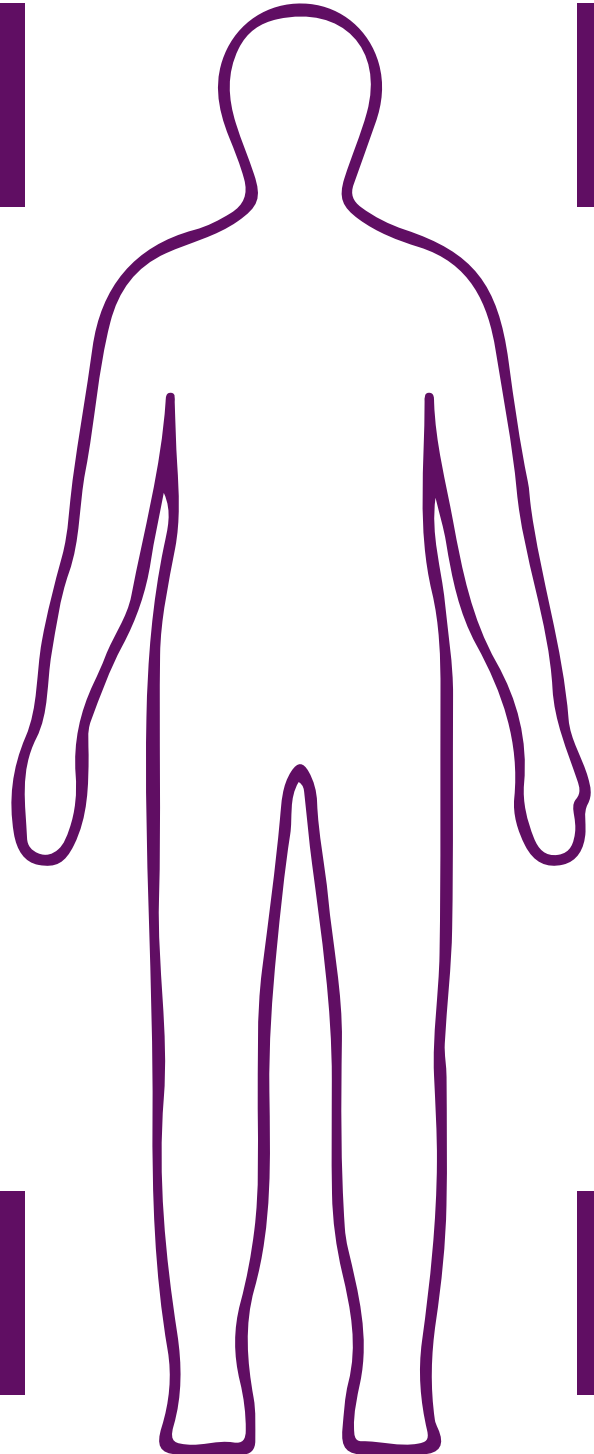
ANGER

The Experience of Anger

Anger is a stress reaction.

Anger is a response to threat or harm. It causes rapid changes in your body that prepare you to **fight, flight (run), or freeze.**

Mark on the figure where you notice changes in your body when you get angry. For example, you may *color your face red to show it as “flushed” or your hands blue to show them as “sweaty.”*



SESSION 6

ANGER

The Dark Side of Anger

Anger and aggression are not the same.

Anger is a strong feeling of annoyance or dissatisfaction. Aggression is hostile or violent behavior. You can feel anger without being violent.



Rage is intense anger that is explosive, aggressive, and loud.

Rage is easily triggered and may lead to unwanted behaviors like fighting. It often feels like you're out of control.



Learn to embrace anger and control the behavior.

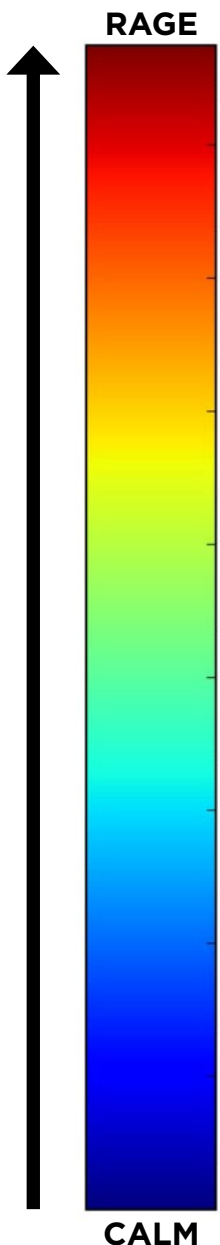
SESSION 6

ANGER

How to Control Your Anger

You don't want to get rid of feeling anger. It helps you know when something goes wrong. Think of better ways to cope with your anger or express it more effectively.

Fill in the table. When I feel _____, I can _____.

| | | |
|---|------------|--|
|  <div>RAGE</div> <div>CALM</div> | FURIOUS | |
| | ANGRY | |
| | FRUSTRATED | |

SESSION 7

TRUST



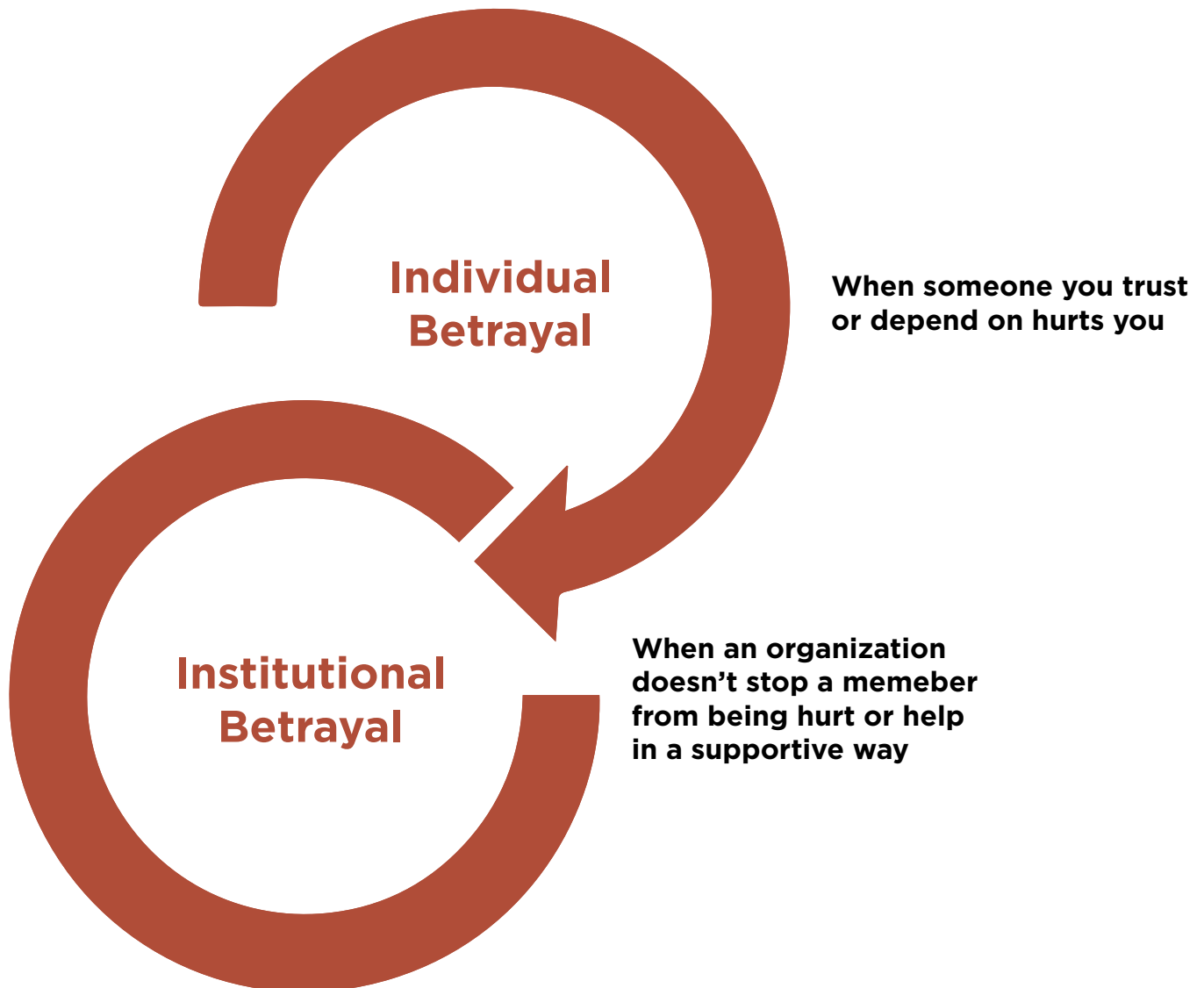
Trust can be easy to break and harder to repair after MST. You might start to second-guess yourself and believe you have poor judgment. It may become difficult to take others at their word. You might also “play it safe” to keep yourself from being hurt again.

SESSION 7

TRUST

Betrayal and MST

MST can be more painful when you know or trust the offender(s). This experience brings up feelings of betrayal for many survivors. You can also feel betrayed by those who don't help or support you afterward.



SESSION 7

TRUST

Trust Isn't All-or-None

It is protective to see trust as something you either give completely or not at all. **But have you thought about how trusting in this way may affect you in the long run?**



| <i>PROS</i> | <i>CONS</i> | <i>PROS</i> | <i>CONS</i> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | | |

SESSION 7

TRUST

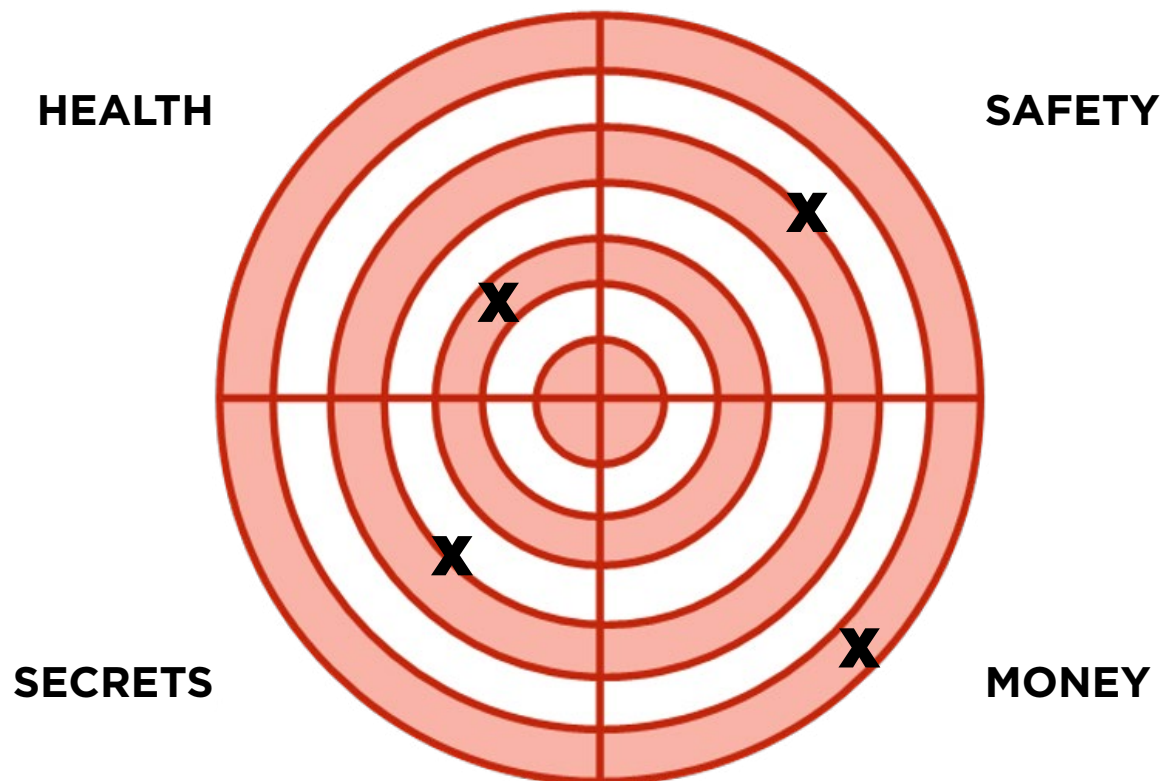
Trust Is a Moving Target

In this exercise, write down two people you tend to trust. Then consider how much you trust them with your personal safety, health, secrets, and money. The more you trust the person in an area, the closer the “x” should be to the bull’s eye.

Example:

DENISE

(NAME)



SESSION 7

TRUST

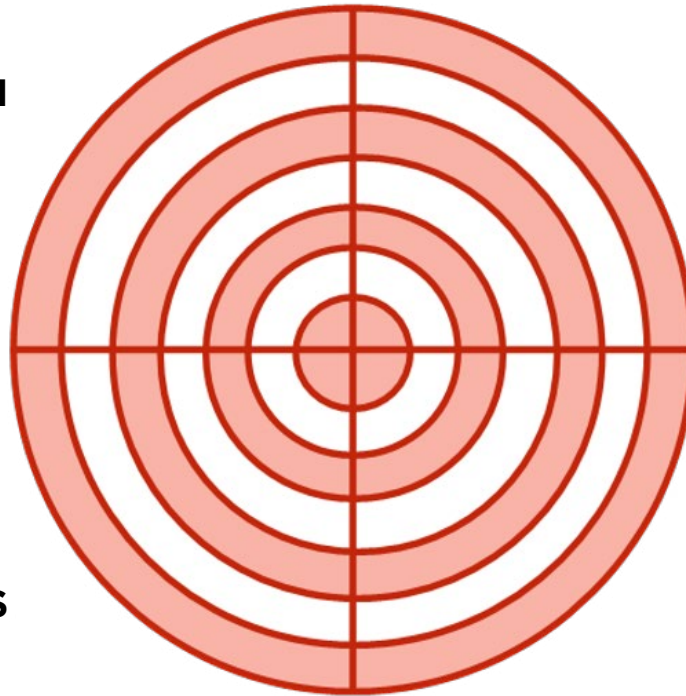
(NAME)

HEALTH

SAFETY

SECRETS

MONEY



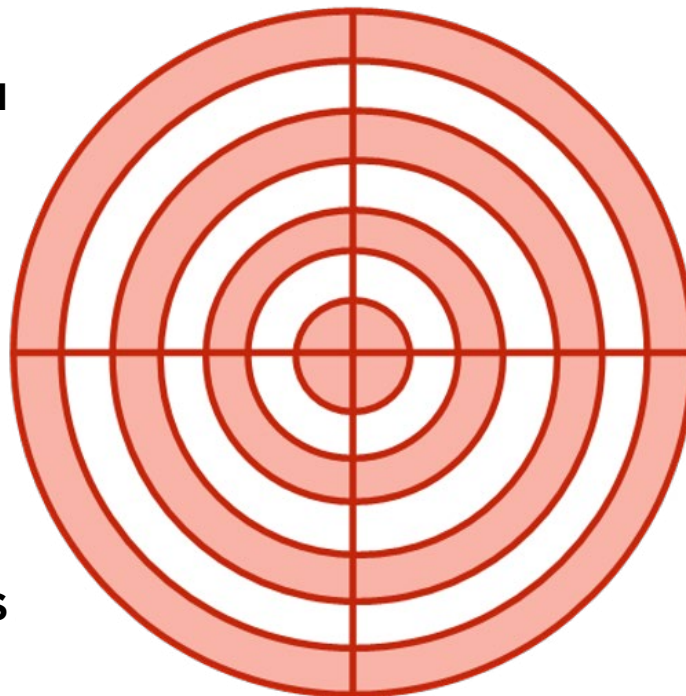
(NAME)

HEALTH

SAFETY

SECRETS

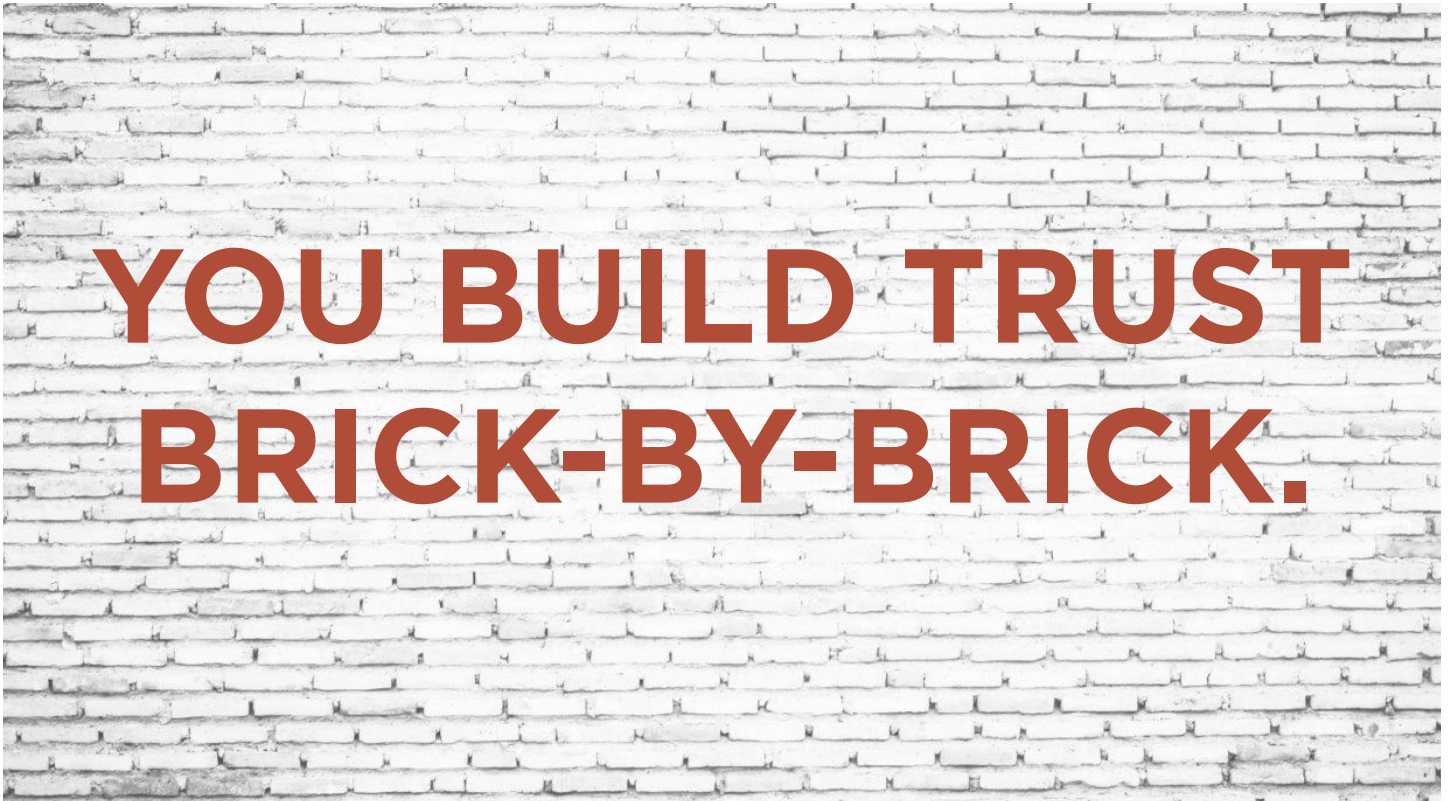
MONEY



SESSION 7

TRUST

Learning to Trust



Trusting others (and even yourself) takes time. Here are a few suggestions to keep in mind as you work on trusting others.

- **START SMALL.** Ask people to do simple tasks before moving to harder ones; slowly share information about you with others.
- **BE FAIR.** Don't ask people to do impossible tasks.
- **KEEP TRACK.** Be mindful of how well people follow through on their commitments.
- **DON'T GIVE UP SO QUICKLY.** Give people a real chance to earn your trust.

SESSION 8

SELF-ESTEEM



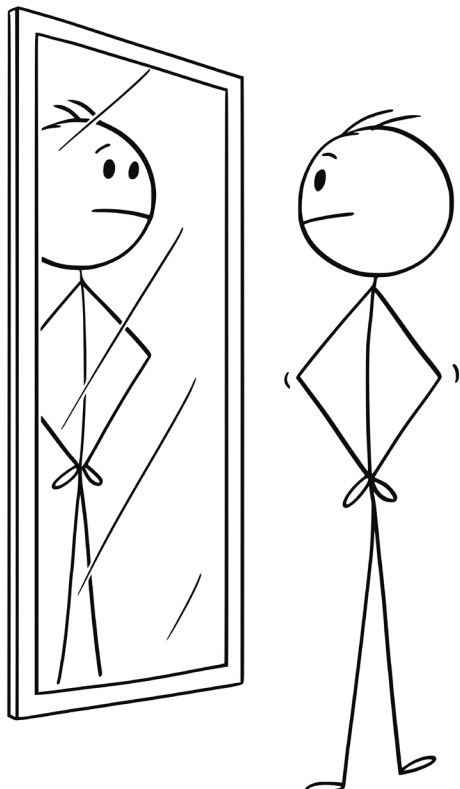
The experience of MST can alter how you feel about yourself. For example, you may feel unlovable or damaged. It is also common to become more critical of yourself. You can begin to quiet this inner critic by learning to show yourself kindness.

SESSION 8

SELF-ESTEEM

Who Are You?

Who are you? In a few sentences, describe how you see yourself, not who you want to be or who you should be. Write about who you believe you *really* are – the good and the bad



Now think about where this self-image comes from. How much of it comes from messages you have received from others? What role does the experience of MST or the military play in how you see yourself?

SESSION 8

SELF-ESTEEM

Thanking Your Inner Critic

Everyone has an inner critic - a voice inside that judges everything we say and do. You may not realize it, but your inner critic is trying to help you. It tries to push you past your limits and keep you from making mistakes.

What is your inner critic trying to help you do?

Practice thanking your inner critic. Write a few words letting your inner critic know that it may not always serve you well, but it has good intentions.

SESSION 8

SELF-ESTEEM

A Letter of Compassion

What is something that you don't like about yourself? After you experienced MST, you might have found that there were things you no longer liked about yourself. Try writing about an issue that has made you feel bad about yourself or "not good enough" since the incident.

Next, imagine someone who loves and accepts you no matter what. This could be a real person or an imagined person. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and weaknesses. This friend loves you exactly as you are, including your flaws. He or she knows your life story and is kind and forgiving toward you.

Now, write a letter to yourself from this friend. With unlimited compassion, what would he or she say to you about your "flaw"? This letter isn't to tell you what you should or shouldn't do (that is, give advice). It is about support. What words of kindness could this friend use to give you the support and encouragement you need to do your best?

SELF-ESTEEM

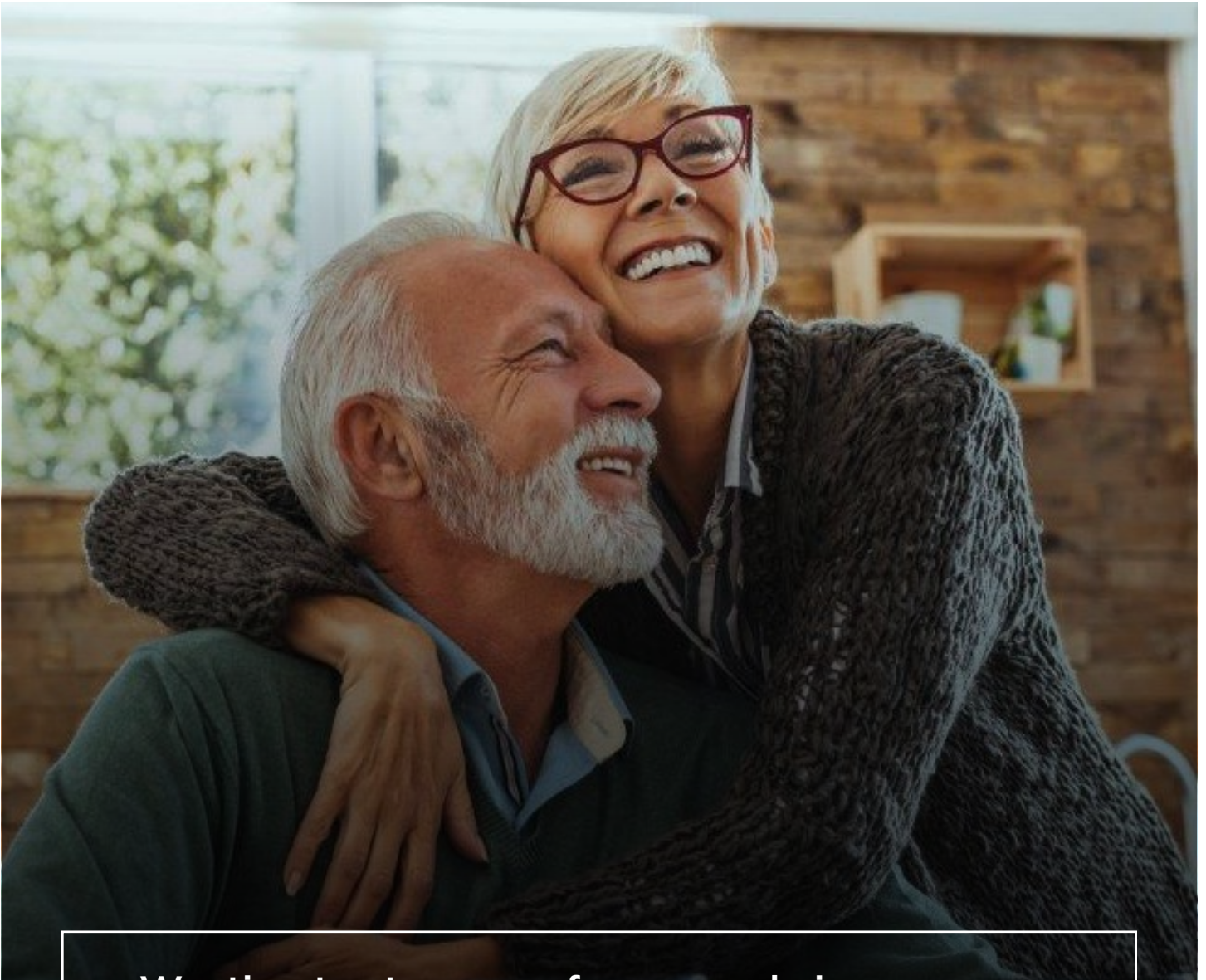
[illegible]

SELF-ESTEEM

[illegible]

SESSION 9

RELATIONSHIPS AND INTIMACY



Wanting to stay away from people is a common response to the experience of MST. Relationships are built on trust. When MST happens, you might find it hard to get close to others. Learning how to communicate your needs can lead to improved, meaningful relationships.

SESSION 9

RELATIONSHIPS AND INTIMACY

Healthy Intimacy



Intimacy is feeling **CLOSE** and **CONNECTED** to someone else.

What are different ways to show intimacy to ...

Family and children:

Friends:

A partner or spouse:

SESSION 9

RELATIONSHIPS AND INTIMACY

Setting Limits

Boundaries are limits to what you will and won't do. They are limits to what you will and won't accept from others. Survivors of MST may have trouble setting and keeping healthy boundaries.

Think of someone with whom you have less healthy boundaries. For each light, you will write a behavior that you want him or her to:

**KEEP
DOING**

DO LESS

**STOP
DOING**

SESSION 9

RELATIONSHIPS AND INTIMACY

How to Communicate Your Needs

Communication is key in a relationship. It is important to say what you want and need from others. Learning to be assertive can help with sharing your needs and boundaries.

When being assertive, it matters what you say and how you say it. Practice asking someone to do the dishes. Use different words, tone, and body language.



WORDS

Explore different ways to make the same request.

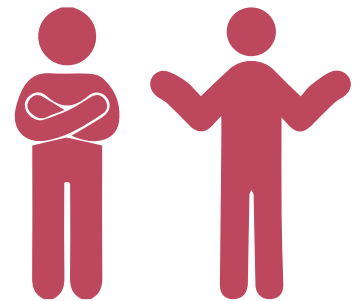
For example, say “Do the dishes” vs. “Will you do the dishes?”



tone

Say “Will you do the dishes?” two to three times, placing the emphasis on a new word each time.

For example, “Will you do the dishes?” or “Will you do the dishes?”



BODY LANGUAGE

Use your body to express an emotion then while saying “Will you do the dishes?”

For example, you could make an angry face and cross your arms.

SESSION 10

BREAKING THE SILENCE



There may be healing in sharing your story when you are ready. Friends and family may understand you better or feel more connected to you. Most importantly, it shows other survivors that they are not alone.

SESSION 10

BREAKING THE SILENCE

The Power of Sharing Your Story

Have you ever tried to share your experience of MST with anyone else? This is often hard to do because ...

- “I didn’t want to seem weak.”
- “I was too embarrassed and ashamed. I didn’t want others to know what had happened to me.”
- “I didn’t think anyone would believe me.”
- “I feared for my life. I was scared that it would happen again or be worse next time.”
- “I didn’t know what to do. I was afraid of losing my career and everything I had worked for.”

Whether you have told others or not, list some reasons why it might be helpful to share your story.

SESSION 10

BREAKING THE SILENCE

How to Share Your Story

FEELING SAFE IS KEY!

YOU get to **choose** to whom you tell your story. Before you do, consider who has **earned** the right to hear it.

Are there people in your life that you trust? Someone you have shared personal things with before? List their names.

What is special about that person or people you listed?

SESSION 10

BREAKING THE SILENCE

How to Share Your Story Continued

Now, pick one person from your list and describe how you would tell him or her. When would be a good time and place? What would you say? How would you want him or her to respond?

What do you hope comes from sharing? Do you have any concerns about telling this person? Be realistic.

SESSION 10

BREAKING THE SILENCE

What to Expect When You Share Your Story

Telling a therapist is not the same as telling a loved one. Loved ones and friends may not know how to respond. They may:

- Feel confused, shocked, hurt, angry, or guilty
- Want to take actions against the offender(s)
- Find it hard to believe at first
- Remain silent or unsure of how to comfort you

**WISDOM COMES FROM LEARNING.
LEARNING COMES FROM EXPERIENCE.
EXPERIENCE COMES FROM MISTAKES.**

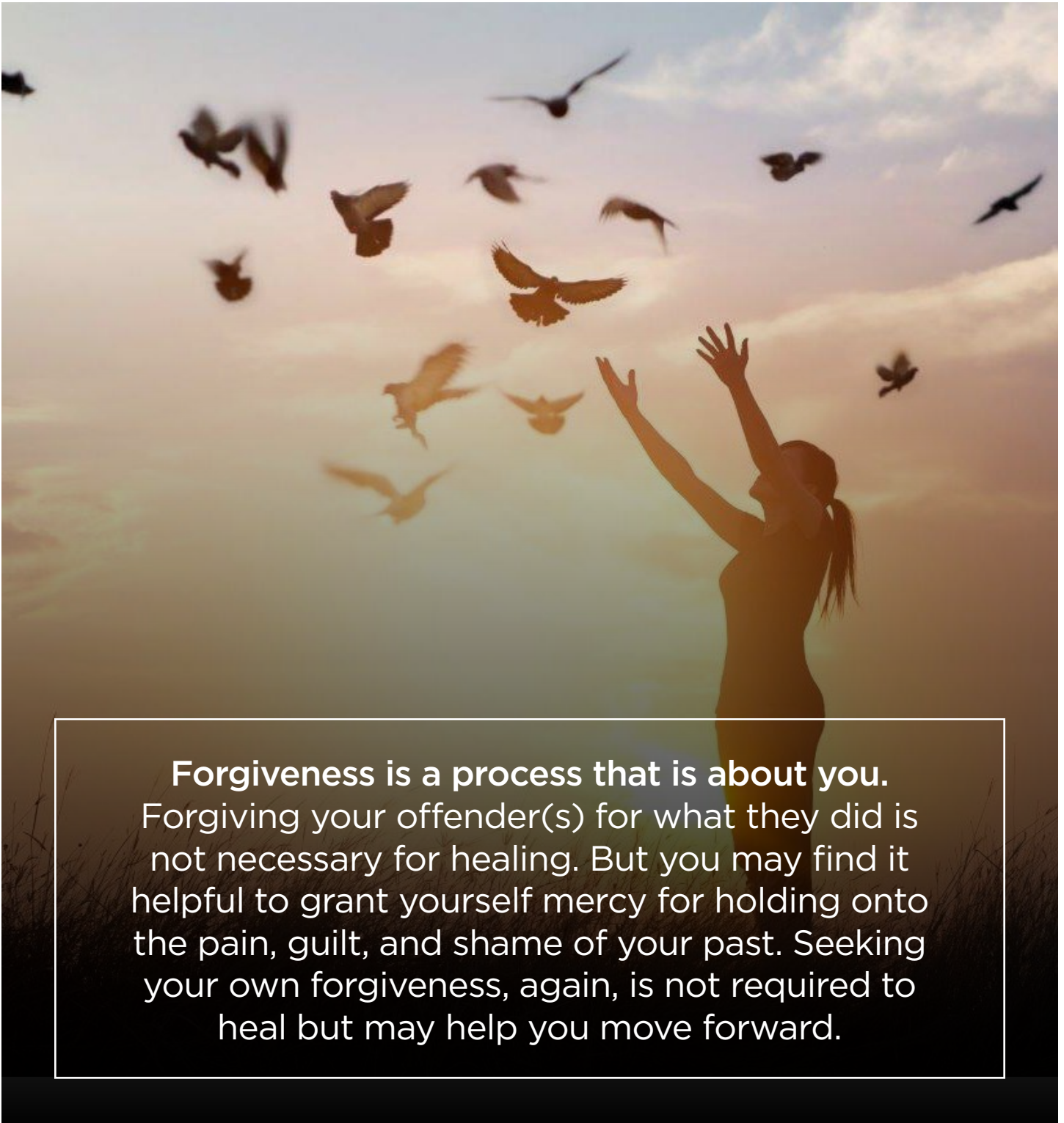
If you don't get the reaction you were hoping for, ask yourself:

- Why did I choose to tell this person in the first place?
- Was this the best time and place to tell this person?
- Should I have stopped the conversation before it got to this point? Would that have helped?
- What has this experience taught me?

SESSION 11

SELF-FORGIVENESS

a choice to show mercy to someone who has hurt you (including yourself)



Forgiveness is a process that is about you. Forgiving your offender(s) for what they did is not necessary for healing. But you may find it helpful to grant yourself mercy for holding onto the pain, guilt, and shame of your past. Seeking your own forgiveness, again, is not required to heal but may help you move forward.

SESSION 11

SELF-FORGIVENESS

What Is Forgiveness?



FORGIVENESS IS ...

NOT forgetting what happened

NOT excusing what the offender(s) did

NOT wishing or seeking revenge

FORGIVENESS IS ...

Deciding to overcome the pain of being wronged

Letting go of anger, resentment, and shame

Giving compassion, whether or not it has been earned

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FORGIVE YOURSELF?

SESSION 11

SELF-FORGIVENESS

How to Forgive Yourself

PHASE 1: The Uncovering Phase

To begin, think about an issue for which you would like to forgive yourself. Is it that you are still blaming yourself for the incident? Are you carrying around guilt or shame for how you've been dealing with what happened?

Anger is a common reaction to feeling disappointed in ourselves. **How angry do you feel right now from 1 (not angry) to 10 (very angry)?** _____

**Are you tired of feeling this way?
How has it been affecting your life? Is it time for a change?**

SESSION 11

SELF-FORGIVENESS

How to Forgive Yourself Continued

PHASE 2: The Decision Phase

What makes it hard for you to forgive yourself on this issue?

Describe how things might be different if you decide to forgive yourself one day.
Be specific.

SESSION 11

SELF-FORGIVENESS

How to Forgive Yourself Continued

PHASE 3: The Work Phase

Everyone has a story. Write down a few points about what life was like for you growing up. How has that shaped the person you are today? What was life like for you when this issue first became a problem?

You can't change what happened.

But you can change how you respond to it.

Are you willing to bear the pain of your past instead of running from it?

SESSION 11

SELF-FORGIVENESS

How to Forgive Yourself Continued

PHASE 4: The Deepening Phase

When you reach this phase, you begin to feel emotional freedom. You may discover a new meaning to life and treat yourself with greater compassion.



You don't have to wait to give yourself the "gift" of forgiveness. You can think of ways to begin taking better care of yourself starting today.

SESSION 12

MOVING FORWARD



You have reached the final session. It is important to reflect on your experience. Consider the following:
“Since starting the group, ...”

- **My biggest achievement has been...**
- **Three important skills I have learned were...**
- **What I found most meaningful was...**
- **One important thing that I’ve learned was...**
- **When I think about the person I am today, I am...**

SESSION 12

MOVING FORWARD

Planning for Your Future

Setbacks are a normal part of recovery. Planning for them will help you stay on track and not go back to unhelpful habits.

When setting new goals, use **SMART** guidelines to make them clear and achievable.

1

SPECIFIC

What do I want to accomplish?

2

MEASURABLE

How will I know when it's accomplished?

3

ACHIEVABLE

How can the goal be accomplished?

4

RELEVANT

Does this seem worthwhile?

5

TIME BOUND

When can I accomplish this goal?

YOUR WELLNESS PLAN

What are your goals moving forward?

What steps and skills can you use to meet your goals?

What obstacles might get in your way and how can you address them?

Who can help you move forward with this plan?

YOUR WELLNESS PLAN

How The VA Can Help

The **VA** provides **free, confidential treatment** at every VA hospital and Vet Center. You may qualify for MST-related care even if you are not eligible for other VA care.

MST coordinators are at all VA facilities and can assist you with getting into care. (For information on VA benefits, visit <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/index.asp>).

Managing a Crisis

The **Veterans Crisis Line** is a 24/7 free, confidential hotline.

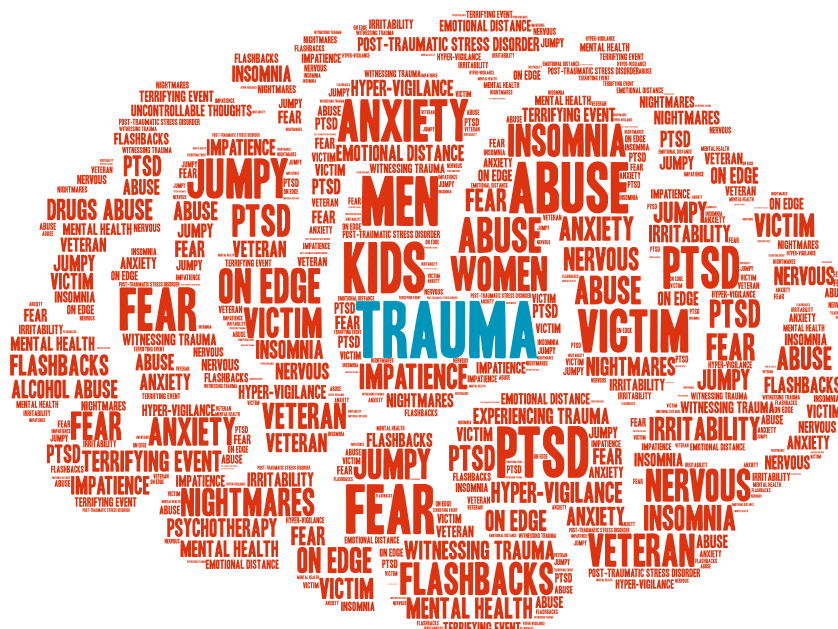
You can call 1-800-273-8255 (press 1), chat online at www.veteranscrisisline.net, or text **838255**.

In case of a mental health emergency, call 9-1-1 or visit your nearest emergency department.

Nearest Facility Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

HONORING WHAT WAS LOST ACTIVITY PLANNING WORKSHEET

CHANGING YOUR EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE WORKSHEET

BE LIKE A TREE MEDITATION SCRIPT

DEEP (DIAPHRAGMATIC) BREATHING INSTRUCTIONS

TRUST BULL'S EYE WORKSHEET

BOUNDARY SETTING WORKSHEET

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES HANDOUT

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION SCRIPT

NATIONAL MST RESOURCES

CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

HONORING WHAT WAS LOST

Activity Planning Worksheet

Activity I want to do: _____

Be specific:

1. What will I do?
2. Who will be involved?
3. When will I do this (day, time)?
4. Where will I do this (location)?
5. How often will I do this?

Challenges: What might get in the way of completing the activity?

Solutions: How might I overcome these challenges?

What Happened: Did I complete the activity? What went well? What surprises or challenges came up? What can I do differently next time?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CHANGING YOUR EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

| SITUATION | HOW I FELT | WHAT I THOUGHT | WHAT I DID | DID IT WORK? | WHAT ELSE CAN I DO? |
|-----------|------------|----------------|------------|--------------|---------------------|
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CHANGING YOUR EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BE LIKE A TREE MEDITATION SCRIPT

Practice tip: Try doing this meditation once a day for a week to see if it is helpful.

To begin, find a comfortable position. You may close your eyes or look at a neutral point on the floor. Imagine that you are a mighty tree (pause).

Plant your feet firmly on the floor, as though you are stretching your roots down into the ground. Notice the gentle tension in your feet as you press your soles against the ground (pause).

Now straighten your spine and let your shoulders relax. Imagine yourself becoming more stable as your sturdy trunk rises upward toward the sky (pause).

As you breathe in, feel yourself growing taller and stronger, planting yourself firmly in the earth (pause).

Slowly move your attention up your body, settling on your trunk. Your trunk includes your chest, shoulders, and stomach. Focusing on your trunk, take notice of your straight posture (pause).

Breathe deeply and slowly, noticing the rise and fall of your chest (pause). Imagine air filling your lungs on the inhale and gently release the air until your lungs are empty (pause).

Take another deep breath (pause). And exhale (pause for 1-2 minutes).

Now expand your attention in every direction like the branches of tree. Get a sense of where you are by noticing any sounds that you can hear (pause for 30 seconds). Now notice anything you can feel or touch (pause for 30 seconds). Notice any smells in the room (pause for 30 seconds). Notice how your mouth feels (pause for 30 seconds). And lastly, imagine things that saw in the room before this exercise began (pause of 15 seconds).

Take a few more deep breaths, embracing everything that surrounds you (pause). When you are ready, begin moving your attention back down the tree from your branches to your sturdy trunk to your firmly planted roots (pause). Take a final deep breath, and open your eyes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DEEP (DIAPHRAGMATIC) BREATHING

Step 1:

Place one hand on your stomach and your other hand on your chest.

Step 2:

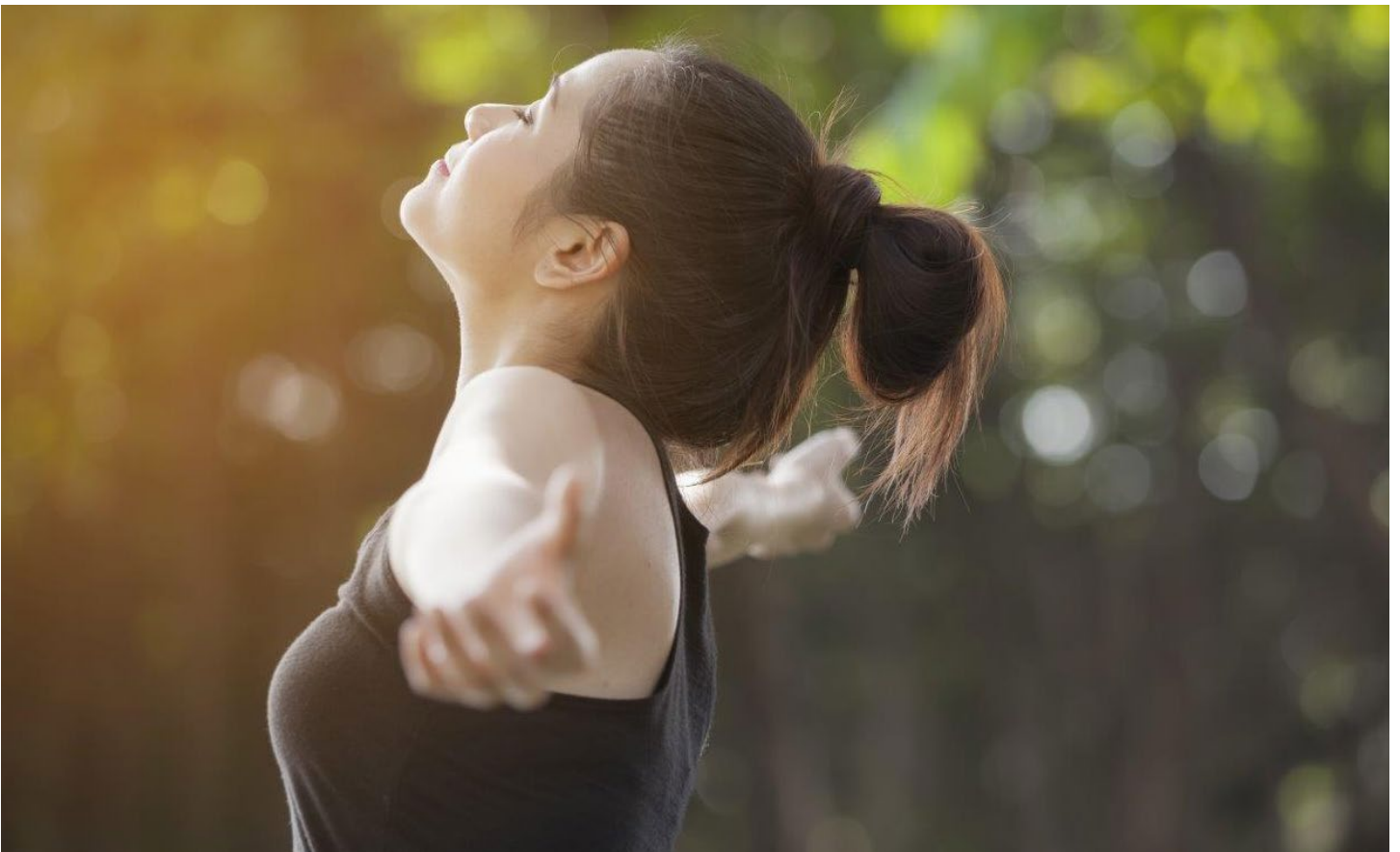
Breathe into your stomach through your nose. You should notice your hand on your stomach move more than the hand on your chest.

Step 3:

Next, breathe out gradually through your lips. Tighten your stomach as you release the breath.

Step 4:

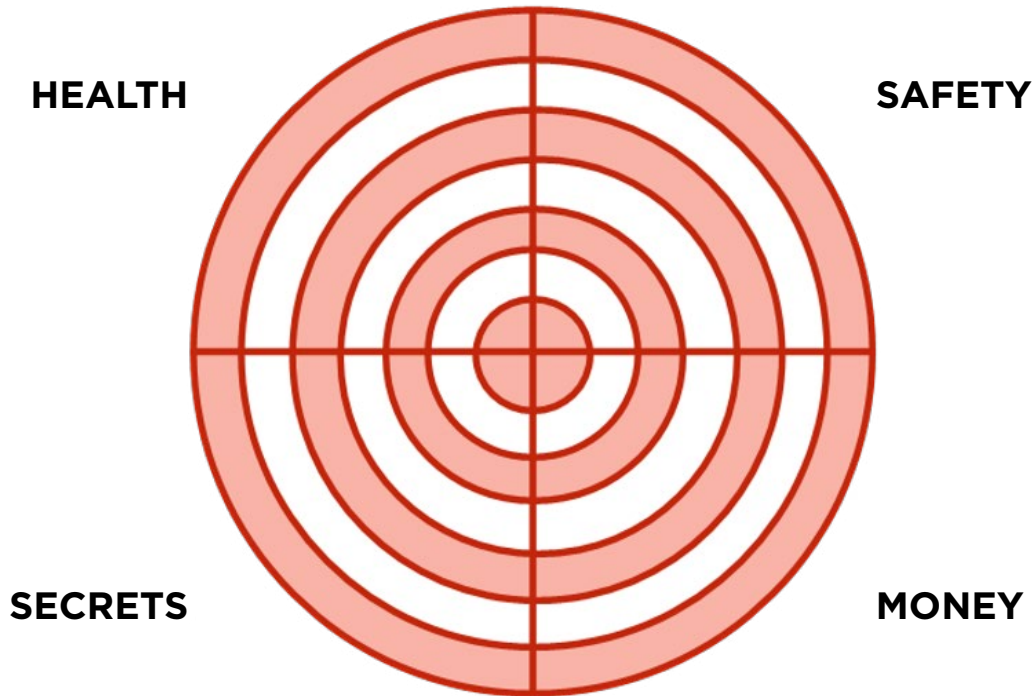
Continue taking deep, slow, even breaths at a comfortable pace. Do not hold your breath after you inhale or before you exhale.



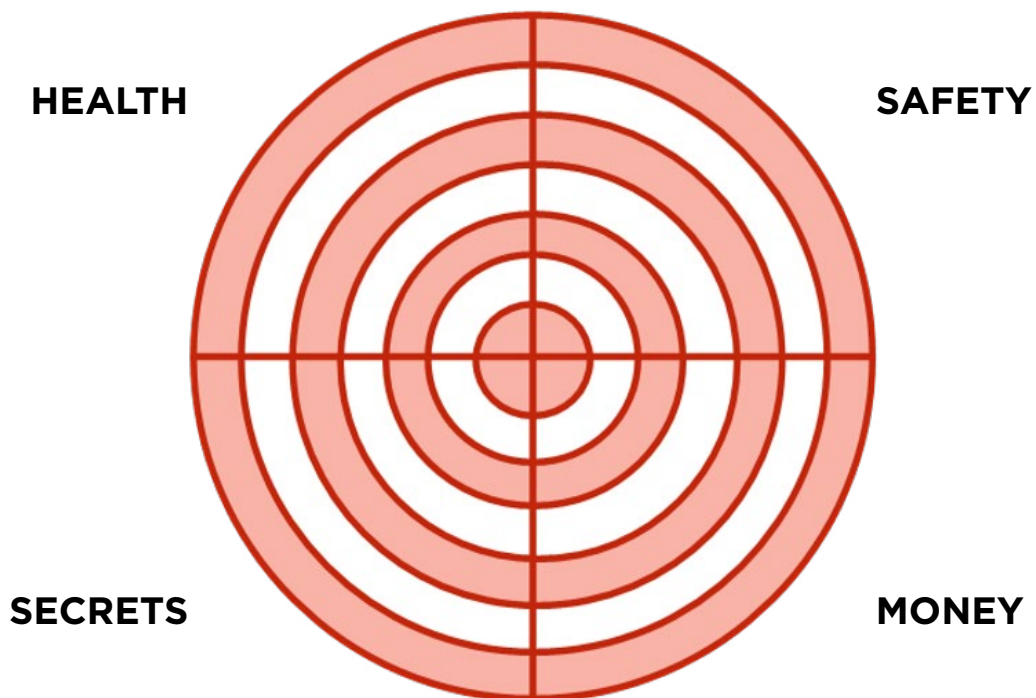
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TRUST BULL'S EYE WORKSHEET

(NAME)



(NAME)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOUNDARY SETTING

Think of someone with whom you have less healthy boundaries. For each light, you will write a behavior that you want him or her to (be specific):



**KEEP
DOING**



DO LESS



**STOP
DOING**

Now share these boundaries with the person and
work toward keeping them in place.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOUNDARY SETTING

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Communication Tip #1: When asking someone else for something, ...

- **Appear confident.** Your body language, tone, and words make a difference in how someone hears you.
- **Be clear.** Use clear, short statements about what you need or want the other person to do.
- **Use “I” statements.** Saying “I” communicates directly what you need and want.
- **Make it a “win-win” situation, if possible.** People are more willing to meet your needs when they also get something in return.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Communication Tip #2: When someone challenges you, ...

- **Be a broken record.** Restate what you said again (and again and again if needed).
- **Negotiate.** Ask for other solutions or make some changes to your request.



Communication Tip #3: When someone asks you for something, ...

- **It's okay to say "no."** Giving too much in a relationship can make you unhappy.
- **Don't be afraid to say "yes."** You may need to break the habit of saying "no" when a relationship is important to you.
- **Say "Let me think about it" if unsure.** Take time to ensure you're making the best decision for you and the relationship.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION SCRIPT

Read the following script at a slow, steady pace.

To begin this practice, let yourself be in a relaxed and comfortable position. Sit with your feet flat on the floor and your spine straight. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths (pause). Breathe in (pause). And breathe out (pause). Again, breathe in (pause). And breathe out. Relax your whole body (long pause).

Now, check into your body and notice how you are feeling right now. Try to let whatever is here be here (pause). Breathe in (pause). And breathe out (pause).

Keeping your eyes closed, start thinking about someone close to you who loves you very much. It could be a family member, a close friend, a child, even a pet (pause). Pick someone that it is easy to feel love for. Let the person come to mind (pause). Have a sense of him or her being in front of you (pause). As you imagine the person, notice how you're feeling inside. Maybe you feel some warmth, or there's some heat to your face, a smile, a sense of happiness (long pause).

Next, imagine the person wishing you well, saying:

I wish all the happiness to you (pause).

I wish that you are safe and protected from danger (pause).

I wish that you never have to suffer (pause).

I wish that you are always loved (pause).

As you receive these words, let them sink in (pause). Next, check in with yourself and see how you're feeling inside (long pause).

Now let this loving kindness expand out – spreading, touching anyone you want to touch right now, in all directions (pause). This may include the people in the room, other people you know or don't know, people who have hurt you. Just imagine expanding and touching (pause). If you want, you can silently repeat:

May everyone be happy, peaceful, and at ease.

May we all experience great joy and feel loved.

Take a few more deep breaths (long pause). And, when you are ready, gently open your eyes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

NATIONAL MST RESOURCES

VA National MST Website includes information about MST, eligibility, treatment, and other resources. Visit <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/index.asp>

MakeTheConnection.net is a website that shares the stories of Veterans who have overcome mental health challenges, including those related to MST. Visit <https://www.maketheconnection.net/>

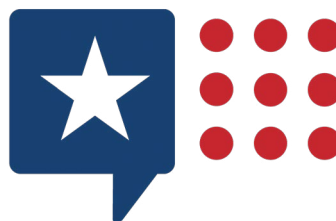
Veterans Crisis Line is a 24/7 confidential hotline for Veterans experiencing distress. They have options for calling **(1-800-273-8255, press 1)**, chatting online at www.veteranscrisisline.net, or texting **838255**.

Women Veterans Call Center is a free helpline for women Veterans and their families with questions about VA services and resources. It is available Monday through Saturday (see website for business hours, <https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/programoverview/wvcc.asp>)

For questions about treatment and healthcare, contact the ***MST Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center.***

For questions about VA disability compensation, contact the ***MST Coordinator at the nearest Veterans Benefits Administration Regional Office.***

**Veterans
Crisis Line**



1-800-273-8255
PRESS 1

CERTIFICATE *Of* PARTICIPATION

is thanked for their effort, support and participation in the

COURAGE GROUP



Presented by

On this day

