

A Matter of Justice

Presenters:

Renée-Claude Carrier &

Shelly Bonnah, PhD cand

Kaushee's Place Transition Home, Whitehorse Yukon

Centre for Response-Base Practice, British Columbia



A Matter of Justice: Response-Based Practice

What will I learn?

➤ Foundations of Response-Based Practice

The key practices, lines of research & theories that make up response-based practice

➤ Violence and Language in Therapeutic Settings

How language is used to conceal violence, excuse perpetrators & blame victims

➤ Response-Based Interviewing and the Importance of Questions

Effective interviewing with diverse clients, regarding different forms of violence

Presenters:



Shelly Bonnah, PHD candidate, family therapist, activist, researcher and instructor in the Counselling Program at City University of Seattle. Works with Allan Wade, Cathy Richardson & Linda Coates at the Centre for Response-Based Practice. Research, writing and training has included youth in the foster care system, and understanding the unique ways that children respond to, and resist this specific bonding rupture.



Feminist activist of Montagnais ancestry. Began activist career at L'Auberge Transition in Montreal. Current manager of Yukon Women's Transition Home Society. Collaborated with shelter activists around the world. Seen as an expert in her community on understanding women's resistance to violence.



Renee-Claude Carrier

Activist Counsellor
A-D. Kaushees Place
Yukon Women's
Transition House

Extreme Athlete

Home Builder

Innu Nation

I have worked in the areas of family therapy, individual counselling, clinical supervision and organizational development.

I've worked extensively with young people in foster care, and have been a caregiver to over 15 children over a period of 18 years.

I am a mother, wife and daughter. The concerns of women and children intersect in personal and professional ways for many of us, as we work to influence policies, practices, and the day to day safety for those who have experienced violence.



Who We Are... the Response-based team



Centre for Response-based
practice



Linda Coates, PhD
Cathy Richardson, PhD
Allan Wade, PhD



Barb McInerny

E.D. Yukon
Women's
Transition House

Heavy Equipment
Operator
Pool Shark

Activist

Grandmother



History & Evolution of the Ideas

- Working in Indigenous communities (what we already know and do, context, resistance to mistreatment, respect)
- Systemic thinking.... The problem is not situated in the person, it is between people, in the social world
- People appreciate fairness, justice and situating their experience in context
- Feminist contributions, an analysis of power imbalances
- Social justice
- Human agency as part of human dignity



Lessons from
Pippi Longstocking...

What does the sign say?" asked Pippi. She couldn't read very well because she didn't want to go to school as other children did.

It says, 'Do you suffer from freckles?'" said Annika.

"Does it indeed?" said Pippi thoughtfully. "Well, a civil question deserves a civil answer. Let's go in."

She opened the door and entered the shop, closely followed by Tommy and Annika. An elderly lady stood back of the counter. Pippi went right up to her. "No!" she said decidedly.

"What is it you want?" asked the lady.

"No," said Pippi once more.

"I don't understand what you mean," said the lady.

"No, I don't suffer from freckles," said Pippi.

Then the lady understood, but she took one look at Pippi and burst out, "But, my dear child, your whole face is covered with freckles!" "I know it," said Pippi, "but I don't suffer from them. I love them. Good morning."

She turned to leave, but when she got to the door she looked back and cried, "But if you should happen to get in any salve that gives people more freckles, then you can send me seven or eight jars."

(Lindgren A. , 1970, pp. 18-19)

What has become the discourse of suffering, problems, illness, and mental health is worthy of deconstruction.

WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

- Violence is uni-lateral (when one person/group acts upon the will and well-being of another)
- Violence is social, involving two or more people
- Violence is non-consensual
- Violence is deliberate

WHAT IS RESISTANCE?

The Scope of Resistance – Not a Definition

“Any mental or behavioural act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible, may be understood as a form of resistance” (Wade, 1997).

Wade, A. (1997). *Small acts of living: Everyday resistance to violence and other forms of Oppression*, (p. 25). *Journal of Contemporary Family Therapy*, 19.

resistance is ever-present

VICTIMS' RESISTANCE	
Is Spontaneous	Is Overt & Covert
Is Creative	Is Direct & Disguised
Is Determined	May exist solely in the Mind
Is Purposeful	Reveals 'emergent capacities'
Stems from Suffering	Infrequently Stops the Violence

THE COLONIAL CODE

Todd and Wade (1994) called the colonial code of relationship, which can be expressed as a three-part message:

1. You are deficient (i.e., heathen, savage, falsely conscious, submissive, passive, internally oppressed, helpless, cognitively distorted and afraid).
2. I am proficient (i.e., critically conscious, expert, professional, closer to god, empowered by the state).
3. Therefore I have the right (duty, sacred obligation, authority) to perform certain operations upon you (prescribing, advising, educating, assessing, praying, counselling, legislating, apprehending children) . . . for your own good.

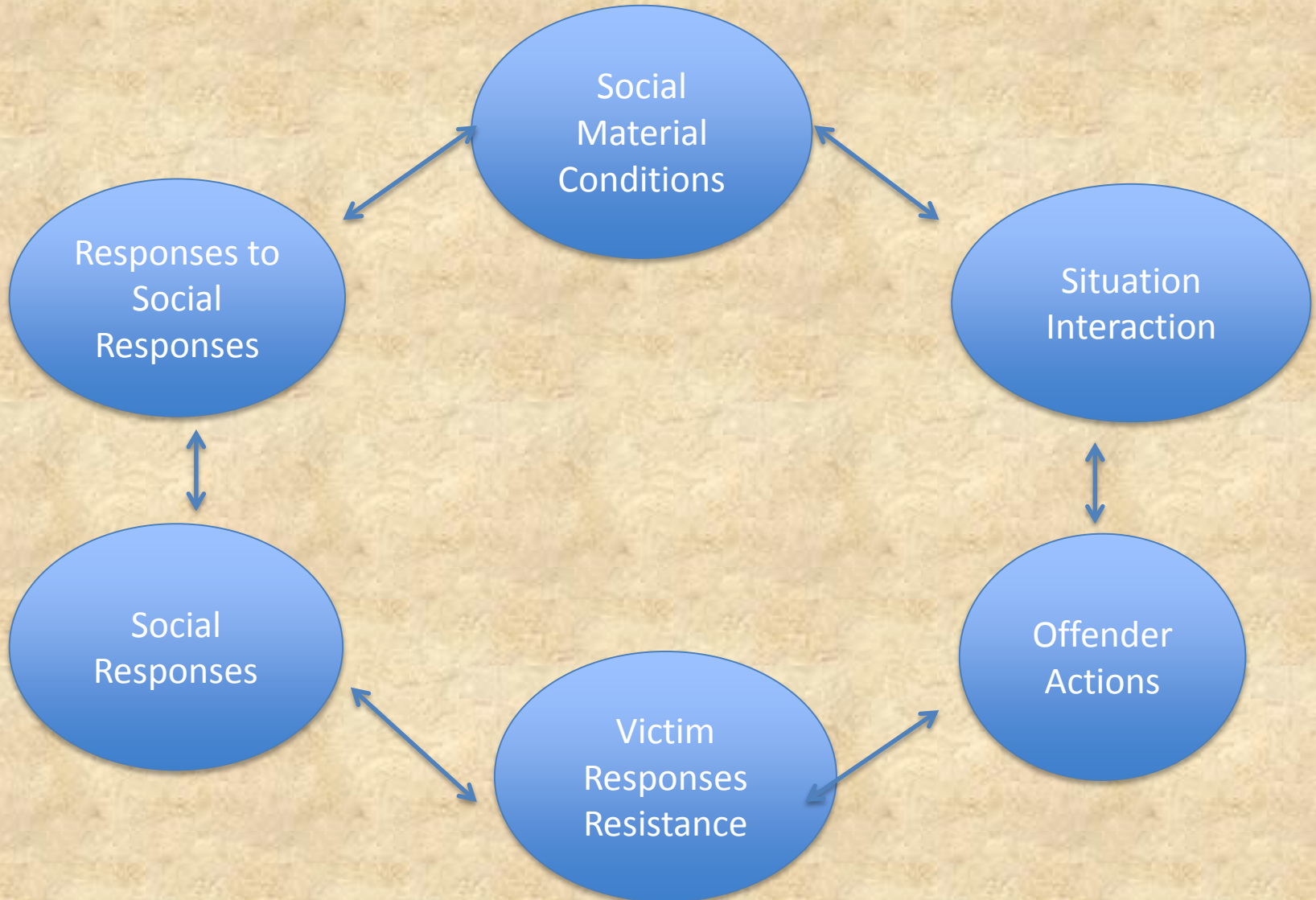
Shane (28), former youth in care

There was a great big guy who worked at the group home I was in when I was 14 years old. He was always really fussy about his stuff and liked to keep everything organized and neat. He was so big, that when kids got out of control, he would just walk up behind them and restrain them in a hold—kind of like a big bear hug. I used to grab his stuff on purpose and then run like hell...I knew he'd get mad and come after me. I used to do that on purpose. It felt so good to be held.

Response-Based Contextual Analysis

Assessment Tool, Documentation Instrument & Response-Based Interview Guide

S. Bonnah, L. Coates, C. Richardson, A. Wade (2014)



The Medicine Wheel of Responses

How did you respond? What did you do?



Working With Moms and Children – Response Based Approach

Renée-Claude Carrier
Yukon Women's Transition Home

Response Based Practice: Dignity and Safety at Kaushee's Place

- The staff at Kaushee's Place follow several principles that take into account the need of women and children to experience dignity.
- Self-analysis: We must be willing to examine our own ideas and practice.
- Critical analysis: It is important to contest victim-blaming and mother-blaming in all forms.
- We do not judge people by their past.
- Every time a woman returns to the transition house with her family, we see it as a fresh start, as though it were their first visit.
- We let the women and children decide what they want to do and talk about.
- We believe in the women and what they say.
- We take a pro-choice attitude regardless of our personal beliefs.

In these conditions, women parent in safety.

“Children who witness”

Versus...

Children who *experience, respond, and resist* violence

Why We Work The Way We Do

Common tactic of men who use violence:

- Sabotage mothers dignity as a women
- Undermine women as a mothers
- Attempt to create doubt in women's parenting
- Damage mother-child bond

It Just Makes Sense

Working with moms and kids together:

- seems natural
- allows for collaborative storytelling
- Encourages togetherness instead of isolation

Working together we can respect and restore the relationships
between mothers and children

Creating an environment to support the mother-child relationship

- Working with mom and child together
- Not separating mom and child during crisis mode
- Honor time when mom and child need to talk about what happened and how each responded
- Honor how they work as a team to keep each other safe.

Push to interview mothers and children separately:

- Infringes immediate limits to the conversation for staff and residents
- Based on ... mother blaming
- Creates fear and doubt

Of particular relevance for First Nations women, past and current apprehension rates must be considered.

“If I am to take their children aside, I could be seen as a child protection worker, as a threat. I do not see that as productive.”

Kathy Humphreys...

“Domestic violence intervention needs to change to take account of the significant barriers that may have been created between mothers and their children by violence and abuse. The priority for post-crisis work therefore needs to involve the strengthening or the recovery of the mother-child relationship in the aftermath of domestic violence. However, the shift in culture this work requires is not straightforward.

The traditional fracturing by organizational structures, which have created services for women and services for children, replicates the fracturing of the relationships between many mothers and children living with domestic violence. It is an issue of particular relevance to social worker managers and front line workers as they straddle the service sectors working with structures that can inadvertently continue to reinforce rather than address the undermining of the mother-child relationship.”
p. 167

In the 30 Days

- Children's responses change overtime
 - 24 hours
 - 72 hours
 - 30 days
- What does parenting in safety look like? How is it different than parenting under siege?

- Spend time together, allow conversation to come up naturally
 - Car rides
 - Shopping trips
 - Camp fires
 - Cooking and eating meals

- Support women as mothers
 - No “Shiny Syndrome”
 - No Fairy Tale Mom Myth
 - Refer back to mom
 - “Did you ask your mom?” “Mom knows best”

- Find ways to shift the negative messages of dad
 - Mom is not to blame for everything
 - Mom is hard working
 - Mom protects

Parenting in safety

- Have a conversation of what parenting looks like when you are safe
- How it can be different than when you fight to keep your child and yourself safe
- How children may start acting like children and be loud, rowdy and playful.
- How they may act out as they start to feel safe.

Parenting at time of crisis

- Reframing perspective on mother's parenting skills during crisis by:
 - Identify how she has been brilliant
 - How she pushed back violence and minimize it's impacts
- Speaking about how she responded to and resisted the violence will help show all the ways he was abusive.

Worst time in your life

Mom still has a lot to deal with:

- Separation
- Custody
- Housing
- Health issue
- Grief

It's not time to teach or give tools, but to be an ally and strategize with her.

Effects vs Responses

- Sexualized abuse causes depression, despair
- Depression, despair is an effect/impact of sexualized abuse

Negative bias in the language of effects/impacts

- A negative cause (spouse assault, rape) can produce only negative effects.

We cannot say . . .

- Child sexualized abuse causes alert and effective parenting
- Alert and effective parenting is one of the leading effects or impacts of child sexualized abuse

But we can say . . .

- Many people respond to sexualized abuse by becoming alert and effective parents

Dignity



What is dignity?

- Physical and psychological integrity (wholeness)
- Care effectively for others, especially loved ones
- A sense of efficacy, agency, ability to “make a difference”
- An inherent quality of the person, in spiritual and human rights language; a result of social interaction; related to culture and immediate social situations.

Human Services Centred on Dignity

- Maximize choice and basic courtesies
- Use ordinary language
- Centre the aspirations, “preferred future”, of service users
- De-centre but do not deny own skills, “expertise”, biases
- Explore and acknowledge “pre-existing abilities” and “emergent capacities” E.g., in responses to injustice
- Acknowledge how “clients” work to accord us dignity as workers, professionals, in the field

Dignity encompasses . . .

- being treated with respect
- Autonomy, Agency
- Freedom to, freedom from...
- Physical and psychological integrity, safety and security
- Self worth, self-sovereignty
- Concern for others... and much much more



Micro Practices of Dignity

1

- Applying manners, codes, helping
- Not telling people what to do
- Preserving people's feelings
- Mending harm, apologizing, repairing
- Sticking up for people
- Restoring awkward, embarrassing situations (e.g. ignoring public farts, spinach in teeth, social gaffs)
- Avoiding humiliation in every encounter

Dignity

- Social life is organized largely around the according and preserving of dignity (face).
- Affronts to dignity create immediate social “problems” that participants work to repair.
- Humiliation requires “just redress”. Failure to supply “just redress” leaves an open social wound.
- Dignity is central to individual and collective well-being.

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- Our central task, no matter what else we do, is to re-assert the dignity of the victim.
- A huge source of dignity violations is false descriptions of violence



Dignity and Resistance

- For many victims, humiliation is the primary affront, the most lasting and painful injury
 - “The bruises go away but you never forget what he said to you.”
 - “He got my body but he didn’t get me.”
- Responses and resistance are often oriented to preserving, asserting dignity
- The violence may be only the first in a series of indignities delivered through social responses
- Our central task, whatever else we do, is to acknowledge the dignity to the victim

- When young people respond to and resist violence or oppression, their actions often defy the assumed predictability of 'child development' models.
- While child development includes strength and resilience, their physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual responses cannot be categorized as normal or abnormal; rather under careful scrutiny these responses most often become understandable only within the context that they occur
- They can be reformulated as healthy responses to highly problematic and dangerous circumstances. Frequently, what children do and think is not "child-like" at all.

Suffering is a directional response . . . and form of resistance

- Resistance and other responses to adversity cannot be represented in the language of effects or impacts.
- Human suffering cannot be adequately represented in a language of effects/impacts.
- The complex distress we experience in relation to violence is already a form of resistance.
- What a person despairs against points to what they hope for.
- Despair signals the insatiable desire for dignity and safety.

Offender Strategies and Victim Responses

If the offender tries to isolate the victim, virtually any way in which the victim refuses to be isolated can be a form of resistance.

If the offender tries to humiliate the victim, virtually any way in which the victim tries to retain her dignity can be a form of resistance.

If the offender tries to control the victim, virtually any way in which the victim tries to retain freedom can be a form of resistance.

If the offender tries to blame the victim, then virtually any way in which the victim “knows” or “feels” that they are not to blame can be a form of resistance.

etcetera . . .

Universal Abilities to Respond & Resist Violence

- Nathan's Story

Nathan's Story (Age: 10 yrs)

Mom, dad, Sarah and me lived in a house all together for 3 years...

What was that like?

I used to hide in my room a lot. Sarah would come running in and hide under my bed.

What did you do when she would come running into your room?

After the first 10 times I got used to it, so it was nothing new. I also hid under the bed sometimes.

Why do you think she came into your room?

Sarah did have her own room, but she didn't like hiding in it. If she wanted me to when she was under my bed, then I triple sealed my door...

Triple sealed your door... How did you do that?

I got pillows and duct tape. I put duct tape on the top and bottom so no one could open the door...to keep dad out. Then I put 3 pillows on all the sides of the door to keep out the noise. The only time we could hear was when they were really yelling...Those times I would play my video games really, really loud....

I don't know if I've ever heard of anything so smart before to keep out noise and protect a sister...

Ya...no one could get in unless they had a knife.

Hmmm.

I play video games. It makes me content so I don't ...so I don't go out there and separate them.

How did you learn that it's a better idea to keep yourself as content as possible, rather than go out there and separate them?

I've tried to separate them. To defend mom would be suicide. Everytime I tried I got red marks. Sometimes he wears his boots...he would kick me or slap me. Once he smacked me so hard the red marks didn't go away for a week. I didn't do anything for that...I didn't deserve it.

...Sounds like you have tried to defend your mom, yourself and Sarah. Sometimes it works but sometimes it really doesn't. What else do you do?

One time me, mom and Sarah all hid in mom's room and locked the door. We watched Mario brothers. We were going to have a Christmas party, but he phoned everybody so that they didn't come to our party. I showed mom how to barricade the door. Sarah cries and hides when she is scared. I usually be quiet to Gino [dad] because he would slap me if I said something to him.

Do you want to keep talking about this? Like where you were when everything happened?

I came to the balcony while they were by the van. I yelled “Mom” when she got pushed down. Tears were coming down my face. I knew it wouldn’t stop things. I knew that for a fact. I wouldn’t expect him to stop because I yelled. It was kind of obvious that this would happen.

What did you do then?

I stayed and watched the rest. He drove away with Sarah and my mom was lying on the ground crying and then she looked up and saw me there.

Then what happened?

Mom came in and talked to me. I tried to support her. I said “Everything will be alright” and she said “No. everything won’t be alright”.

Why Focus on Social Responses to Victims?

The quality of social responses is the strongest single predictor of victim distress after violence & predictor of violence being used by victim later on.



Social Responses to Victims and Offenders

How family, friends, professionals, and larger society (media, police, child protection, courts) respond when violence is disclosed.

A majority of victims report receiving negative social responses

Examples: What does “positive” and “negative” mean?

Family, Friends, Police, Court, Child Protection

Marginalized, disadvantaged people are more likely to receive negative social responses: LGBTQ, Aboriginal, Refugee, Disabled

The quality of social responses may be the best single predictor of the level of victim distress

Victims' Responses to Social Responses

Victims respond physically (epigenetically, hormonally), emotionally, mentally, socially, spiritually – to positive and negative social responses

Victims who receive POSITIVE social responses:

- tend to recover more quickly and fully
- are more likely to work with authorities
- are more likely to report violence in future

Victims who receive NEGATIVE social responses:

- less likely to cooperate with authorities
- less likely to disclose violence again
- more likely to receive diagnosis of mental disorder

False Descriptions and Social Responses

Negative social responses are built on false and prejudicial descriptions.

Research shows that violent crimes, victims, offenders are often misrepresented in criminal justice, media, mental health, and so on.

- Although victims invariably respond and resist, they are often portrayed as passive or only as affected or impacted.
- Although violence is deliberate, offenders are often portrayed as out of control, helpless victims of their biology or emotions.
- And, although violence is unilateral, it is often portrayed as mutual.

Indigenous Women As Targets

- As we would predict, research shows attacks on Aboriginal women are much higher than for non-Aboriginal women
- 24% of Aboriginal women said they had been victims of spousal assault in the period ending in 2006.
- Geographic isolation, lack of access to services, lack of transportation and poverty all increased the danger for Aboriginal women

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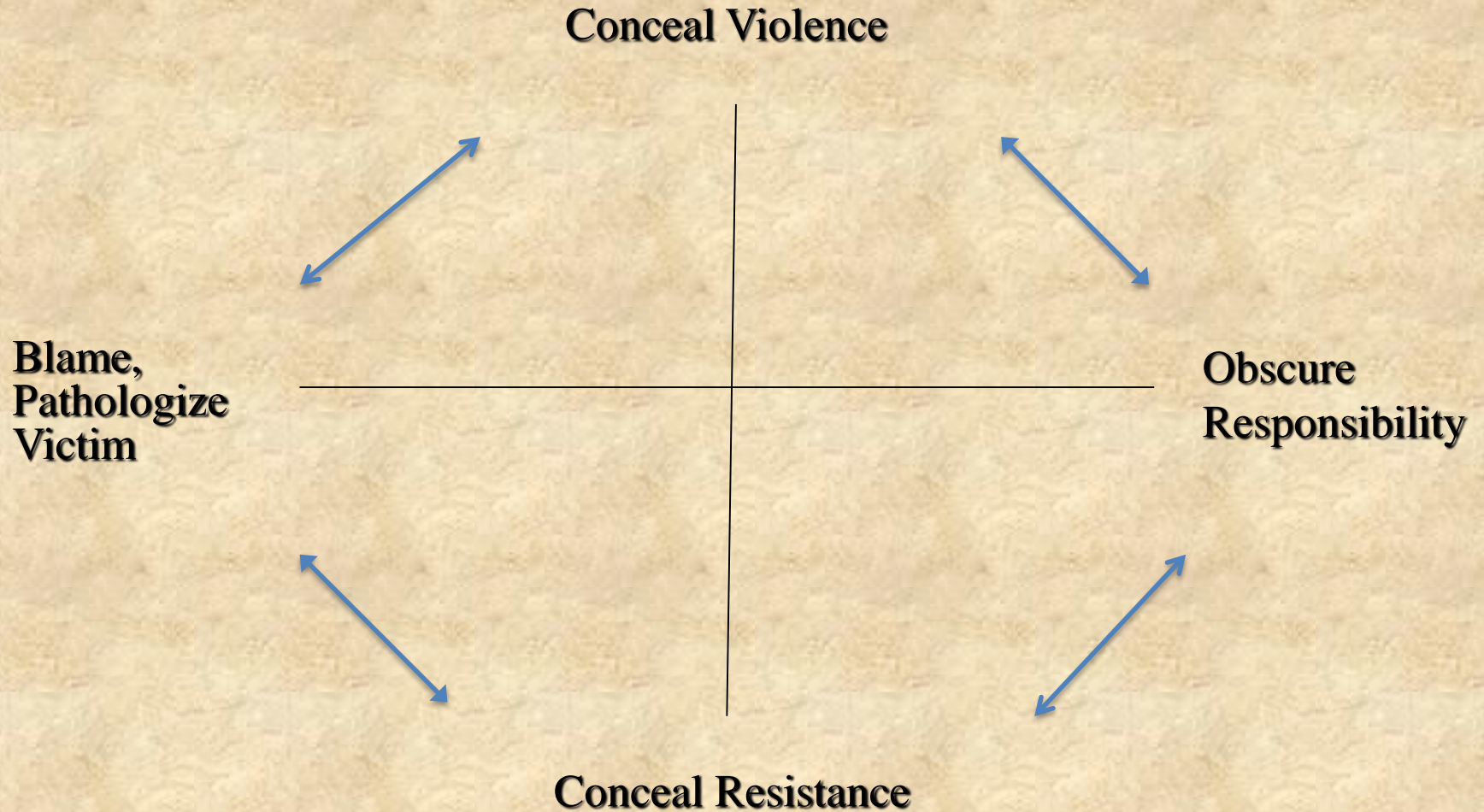
Adults were my enemies, and I wanted to get them mad so I could hate them even more. If adults tried to bribe me with a gift, I would destroy it right in front of them. If they tried to correct me, I would curse and scream at the top of my lungs. I knocked over lamps and tables. Once I was forced to eat a bar of soap for swearing; the stinging pain made me gag, but I refused to apologize. I tried to ruin food by putting salt in the sugar bowl; they spanked me and sent me to bed without supper. Once I had to pull down my pants and sit nude on the sharp rim of a #10 can. I pretended it didn't hurt. (p. 66)

Seita, J. & Brendtro, L. (2005). *Kids Who Outwit Adults*. Indiana: Solution Tree.

Children and response-based

- Children respond well to the Response-Based approach because it is concrete.
- Ask them what they did, and they will tell you the stories of how they protected their siblings, their mom and themselves.
- This will help to identify and outline all the ways in which each member of the family respond to violence and worked to minimize the danger and uphold dignity.

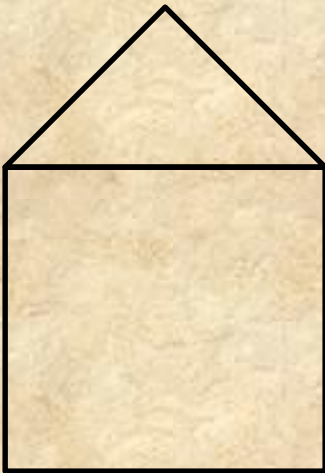
The Four Operations of Language Work Together



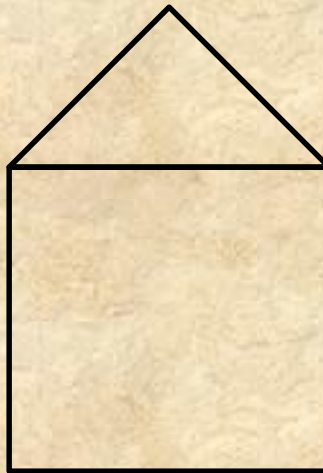
Activities

3 Houses... and a Rickety Response-Based Shack

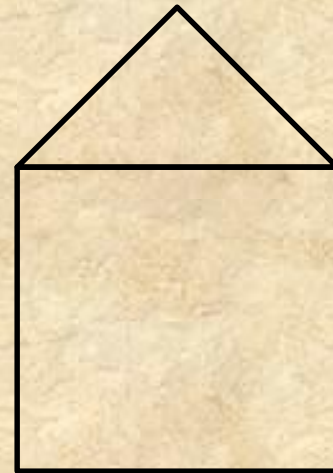
Original work by: Nicki Weld & Maggie Greening



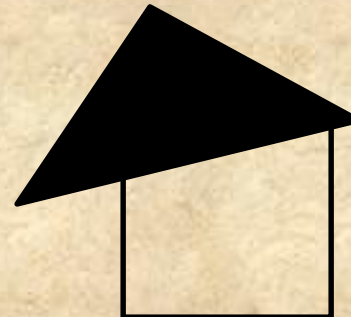
Good Things



Worries



Dreams



Rickety Response-Based Shack

Show and Explain Your Growth

Have a child stand against the wall and measure their height then have them move away and appreciate it. Ask how tall the child thinks they were one year ago and mark that. Now you can ask questions around what and who helped promote that growth: How did you do that? What did you mom do to help you get from there to here (pointing at the differing marks)? What did you sister do?

Bring mom into the discussion and ask her about things that her child is doing now at this height that they weren't doing one year ago? How did they come about?

*this exercise looks to encourage bragging about each other and highlighting teamwork.

Boys Role in Safety

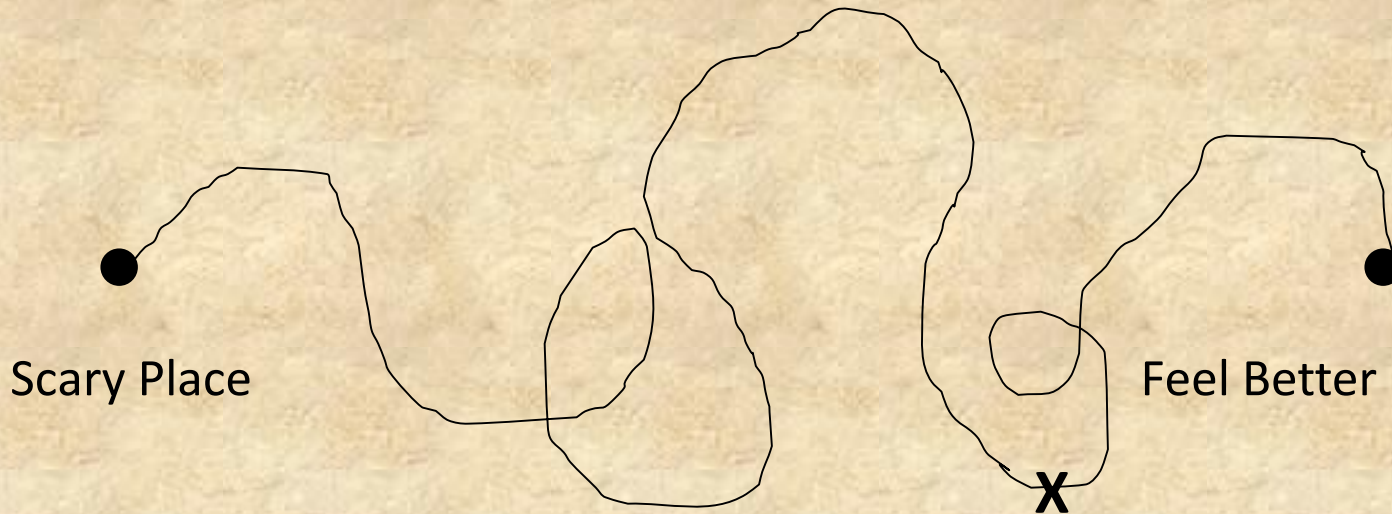
Start asking boys

How do you keep girls safe – at school,
with friends, in groups, alone?

How have you seen other people keep
girls safe? What does it look like?

Do you know others who work
to promote safety for girls?

2 Dots



Draw a winding road connecting the two. Ask the child to put an X mark where they feel they are right now. Ask the child how they got from the scary place to where they are now.

“There is a path, isn’t there? Where are you on the road now?”

“Wow that’s quite a long ways along. How did you get from the scary dot to your new place? Who helped?”

2 Dots For Women

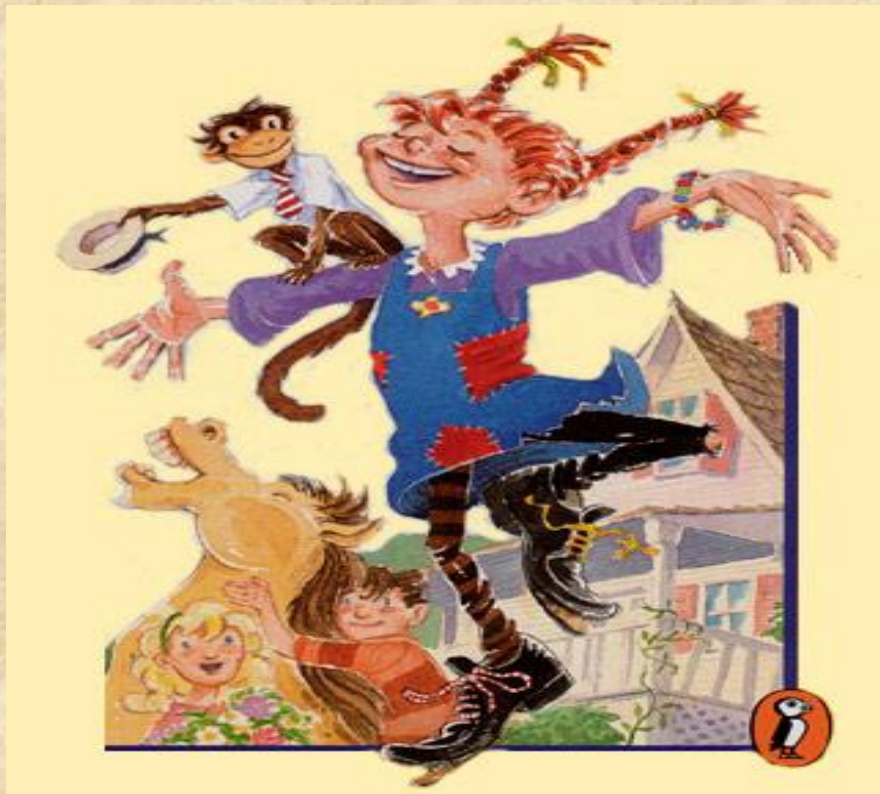
Have the women pick a number for where she is now



Inquire about why she picked that number as opposed to another? What is the context behind that number for her? What has changed? What has potential to change?

CREATING YOUNG ACTIVISTS





We have found that building more accurate and just accounts is a straight forward process that is of immediate benefit to victims and offenders.

This is not the province of experts: It is a human rights “witnessing” practice – an ordinary practice - that we are all qualified to perform.

Thank you!