

# S.E.L.F.:

## *A Trauma-Informed Psychoeducational Group Curriculum*

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### OVERVIEW

Every outpatient and inpatient mental health setting, child protection service, parenting program, domestic violence shelter, school, and homeless shelter today must contend with the issue of a past history of exposure to trauma in their clients. Grant applications and federal funding sources insist that programs become “trauma-informed”. But how can professionals – some with extensive professional training, and some with very little formal training – address the issues that arise surrounding past abuses and exposure to violence without “opening up a can of worms”?

The [S.E.L.F. Psychoeducational Group Curriculum](#) is a good way to start, addressing the fundamental problems surrounding exposure to violence without needing to focus on specific individual events within a group setting.

The most elementary aspect of becoming trauma-informed is education. Trauma recovery begins with psychoeducation. Educating people about the impact of overwhelming life experience helps to get everyone “on the same page” with a shared and coherent organizing framework that does not stigmatize the injured person but instead allows a much closer and empathic understanding between client and caregiver.

Unlike most of the theoretical jargon that informs so much of mental health treatment, educating people about the psychobiological effects of serious, recurrent, and chronic stress “rings bells” for them. Even people with little education can easily grasp very complex concepts because the concepts are consistent with their own experience. Much of educating people about trauma is simply giving them words for what they already know and helping them see patterns where no patterns existed for them before.

The primary task of reeducation involves a change in the person’s self perception. We believe that increasing awareness, emphasizing safety, and teaching skills to manage feelings are crucial steps to take in creating an environment that can handle the crucial work of processing feelings, past trauma, grief and loss. Alone, changes in knowledge, values and beliefs won’t result in changes in behavior unless they are grounded in a changed perception of the self and situations.

Educators, parents, and policy makers have established that children and adults need a certain set of skills to be successful in the world – the ability to read and write well, to have a good understanding of math and science, and the ability to use critical thinking skills. But there is a whole other set of skills that people need, not just to get a good job but to have a good life. This set of skills is often taught to children, consciously or not, by their family members. In the best of situations, these concepts are taught during “teachable moments” throughout a day.

Unfortunately, sometimes children do not learn all the skills they need or are taught negative and destructive ways to live. All children need to learn the skills that will help them to succeed in the world – the ability to care for themselves and others, the ability to manage their emotions, the ability to envision a positive future, and the ability to cope with adversity and loss. As these children grow up, they do not necessarily learn whatever the skills are that they could have learned to deal with safety, emotions, loss and future. The result is adults who may be very successful in certain parts of their life while enduring large deficits in others.

We hope this curriculum encourages a more conscious conversation about how we plan to teach these crucial social and emotional skills to children. This curriculum supports the teaching of this knowledge, and we encourage you to develop your own creative means of teaching children emotional intelligence skills.

Teaching these skills in a variety of settings at your agency, such as the classroom, the residence, and individual therapy sessions, encourages a shared language from which we can all draw upon to create Sanctuary. This language can help when the community is struggling or experiencing any concerns related to **Safety, Emotion management, Loss and Future**.

We hope your approach in sharing these exercises with your clients is one of collaboration -- a primary Sanctuary principle. The more you collaborate with the people in your care, as well as with your colleagues, we believe the more successful you will be. Please feel free to modify, change, or develop your own approaches to teach these concepts to your group, since creativity and flexibility are also important skills to model for the children.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The overall frame of this curriculum follows the **SELF** model – **Safety, Emotions, Loss and Future**. Each domain has at least two modules. It follows a natural progression though the modules can stand alone as well. Ongoing adaptations can be made to target your specific group and their needs.

The goal is to first work with the group to build a basic understanding of the concepts of S.E.L.F. and then explore topics pertinent to the group’s needs. The order in which the activities are present is not meant to be addressed in a fully systematic way. For example, one group may need to spend 4 weeks on Safety to build an awareness of the multiple safety needs within the group. Another group may need to target emotional awareness thereby learning how to identify and negotiate more complex emotional experiences. As a group facilitator, the task is to monitor the group’s needs, collaborate with members, and to facilitate learning through the psycho-education groups.

## S.E.L.F. IS A “NONLINEAR” METHOD

S.E.L.F. is not a staged treatment model, but rather a nonlinear method for addressing in simple words, very complex challenges. Victims of overwhelming life experiences have difficulty staying safe, find emotions difficult to manage, have suffered many losses and have difficulty envisioning

a future. As a result, they are frequently in danger, lose emotional control or are so numb that they cannot access their emotions, have many signs of unresolved loss, and are stuck in time, haunted by the past and unable to move into a better future.

The four concepts: [Safety](#), [Emotions](#), [Loss](#), and [Future](#) represent the four interactional fundamental domains of disruption that occur in a traumatized person's life and within these four domains, any problem can be categorized. Naming and categorization are the first steps in making a problem manageable.

The S.E.L.F. Trauma-Informed Psychoeducational Group Curriculum is designed to provide clients – and staff – with an easy-to-use and coherent cognitive framework that can create a change momentum. Because it is a model that is “round” not square, circular, not stepped, it provides a logical framework for movement. We think of S.E.L.F. as a compass through the land of recovery that can help guide individual treatment, staff decision, team treatment planning, and an entire institution. It is not constrained by gender, age, race, religion, or ethnicity because the domains of healing that S.E.L.F. represents are human universals, unbound to any time, place, or person. In our residential programs, children as young as four are comfortably using the S.E.L.F. language – and using it appropriately.

The S.E.L.F. Psychoeducational Group Curriculum has been almost twenty years in the making. The authors of this curriculum founded The Sanctuary® programs, originally in-patient adult programs to treat complex problems related to a past history of child abuse and neglect and now extended to children's residential programs, adult substance abuse programs, and a variety of outpatient programs for children and adults. We now have a [Sanctuary Institute](#) to formally train programs in the Sanctuary Model.

Our S.E.L.F. groups evolved organically from our need to teach our adult clients how to:

- think differently about their problems;
- organize the changes they needed to make into more manageable bundles;
- help them develop pattern recognition for the ways in which their present problems related to past experiences;
- help provide a roadmap for the process of recovery.

This curriculum has grown out of that experience and has been adapted to the unique environments that today characterize the mental health and social service world.

Each lesson includes:

- An Introduction to S.E.L.F. and some S.E.L.F. Group Guidelines
- A Script for a group that focuses on one of the four key topics: Safety, Emotion, Loss, or Future.
- A Handout for the clients to use during or after the group.
- A Resource - written course material for therapists that - taken as a whole - represent an course in trauma studies

For the most part, each lesson is independent of every other lesson and there is no fixed order within which the lessons must be taught. We arranged the curriculum this way for some very specific reasons:

- The turnover rate in many settings is so rapid, that if clients are to benefit from attending only one or two groups, then each group must stand alone as a valuable lesson, without necessitating prior attendance.
- We wanted the curriculum to be responsive to the immediate and pressing needs of each environment at any point in time.
- Finally, we recognize that the staff members in most mental health and social service environments are stressed, frequently demoralized, frustrated, and overburdened.

Many of the direct line staff - and in many cases the professionally trained staff - have little if any experience in running groups and may be intimidated by the prospect of using a group format. Unfortunately, failure to create a safe group atmosphere wastes an enormous human resource for positive change. Recognizing this dilemma, we have tried to create scripts for group leaders that will create an interactive but contained process, even while opening up painful subjects. Using an educational format - that includes handouts, flipcharts, a question-and-answer format - promotes a containing environment quite different from a typical process group that can be far more difficult to manage. In this way, staff members can discover the power of the group process in helping people to learn, grow and change, while simultaneously building community within their setting.

It is not necessary to read the Resource material in order to have the groups be beneficial. However, we believe that as staff members watch the outpouring of new information that will inevitably arise from the group process, their curiosity is likely to be stimulated and we wanted some material to be readily available to them. In some of the lessons we have also suggested some relevant movie titles pertaining to the topics.

Although this is a trauma-informed curriculum, we do not frequently address head-on the issue of trauma, maltreatment or abuse. Again, this was intentional - words like "trauma" and "abuse" are highly charged for many people and are frequently misunderstood. We focus instead on the results of exposure to trauma - experiences that everyone can relate to, whether they have been traumatized or abused in the past or not :

- loss of safety
- inability to manage emotions
- overwhelming losses
- a paralyzed ability to plan for or even imagine a different future
- Likewise, many of the lessons can be used for family groups without the need to create an atmosphere of recrimination, guilt or accusation.

## LESSONS- KEY POINTS, DISCUSSION TOPICS, ACTIVITIES

Each **Section** will provide information on the topic and concepts that are vital to try to teach and process through the following lessons. Sample lessons will be explained. These lessons are guidelines to use as a base to be built upon. Group dynamics are frequently changing and therefore, lessons will need to be adapted to suit the needs of the group. Each lesson will include **Key Points** that designate the concepts that are to be taught to group members. These will be followed by an **Activity Description**. Activities may use art, multimedia or interactive tasks and materials.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE S.E.L.F. CURRICULUM

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- Describes the S.E.L.F. Curriculum as trauma-informed, why that is important, and how to use the Curriculum.
- **Sanctuary Philosophy** : Essay by Dr. Sandra L. Bloom, one of the founders of the Sanctuary Model®, the defines the values and belief system that is the underpinning of the Sanctuary Model and S.E.L.F. Curriculum which is one of the key implementation components the Sanctuary Model.
- **Introduction to S.E.L.F.** Simple handout for clients that accompanies every lesson or group of lessons. Meant to be given out to every participant at the beginning of the group to ground them in the basic language of Safety, Emotions, Loss and Future = S.E.L.F.
- **S.E.L.F. Group Guidelines**: One page handout to offer some simple guidelines for group procedure

### WHAT DOES S.E.L.F. MEAN?

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Introduce concepts of S.E.L.F. to the group
  - Connect S.E.L.F. to the mission of the organization
  - Connect S.E.L.F. to individual client problems
- HANDOUT: What Does SELF Mean?
- RESOURCE: S.E.L.F. – A Nonlinear Framework
  - More detailed explanation of S.E.L.F. for staff with some guidelines questions for staff to use with clients

### WHO ARE YOU A S.E.L.F. SELF-ASSESSMENT

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- OBJECTIVES

- To learn to use the acronym, S.E.L.F. to define individual identity and pinpoint individual strengths and vulnerabilities.
- To begin the process of developing self-knowledge and knowledge about others in the group.
- HANDOUT: Using SELF to Introduce Myself
- RESOURCE: *Why Do We Have Emotions?*
  - Brief essay on the role of emotions in our lives, why we have them and the problems we can encounter trying to successfully manage them.

## PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER: WHAT TRAUMA DOES TO THE SELF

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - To graphically demonstrate how trauma can be experienced as a disintegration of one's sense of self and identity
  - To show that the key domains of beginning the process of recovery from trauma involve focusing on Safety, Emotions, Loss, and Future.
- HANDOUT: Effects of Traumatic Experience
- RESOURCE: *Understanding the Impact of Traumatic Experience*
- An extended explanation about what psychological trauma is and some of the ways traumatic experience can influence the way people think, feel, and behave.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT SURVIVAL: FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Understand the basic human stress response and how it interferes with safety
  - Be able to identify one's own typical response to stress
  - Assess the effectiveness of one's own stress response
- HANDOUT: How Do You Respond to Stress?
- RESOURCE: *Fight-Flight-Freeze or How Not To Get Eaten*
  - Essay explaining the basic stress response and the ways it impacts the body and the mind.

## SELF BEGINS WITH SAFETY

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Introduce basic ideas about what "safety" really is
  - Define Safety as: Physical, Psychological, Social and Moral Safety
- HANDOUT: What Does Safety Mean?
- RESOURCE: *Safety- The First Pillar of Sanctuary*
  - Brief essay about what it means to create safety within any environment.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PHYSICALLY SAFE?

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Introduce four kinds of safety: Physical, Psychological, Social and Moral
  - Focus on physical safety as the most basic form of safety

- Explain and encourage use of the Five-Step Safety Plan to maintain physical safety
- HANDOUT: What is Physical Safety?
- RESOURCE: *Safety and Adversity in Childhood*
  - Explanation of PTSD and the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE?

- OBJECTIVES:
  - Focus on defining psychological safety
  - Explain and encourage us of the Five-Step Safety Plan to maintain psychological safety
- HANDOUT: What is Psychological Safety?
- RESOURCE: *How Shocking! Thinking, Feeling and Acting Under Stress*
  - Essay on the ways in which our thinking is affected by stress, how acute dissociation protects us in the short-term, and how we are likely to act under stressful conditions.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SOCIALLY SAFE?

- OBJECTIVES:
  - Focus on defining social safety
  - Explain and encourage us of the Five-Step Safety Plan to maintain social safety
- HANDOUT: What is Social Safety?
- RESOURCE: *The Social Response to Danger*
  - Brief essay exploring the social response to danger grounded in our need to attach from cradle to grave, and some of the potential negative consequences including trauma-bonding and scapegoating.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MORALLY SAFE?

- OBJECTIVES:
  - Focus on defining moral safety
  - Explain and encourage us of the Five-Step Safety Plan to maintain moral safety
- HANDOUT: What is Moral Safety?
- RESOURCE: *Moral Intelligence*
  - Brief essay that reviews the concept of moral intelligence and how it is define

## THE FIRST LANGUAGE OF SAFETY: YES, NO, UH-OH, OUCH

- OBJECTIVES:
  - Develop greater awareness of boundaries and what it means to be safe
  - Increased awareness of personal signals for various kinds of danger
  - To help people recognize a psychological injury when it happens
- HANDOUT: What Do We Mean by Boundaries?
- RESOURCE: *Creating Sanctuary: The Active Development of Nonviolent Environments*
  - Essay describing the Sanctuary Model as a trauma-informed, whole-systems approach to creating nonviolent environments.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRUST? SOCIAL SAFETY

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - To explore that it means to trust oneself and other people
  - To discuss the obstacles to trusting other people
  - To develop awareness of when and when not to trust
- HANDOUT: What Does It Mean “To Trust?”
- RESOURCE: *Attachment, Trust and Trauma*
  - Essay on basic attachment research and the effects of disrupted attachment on subsequent development

## FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS: WHAT IS A BOUNDARY?

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Introduction to concept of boundaries and the importance of boundaries in people’s lives
  - Assessing functionality of interpersonal boundaries
  - Demonstrating other styles of creating and maintaining boundaries
- HANDOUT: Fences Make Good Neighbors
- RESOURCE: *Implementing S.E.L.F.*
  - More detailed explanation of S.E.L.F. with some examples of practical applications

## LIVING WITHOUT THE TERRORIST WITHIN

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Identifying self-defeating and self-deprecating thoughts
  - Creating safety within oneself and developing positive self-regard
  - Enhancing self-respect
- HANDOUT: Do You Have A Terrorist Within?
- RESOURCE: *When Victims Become Bullies*
  - Essay on bullying behavior in children and in adults

## VOLUME CONTROL

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Teach how to appropriately match emotional reactions to the realities of the situation
  - Provide tools for thinking about emotional reactions that precipitate action
- HANDOUT: Volume Control
- RESOURCE: *Fear Conditioning & Volume Control*
  - More detailed information about emotions, emotional management and the way fear interferes with normal emotional and cognitive function

## INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD – AND THE WORDS – OF EMOTION – MAD, SAD, GLAD, SCARED, SHAMED

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Develop ability to identify emotions in a situation and match appropriate emotion to that situation

- Develop ability to verbally communicate emotional states
- Desensitize individuals to self-sharing in a group
- Develop recognition that emotions can be used to create different outcomes
- HANDOUT: The Words of Emotion: Mad, Glad, Scared, Sad, Shamed
- RESOURCE: *I Don't Want To Talk About It: Numbing and Addiction to Stress*
  - Essay that explores emotional numbing, alexithymia, the relationship to health, addiction to trauma and endorphins, the social role of emotions and emotional contagion.

## PROBLEM SOLVING

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Provide a logical, S.E.L.F. approach to problem-solving
  - To provide a tool that can help make problem-solving more manageable
- HANDOUT: Problem Solving Worksheet
- RESOURCE: *The Problem of Evil*
  - Philosophical essay exploring how the notion of evil has been defined and how understanding the nature and consequences of traumatic experience may alter those notions and potentially lead to different response to people who do bad things

## TO CONNECT OR DISCONNECT: THAT IS THE QUESTION

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Explore the ways in which intensely disturbing or traumatic experiences may cause us to disconnect from our bodies, emotions, thoughts, and memories
  - To develop an understanding of what dissociation is and how it relates to previous trauma
- HANDOUT: Do You Disconnect?
- RESOURCE: *Dissociation*
  - Essay defining dissociation, offering examples of dissociation, and exploring some of the long-term effects of chronic dissociation

## HOW TO STAY GROUNDED

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- OBJECTIVES:
    - Explore the natural inclination of the mind to emotionally and physically disconnect from disturbing or traumatic situations
    - Describe simple methods for getting grounded in order to reconnect and reorient mind and body to present reality
  - HANDOUT: How To Stay Grounded
  - RESOURCE: *Memory and Dissociation Under Stress*
    - Essay describing the memory disturbances that frequently accompany traumatic experience, including flashbacks and post-traumatic nightmares
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## SELF-SOOTHING AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Identify stress responses in mind and body
  - Differentiate between soothing behaviors that are maladaptive and those that promote healing
  - Select behaviors and responses that can decrease emotional arousal
- HANDOUT: Managing Emotions
- RESOURCE: *“But I Just Can’t” Perception, Learned Helplessness and Attention Problems*
  - Essay exploring the helplessness associated with trauma, learned helplessness and interference with cognitive and behavioral function.

## HURT PEOPLE HURT PEOPLE

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Normalize discussion about the contagiousness of violence
  - Demonstrate how aggressive behavior begets aggressive behavior
  - Explore different ways that people respond to the stress response
- HANDOUT: Are You a Puffer or a Shrinker?
- RESOURCE: *Hurt People Hurt People*
  - Essay that explores the ways in which victims can become victimizers with a special emphasis on domestic violence and child abuse

## ADDICTIONS, SAFETY AND SELF-SOOTHING

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Discuss the ways addictive and compulsive behaviors are played out in everyday life
  - Develop understanding about the connection between addictive behavior and problems with emotional management
- HANDOUT: The Primary Colors of Emotion
- RESOURCE: *Double Trouble - Substance Abuse and PTSD*
  - Brief essay relating substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder

## RESOLVING CONFLICT

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Develop awareness of the ways in which conflict resolution can be blocked and the different kinds of conflict resolution styles available
  - Review list of guidelines for managing or resolving conflict
- HANDOUT: Guidelines for Managing Emotions and Resolving Conflict
- RESOURCE: *I Like To Play With Fire: Risk-taking, Suicidality and Aggression*
  - Essay exploring the connections between a past history of trauma and a variety of risk-taking behaviors including sexual promiscuity, suicidal and aggressive behavior.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LOSS?

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Define broad category of loss
  - Teach the various ways of showing grief and unresolved grief
- HANDOUT: The Many Faces of Loss
- RESOURCE: *Sexual Assault*
  - Essay on the nature of child and adult sexual assault

## USING SELF TO WORK THROUGH LOSS

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Demonstrate the ways in which the components of S.E.L.F. can provide a guide for working through loss
  - Explore barriers to working through loss in order to move on into a different future
- HANDOUT: Losses Associated with Childhood Adversity and Trauma
- RESOURCE: *The Grief That Dare Not Speak Its Name*
  - Essay about the many losses associated with abuse and deprivation in childhood

## NEVER HAVING TO SAY GOODBYE- REENACTMENT

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Understand the ways in which the self-limiting roles they are currently playing are a result of past experiences
  - Recognize the ways in which reenacting past self-defeating roles reproduces helplessness, abusive power, and a tendency to be revictimized
  - Recognize how reenactment roles affect identity and reproduce loss
- HANDOUT: Is It the Same Thing Over and Over
- RESOURCE: *Traumatic Reenactment*
  - Essay describing in more detail the dynamics of traumatic reenactment as it manifests in behavioral reenactments and self-harming behavior

## LEARNING TO LET GO

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Recognize that working through loss is vital to creating a different future
  - Describe the meaning of “letting go” and a process for completing it
- HANDOUT: Learning to Let Go Worksheet
- RESOURCE: *Give Sorrow Words: Emotional Disclosure and Physical Health*
  - Brief essay describing research on using writing to promote both emotional disclosure and improved physical health

## HOW TO LOSE YOUR SELF: TURNING PEOPLE INTO CHAMELEONS

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Learn how to set boundaries to better define one’s self

- Understand the impact of peer pressure
- Demonstrate how easy it is to lose one’s sense of identity in interaction with others
- HANDOUT: Do You Ever Lose Yourself?
- RESOURCE: *The Neglect of Neglect*
  - Essay describing the ways in which childhood neglect contributes to adult problems

## HABITS AND RESISTING CHANGE

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Learn about the automatic nature of forming habits and what it takes to change bad habits in order to achieve safety
  - Recognize that changing habits requires managing difficult emotions
  - Recognizing that changing habits involves facing fears and enduring loss in order to create a better future
- HANDOUT: What Are Your Habits & My Plan for Changing Habits
- RESOURCE: *Revictimization, School Failure and Substance Abuse*
  - Essay about how revictimization, failure in school as a child, and substance abuse as an adolescent and an adult all relate to each other and precipitate reenactment behavior.

## WHAT WE RESIST PERSISTS

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Recognize the fears that are aroused as barriers to change
  - Inform participants about the Stages of Change theory
- HANDOUT: Loss, Fear and Stages of Change
- RESOURCE: *Barriers to Recovery and Stages of Change*
  - Essay reviewing the Stages of Change theoretical framework and some reasons why it is so difficult for practitioners to address the impact of trauma on their clients.

## ONE STEP AT A TIME – IS THAT ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW?

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- OBJECTIVES:
    - Demonstrate how direction, vision and future planning are essential parts of change
    - Demonstrate that we can influence our own future through the choices that we make
  - HANDOUT: Five Steps to a Better Future for Myself
  - RESOURCE: *The Bystander Effect*
    - Essay that explores the ways in which victimization and perpetration are influenced by everyone else – the social context within which events unfold.
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## HOW DOES CHANGE HAPPEN?

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Demonstrate the ways in which we can influence our choices that determine the future by understanding the patterns of the past
  - Recognize how important it is to learn from the past
- HANDOUT: Autobiography in Five Short Chapters
- RESOURCE: *Chaos, Complexity and the Process of Change*
  - Essay that attempts to simplify the emerging concepts of complexity as it relates to the ways in which people change

## EMPOWERMENT

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Differentiate between destructive and constructive forms of exercising power
  - Become familiar with direct and indirect methods of exercising power
  - Recognize previously untapped sources of personal power
- HANDOUT: Exploring What Power Really Means
- RESOURCE: *Retributive vs. Restorative Justice*
  - Essay that explores the difference between justice that is based on retribution and justice that is based on restoring the integrity of the community

## HOW TO INFLUENCE THE FUTURE: SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Understand how we play a role in determining how other people treat us
  - Guide participants in a method for altering the roles we automatically play so that people will treat us differently
- HANDOUT: Self-Fulfilling Prophecies
- RESOURCE: *How Labels Determine Reality*
  - Essay describing the ways in which we tend to label things, including people, and they how those labels can become self-fulfilling prophecies that actually determine how reality is defined.

## RELAPSE PREVENTION

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Identify situations which compromise sobriety – from substance abuse or destructive behaviors – while attending to the emotions that accompany change
  - Define strengths that allow individual to successfully resist relapse
- HANDOUT: Relapse Prevention Worksheet
- RESOURCE: *Caring for the Caregiver: Vicarious Trauma*
  - Essay on “vicarious trauma” describing the cumulative transformative effect on the helper of working with victims of trauma.

## MOVING ON AND GIVING BACK

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Introduce the idea of a survivor mission
  - Describe successes people have had in struggling with challenging life experiences
  - Develop understanding for how giving back is an integral part of growth, recovery and personal development
- HANDOUT: Survivor Mission
- RESOURCE: *Social Transformation of Trauma*
  - Essay describing various ways that people transform traumatic experience into something of value for themselves and for others

## IMAGINING A BETTER FUTURE

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- OBJECTIVES:
  - Introduce the idea of living a balanced life
  - Exercise the skills necessary to envision a better future
- HANDOUT: Inventory of Recreation Activities
- RESOURCE: *The Sanctuary Model of Organizational Change*
  - Brief essay on why trauma-informed services are so important and what it actually means for an organization to be trauma-informed

## ADAPTATIONS FOR VARIOUS POPULATIONS

As there are multiple populations being taught the Sanctuary Model, there will be adaptations and explanations for these.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES AND TOOLS

Each lesson has **Resource Suggestions** following it. These may include workbooks, movies, music, websites and items in the appendix. As this is a working document, if group leaders discover additional resources, these will be included. It is important to recognize that movies and music and other pop-culture items are frequently changing and may not apply to all populations. Resources will be marked as to which population they apply.

## ADDITIONAL GROUP STRUCTURING TOOLS

At the start of this manual, there are materials to help to structure groups such as check in activities, check out activities and other suggestions. Some lessons may have different structuring options and tools.

## S.E.L.F. PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL GROUPS

## BACKGROUND

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Group dynamics theorist, Kurt Lewin believed that the primary task of reeducation involved a change in the person's self perception. He found that the change in perception of oneself preceded changes in knowledge, values and beliefs and only then would there be a lasting change in behavior [1]. In the original Sanctuary program, psychoeducation was an indispensable part of the program. Here is how Sandy described it in her original book:

AN ESSENTIAL PART OF TRAINING FOR STAFF AND FOR PATIENTS WAS PSYCHOEDUCATION AND THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION. WE ALL NEEDED A WAY TO THINK ABOUT OUR PROBLEMS, WE NEEDED A SHARED VOCABULARY AND A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH STRATEGY COULD BE CAREFULLY FORMULATED. THEREFORE, THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY NEEDED TO PROVIDE AN ONGOING, CEASELESS EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE. EVERY INTERPERSONAL OCCURRENCE HAD TO BE SEEN AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH, IN MAXWELL JONES' TERMS A "LIVING-LEARNING SITUATION". THE UNCONSCIOUS HAD TO BE MADE CONSCIOUS, BUT PEOPLE MUST LEARN HOW TO DO THIS AND THIS SKILL DOES NOT COME EASILY IN OUR PRESENT SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT. WE USED ANY MEANS WE COULD FIND - WRITING, ART, DRAMA POETRY, DANCE, SPORTS, MOVIES - TO HELP PEOPLE PUT THEIR EXPERIENCE INTO WORDS. ONLY WITH WORDS WOULD THEY BE ABLE TO PUT THEIR LIVES INTO THE NARRATIVE FORM SO THAT THE PAST COULD TAKE ITS PROPER PLACE AND LEAVE THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE ALONE. IN FORMAL PSYCHOEDUCATION GROUPS, WRITTEN P., READINGS, AND VIDEOS, WE TAUGHT THE PATIENTS THE LANGUAGE OF TRAUMA THEORY (P.128) [2].

As a result of their experiences in the world, including previous experiences with the mental health and social service systems, many clients enter environments that are supposed to be therapeutic believing very negative things about themselves and the world around them and in large part because they have no other explanatory system, explanations become highly self-referential. When an entire staff shares the same knowledge base and can consistently share the same language and approaches through informal interactions and through formal psychoeducational instruction methods, treatment changes. Instead of drawing on their own folk psychology, which may or may not be helpful, all staff members can draw upon a scientific knowledge base for why we do what we do and feel what we feel under conditions of extreme stress.

## WHAT IS IT?

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We have created psychoeducational materials that are organized around S.E.L.F. and help clients to shift their understanding of what has happened to them, how they have responded to those events, and the role they must play in their own recovery. In the fast-paced human service world that most of us function in today, for a curriculum to be useful it has to be simple to deliver by staff members who have a minimum of training, while still applicable when used in the hands of more experienced professionals. In most cases, there can be no expectation that every client will have the time to experience the entire curriculum. Many treatment/residential experiences are so brief that a curriculum that builds on previous lessons, as is typical in an educational setting, is

simply not appropriate. Therefore each lesson must embody at least a piece of the whole curriculum AND the entire curriculum must be flexible enough so that each lesson can stand on its own independently. To be maximally useful in a residential setting, it must be possible for a staff member to decide that “Today, we need to focus on loss” or “We are having such issues around safety in the community that I am going to do the lesson on social safety today” and not have to use the material in a set sequence.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

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Embedding the fundamental tasks of recovery: Safety, Emotional management, Loss, and Future - as a common language is an essential part of the Sanctuary Model and is supported by the implementation of psychoeducational groups for clients that follow the S.E.L.F. format. Through these groups staff and clients learn about the destructive impact of trauma and develop an increased understanding that many symptoms are simply normal responses to abnormal situations. As this staff and clients become more knowledgeable, S.E.L.F. language is used more consistently in the organization and developing skill in managing emotional states becomes more noticeable. As this process unfolds, the staff members become much more interested in the history of what the clients have actually experienced and how that history has determined present behavior. Through case discussions and an increase in collaborative efforts among various treatment team members, innovative approaches are tried and discoveries made that further reinforce the process of continuing change. Issues of loss are frequently neglected in therapeutic environments as is for fear of opening up “doors” that indeed need to be opened. The S.E.L.F. psychoeducational groups guarantee that Loss will not get ignored, since dealing with issues of loss are so key to helping clients stop reenacting their past damaging experiences. The lessons on Future repeatedly convey the notion of health, transformation, and healing, encouraging positive goals and images of very different outcomes than those of the past.

## HOW DO YOU DO IT?

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The S.E.L.F. Psychoeducational Curriculum for clients must be consistent with that delivered to the staff and include information about the basic psychobiology of trauma and the concepts covered under S.E.L.F. including issues of attachment, stages of change, and the various components of understanding what it means to be safe, how to define and manage emotions, how to say goodbye to the pain of the past, and how to use one’s imagination to envision a different future. Psychoeducation is a key aspect of recovery, empowerment, and the development of better self-control.

The Sanctuary treatment environment as a whole is richly educational utilizing all available methodologies to help the clients understand the impact of negative experiences on their development and enlisting them in the process of positive change. Psychoeducational groups stimulate learning and the development of consistent community norms and a shared language. This kind of education is necessary to ready children and adults to safely engage in the direct trauma resolution work that many of them need. It is best if the psychoeducational groups are flexible and that the subject matter is varied based on the immediate needs of the community on

the day of the group. As a result, the group leaders must be reasonably good educators who have a sufficient grasp of the material to adapt S.E.L.F. concepts to the needs of the moment.

## HOW TO GET THE CURRICULUM

Introductory information, an essay on the Sanctuary philosophy, and a Table of Contents that lists all the available lessons can be downloaded for free at any point. Each individual lesson in the curriculum can then be purchased on-line after signing a licensing agreement that allows a program the right to copy the material but only for that program's use.

1. Coghlan, D. and C. Jacobs, *Kurt Lewin on Reeducation: Foundations for Action Research*. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 2005. **41**(4): p. 444-457.
2. Bloom, S.L., *Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies*. 1997, New York: Routledge.