

Amity

Amity Stronger Relationship Sessions workbook for parents



www.amityrelationshipsolutions.org

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Introduction for using the Amity structured sessions in your work with individuals or couples

Welcome to the Amity structured sessions for intact couples. The sessions have been developed to support you in your everyday practice, building on the skills you already have when supporting children, young people, adults and families. This resource has been created by Amity using their subject matter experience in couple therapy, family coaching and family mediation. Amity have created this practical and user-friendly resource so that trained practitioners can support families (in particular intact couples) to have stronger and healthier relationships and more positive communication. This resource is not suitable where domestic abuse has been identified.

You can work through the Amity structured sessions with a couple or one person if the other person doesn't want to get involved. They may change their mind later but in the meantime, you should still work with and support the person who is ready to start the process of change.

Here at Amity, we have a strong shared belief that relationship support should be more readily available for families and undertaken across the continuum of need by a range of already very capable multi-agency practitioners including those in health, education, early help, children's social care, housing organisations, community and voluntary organisations. This list is by no means exhaustive as we believe that supporting relationships to thrive can become everyone's business. Support for relationships doesn't need to be just about 'specialist support' - there is certainly a place and need for this. However, there is also plenty of room for those working with people to play their part and offer an appropriate supportive intervention where they feel they can.

Some practitioners may worry about being responsible for 'fixing' relationships which can feel daunting. With this in mind, the structured sessions have been created so that 'relationship curiosity' becomes easier and practitioners soon realise that good relationship support is about asking useful questions and providing evidenced based tools and strategies rather than 'fixing'. We hope as you grow in confidence that relationship enquiry will become a natural part of your work. Whatever your professional role in supporting people, there is something in the toolkit that will help an individual or a couple, with your support, to think about the quality of their close relationships and learn some new strategies to manage unhelpful, damaging conflict.

It is worth a reminder that quality relationships throughout life are a right, not a privilege. Our relationships are one of the most important aspects of who we are, yet we often forget just how crucial our connections with other people are for our happiness. Together we need to create strong healthy relationships where we can and promote healthy and respectful communication habits.

Good relationships make us feel connected, content and fulfilled; yet poor relationships can make us feel disconnected, afraid or lonely. Couple, family and social relationships hold the key to good parenting, which in turn impacts on our children's educational attainment, mental and physical wellbeing, self-esteem and future life chances. Essentially, it's the people around us that will get us through life's ups and downs. There is a growing evidence base that supports the call for a system

change approach, recognising and supporting quality parental and couple relationships as a core shared objective across all areas of service delivery in the public sector. We know that families who receive relationship support from a practitioner they already know benefit hugely and that it puts them at ease, along with the huge sense of relief felt when they have offloaded their relationship worries and have been provided with some practical strategies to help them work things out for themselves. By encouraging practitioners to use this innovative, solution focused, we can collectively start a relationship support revolution that will benefit families for years to come.

Relationships affect us all, they are part of being a human, they are one of the hardest things we learn to navigate as a child and an adult

This Amity structures sessions have been designed to help you as a practitioner in your role supporting couples in their relationships. It is not a quick guide to turning you into a counsellor or a guide to how to 'fix' couples. This resource provides you with tools to use with couples to initiate productive conversations. The point of this work is not to try to keep couples together but to help couples to understand their conflict and how to repair what is not working be that together as an intact couple or parents that are co-parenting.

Children are greatly affected by exposure to unhealthy relationships and we know that it can be better for a child's wellbeing if their parents or carers do separate rather than consistently expose the child to long term destructive conflict.

Where children do experience the break-up of their parents it is the behaviour of the parents before, during the after the breakup that causes the most difficulty for children. Children cope well when their parents cope well and adjust to co-parenting.

The sessions are useful to all kinds of couples, same sex couples, families with adopted children, families where there is a blend of cultures or religions. The sessions are designed to give you confidence to have conversations with couples about their relationships knowing that it is not your job to be fixing but to be sharing knowledge that gives families the tools they need to make their relationships healthier. The aim is to work in a solution focused way, enabling and empowering couples to understand their conflict and see how to resolve their issues themselves, rather than relying on a practitioner for solutions. Children do better when they feel safe and secure, this feeling of wellbeing can be largely generated by exposure to healthy relationships within the home. Improving the health of the relationships of the families you work with is something you can have a real impact on.

There are 6 sessions in total, and it makes sense to complete all the sessions in the order they have been laid out for you. You can record the session progress within your assessment, action plans and case notes. Don't forget to use the Amity self-reporting questionnaire which you will find at the back of the resource. This will help you understand the current difficulties an individual or couple might be having and will also help you and the person(s) you are supporting at the end to see how far they have come.

For further about information Amity's work please visit www.amityrelationshipsolutions.org

Introduction for parents and carers

Welcome to this Amity Relationships Workbook. This book has been designed to be used with couples working alongside a practitioner who will guide you through the content, and support you through a series of reflections and discussions.

It's good to remember that 'You get out what you put in' when you are doing this kind of activity. It's worth trying to be open minded and kind to each other as you start to explore how you communicate and try to understand what might be getting in the way of you getting on better. Try to really listen to what each of you are saying and show respect for each others thoughts and ideas. You can do this by trying to avoid saying things like 'Don't be silly' if your partner expresses a feeling. It's important to acknowledge that is how they feel rather than trying to dismiss their feeling because it makes you feel uncomfortable.

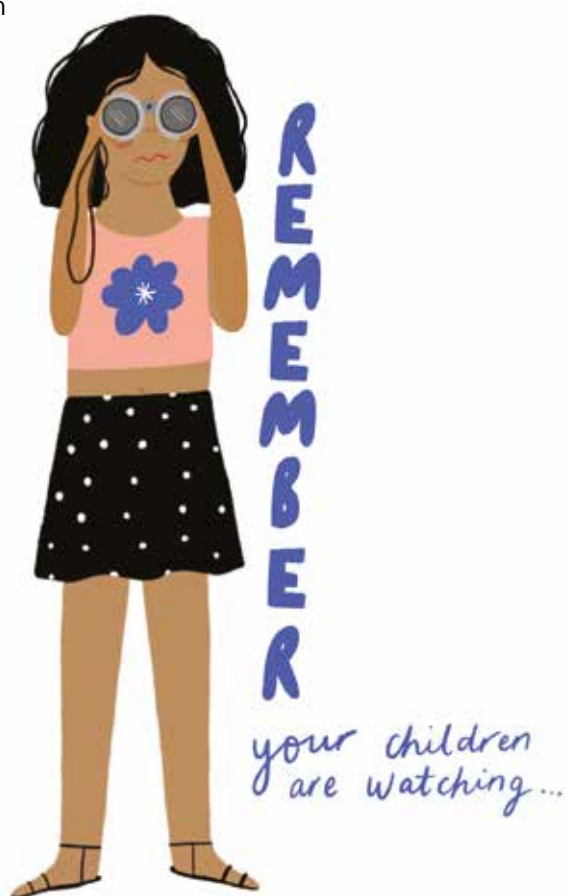
The idea of this book is to help you to explore together different areas of your relationship and the way you communicate with each other, so you are better prepared to deal with the next argument you have. When you start to feel distant or there is a lack of warmth between you, doing this work will help you to know how to find your way back to one another.

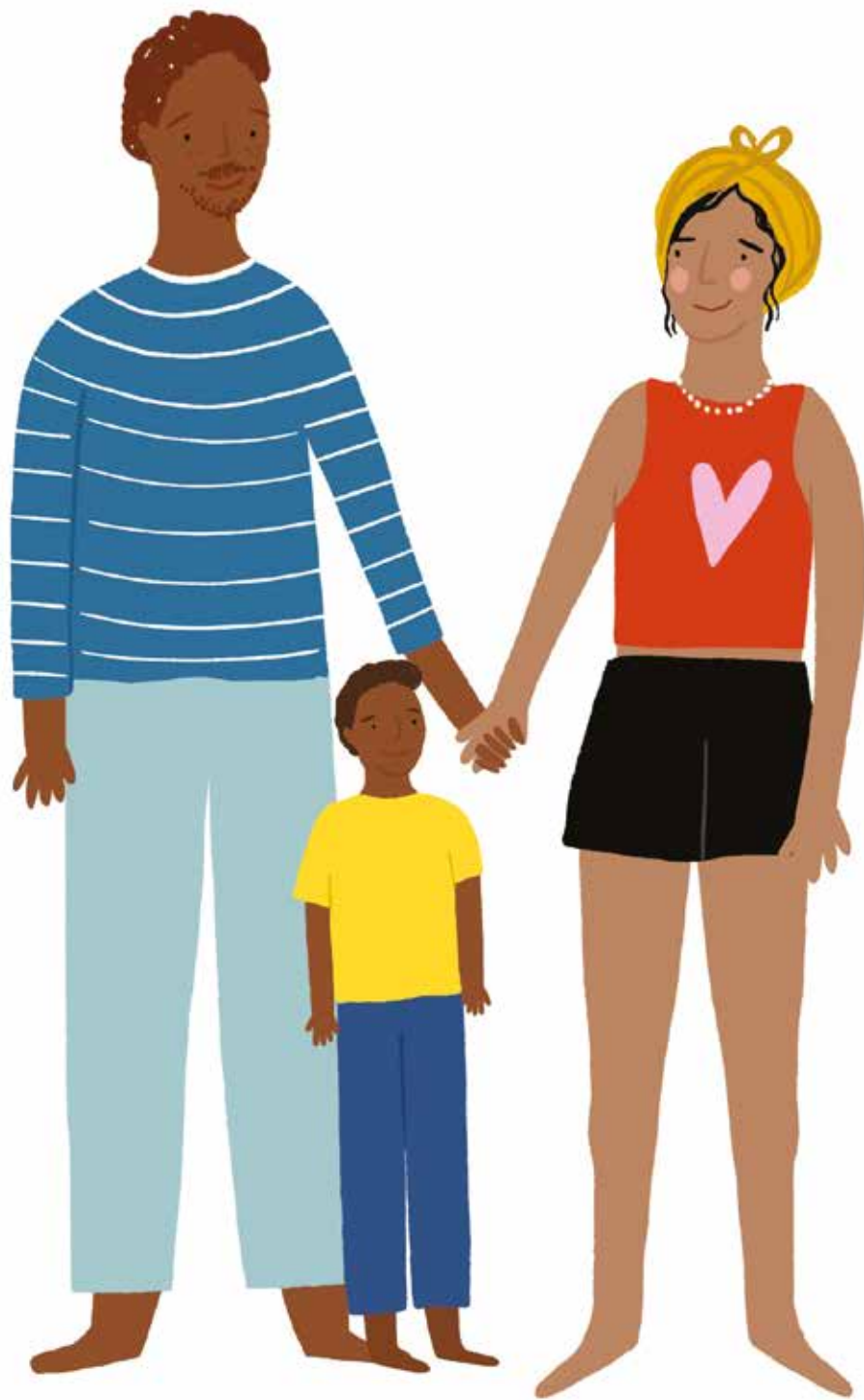
One of the keys to making progress in the maturity of your relationship is learning how to avoid blaming and criticising each other when things get stressful and challenging. When you have a breakdown in positive communication, things can easily slide into unhelpful behaviours becoming normal and that can make it hard for you to feel like you can see a way forward that will bring a sense of stability back.

It's so important to remember that all the time you are bickering and arguing when things are getting on top of you, your children are witnessing the way you are talking to each other. Children learn from what they see. By working through this book and addressing issues together you increase your chances of setting a positive example to your children of how to communicate in a respectful way.

The aim of this book is not to try and stop you from ever having another argument, that would be ridiculously unrealistic and not how a healthy relationship works. Healthy relationships are ones that have disagreements in them, but essentially, they also have apologies and respectful repair conversations in them too.

By working through this book you are investing in your relationship. Reflecting together is always a good thing to do. Keep this book when you have completed it, so you can refer back to it when you feel like you need some steering back in the right direction.





SESSION ONE

Pre-session check in

Before each session you will consider how you are both feeling and where on the scale you may sit right now. Have a look at the image below, there was probably a time when your relationship was stronger and things felt ok. Think back to that time when things felt better between you, what were you doing then that you are not doing now?

Where on this scale would you say you are today?

You may have different opinions about this and that's totally fine and normal!



The start of your story - where it begins

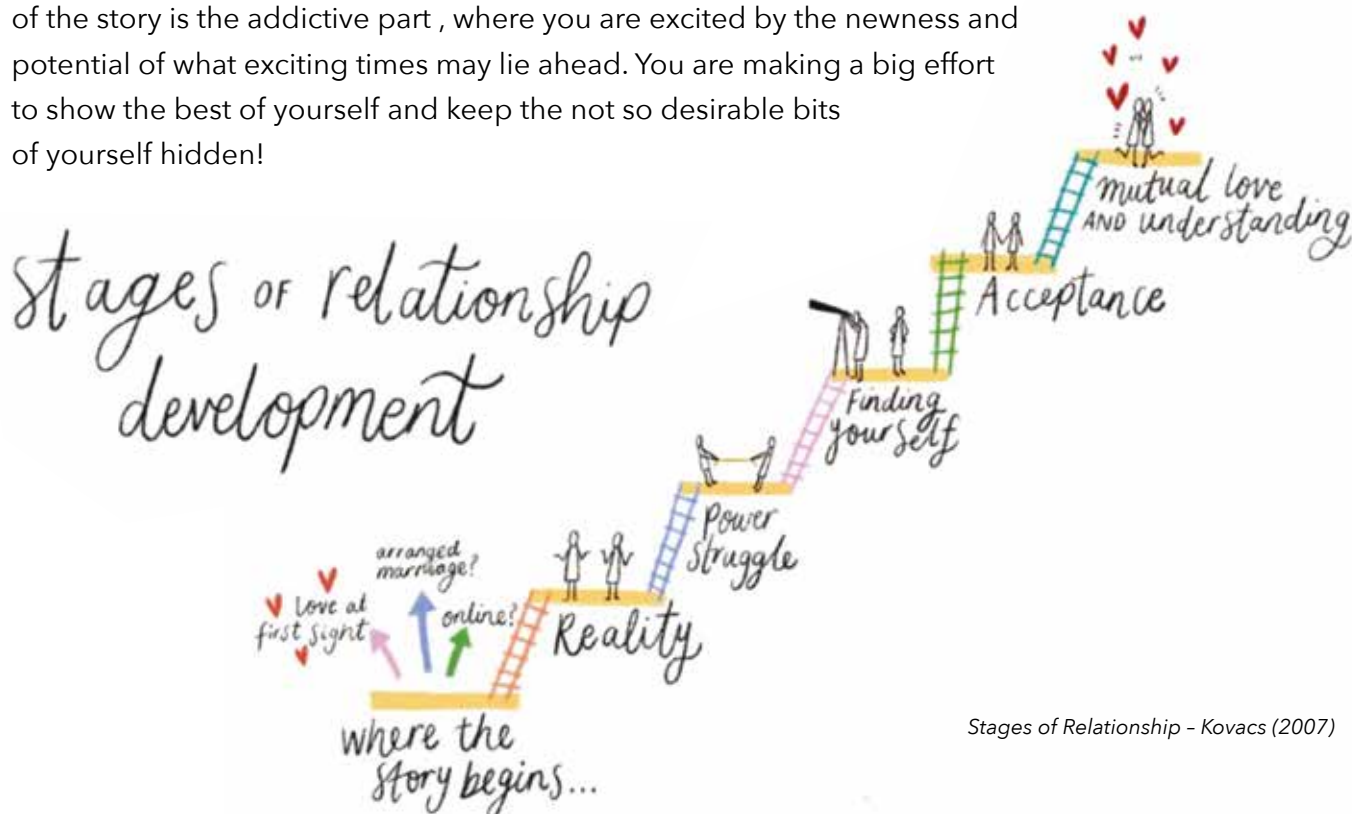
Where did your story begin and what stage are you at now? Most people don't know much about the stages our relationships go through, but it can be very helpful to know more about them and what is normal in the journey! Moving up and down through these stages can be hard, but by doing so you are strengthening your bond and learning how to meet one another's needs. It's normal to find yourselves arguing when you experience a change. A change in your life means your relationship has to change a bit too. Moving through these steps can feel unsettling and challenging but it is normal and can be good for the quality of your relationship.

The trick is to work out how to move to the next stage. When you've been stuck in eg: power struggle before what helped you move on? What do you need from each other?

Where the story begins

The story of your relationship can begin in different ways, an arranged marriage, meeting online, introduced by a friend etc.

For those who choose their partner and instigate their relationship this start of the story is the addictive part, where you are excited by the newness and potential of what exciting times may lie ahead. You are making a big effort to show the best of yourself and keep the not so desirable bits of yourself hidden!



Stages of Relationship - Kovacs (2007)

Reality

The reality is you can't keep that up. No one is perfect and every relationship requires some compromise, so in the end you either accept the reality of the other person, imperfections on your part and theirs, or you leave that relationship. It is very common for young people to leave when they realise the imperfections and continue their search for that mythical perfect person!

Power Struggle

At this point in a relationship you are learning to compromise and negotiate the small things, the everyday issues that eventually add up to whether you feel happy sharing your life with this person. For example:

- Are you happy to go to their mums every Sunday for lunch?
- Do you sleep with the window open or shut?
- Dogs or cats, curry or pizza?

It's at this point some couples realise they are not a good fit. They are not able to find a way to both feel happy with the compromises required. It may also be at this stage that you realise that there is a power imbalance in the relationship if one half of the couple feels that they constantly have to compromise and do what their partner wants as opposed to it being a fair balance of decision making.

Finding yourself

If you've managed to get through the power struggle stage and build on some solid foundations, this stage challenges you to hold on to your identity as a couple. Healthy relationships tend to be healthy because each person has retained their identity as an individual, they have not morphed into one just because they are a couple. Having a clear identity of who you are as a couple helps you to feel confident, to also thrive as individuals who may have different hobbies that they feel free to engage in as well as shared interests. If one partner finds this hard to do, it can lead to the breakdown of the relationship.

Accepting

Every relationship has its own quirks and what is happy bliss for one couple certainly is not for another, you create your own relationship reality. If you have accepted one another for all the good and not so good bits you are able to move on to...

Love, respect and understanding

At this point you have worked out how to meet each other's needs, how to love one another in the way that you need to feel safe, secure and thrive.

Life, with all its stressful events (e.g.: loss of job, moving to a new house, health issues) upsets this hard earned balance and we can quickly be transported back to a different stage such as power struggle/finding yourself for example as a result of having to re-adjust to a new situation/life transition.

That is totally normal. You build strength and resilience into your relationship by working through these relationship stages multiple times. So what we perceive to be bad at the time can turn out to be good for your relationship in the long term.

Understanding the people and events that make up your past is helpful for making sure you understand each other and how you got to this point.

Moving up and down through these stages can be hard, but by doing so you are strengthening your bond and learning how to meet one another's needs. It's normal to find yourselves arguing when you experience a change. A change in your life means your relationship has to change a bit too. Moving through these steps can feel unsettling and challenging but it is normal and can be good for the quality of your relationship.

The trick is to work out how to move to the next stage. When you've been stuck in eg: power struggle before what helped you move on? What do you need from each other?

Which stage might you be in now? (Did you know that it can be normal to be at a different stage to your partner? In fact this often explains why people are not getting on if you are having a different experience to your partner and there is a lack of understanding between you this can cause conflict).

Things to consider now

Are you on the same step?

What does it feel like?

When you have been here before how did you work things out?

Notes

ACTIVITY: What is the history of your family?

You might find it helpful to reflect together on your history by discussing the answers to these questions. The answers to the questions can often be useful to work out why and how the past may be affecting your relationship now.

How long have you been together?

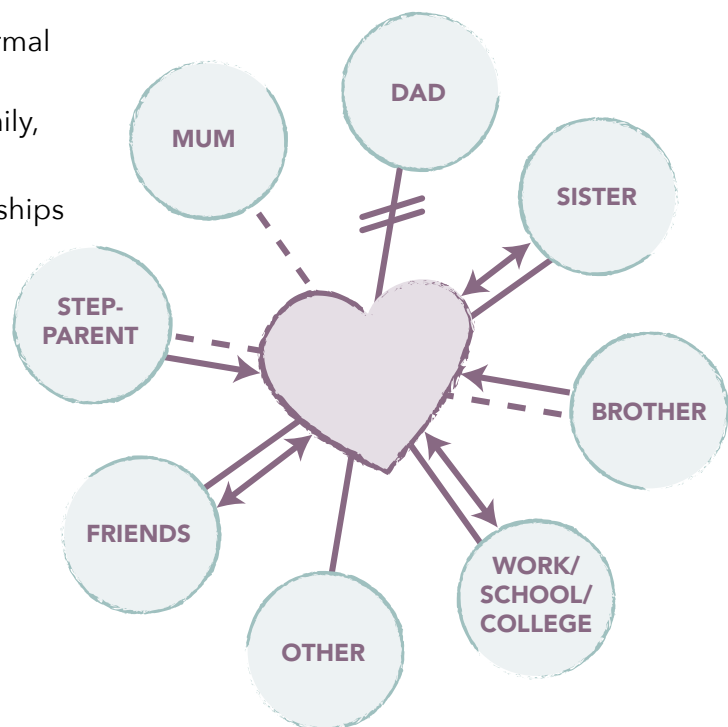
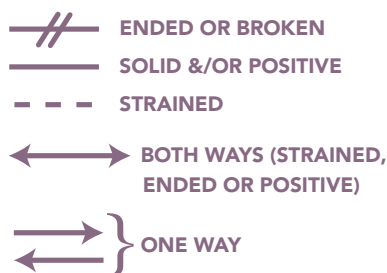
Have you had any other significant adult relationships? Do they impact on the relationship you have now?

Have there been any big life events in your family that you feel may be affecting your relationship?

ACTIVITY: RELATIONSHIPS MAP

This is the Amity Relationship Map. It's a great way to explore the relationships you have with those around you. There will be people who enrich your life, like your children, and there will also be other people who make it more complicated or stressful. Your children probably do both because parenting can be very stressful as well as being fun too. You might identify strained relationships that would benefit your whole family by being improve. As a couple you are trying to function as a successful team. You give yourselves the best chance of achieving this by making sure the people in your lives support and help your team rather than disrupt it. If you've identified disruptive people, it's good to talk about how you are going to respond to them in a healthy way together. By doing this exercise you start off on the right foot to improve the stability and quality of your relationship. You may want to do a relationship map for your children too. They have less choice about who is in their life and it's easy to forget how influenced they might be by the people around them - both positively and negatively. You can use the blank version to help you to think about all the people in your lives and what support or stress they add to your life. Each adult will need their own Amity Relationships Map because every person in the family will have their own relationship strengths and strains. It can also be useful to do a joint map together. Use the key to explore and determine whether each relationship is strong, reciprocal, strained etc. This is a useful activity which can help you think about and reflect on things like:

- Family dynamics
- Formal and informal relationships
- each child's connections to their formal and informal relationships (school, resources, friends, family, wider family, networks, professionals etc)
- quality and nature of those relationships
- which relationships might need to be encouraged and/or strengthened?



SESSION TWO

A little check in...

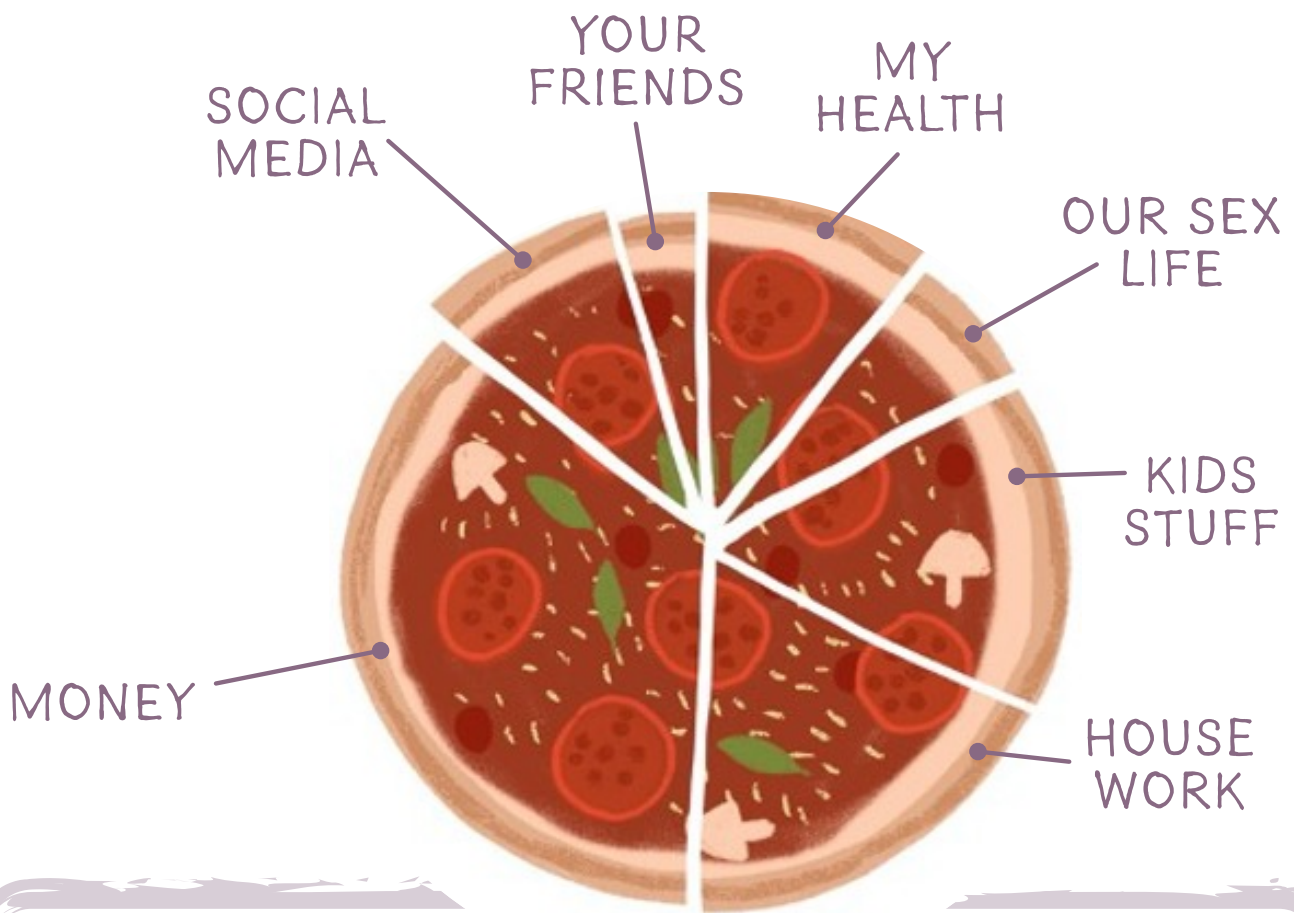




REMEMBER

*your children
are watching...*

The Problem Pizza



ACTIVITY:

So what's your problem? It's not always as easy to answer this question as you think. There may not be a problem as in a big bust up for instance, more that there might be a few things that are challenging right now and those issues may look and feel different for both of you.

It helps to make these problems visual and to give them a size, so you both understand each other's perspectives on things right now.

A pizza each....the bigger the problem for you, the larger the slice of pizza will be.

Answer honestly about how you feel.

Discuss what you have both written

Were there any surprises?

What might you do differently now to support each other?

Are your slices similar or different?

You may have different issues to each other, its normal for your pizzas to look different

How's your hula hooping

As a human, you do what you do and think what you think largely influenced by your past experiences the 'stuff' you bring with you. This stuff consists of many different things such as:

- The culture and community you have lived in
- The way you were parenting
- Your genetic make-up, your personality
- The socio-economic environment you have lived in
- Your past relationships - romantic and family



All this 'stuff' has an impact on how you operate as an adult. It is your baggage, some of the baggage is helpful and some of it is not. Some of your baggage has helped you become more resilient and stronger and some of it has made you more vulnerable. We also call this the bag of life because it's something we carry around all the time. Some bags are heavier than others and that's OK. A lighter bag doesn't mean we have had it easier than our partner.

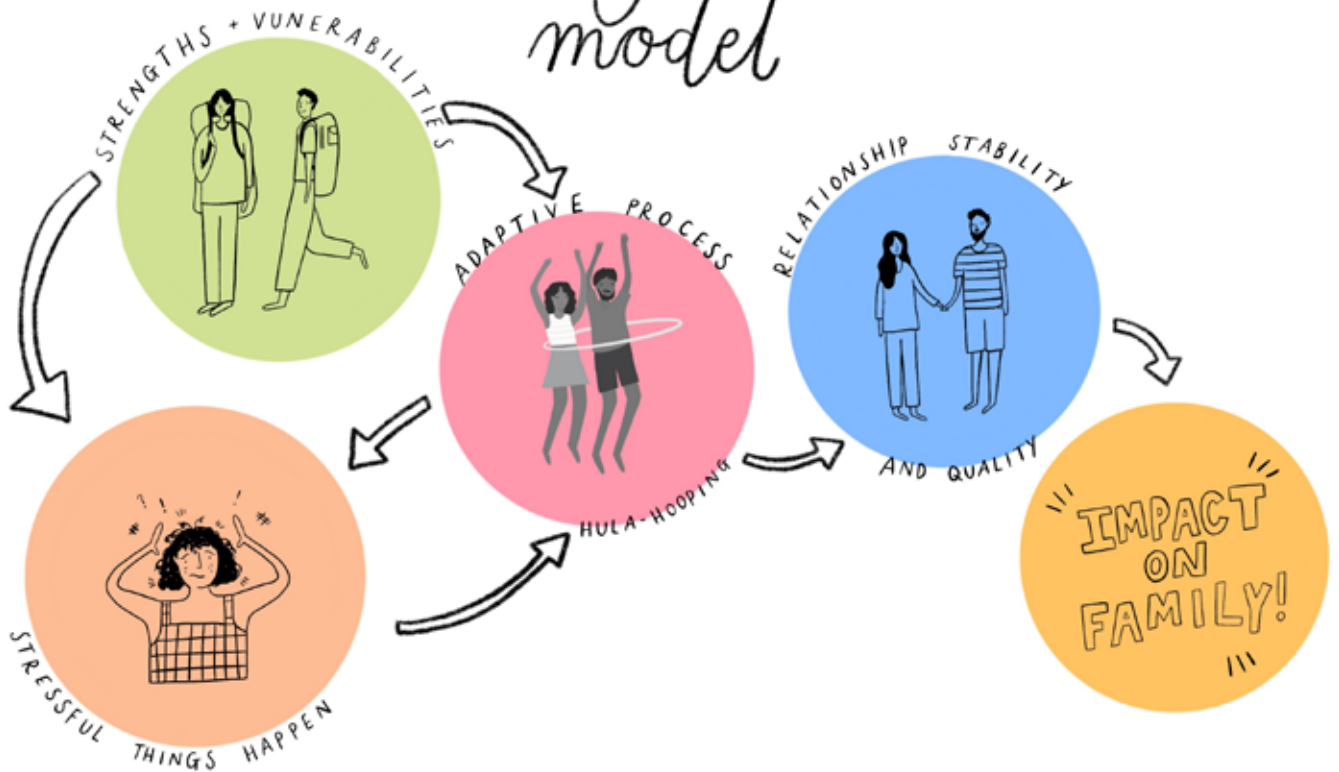
So, when you choose to engage in a relationship, you bring all of it with you. The impact of the baggage that you bring with you can stay largely dormant until a stressful event (i.e., a bereavement, job loss, illness) puts pressure on the relationship for example - when a new baby arrives, how you functioned as a couple before has to change. You have new responsibilities and priorities, they change instantly, but your relationship will take time to adjust to the new normal. If you are able to adjust well together, if you are good at sharing what makes you feel vulnerable and what you feel able to cope with you will adapt more successfully than a couple that has baggage that exposes their ability to cope at times of change.

How well you are able to communicate with each other becomes key, rather than blame one another for the things that are going wrong, instead trying to listen and respond to one another with empathy. Responding with empathy is made easier if you are able to understand where the other person is coming from, if you understand their 'stuff'. This in turn helps to prevent the stressful situation i.e. the new baby, having an impact on the quality and stability of the relationship.

Being able to recognise that your partner's baggage lies behind the reason why they are responding to situations of change or stress the way they are, provides you as a partner the chance to feel less resentful towards their reaction.

Understanding one another's baggage and making allowances for it enables better adapting, better communication and a healthier relationship. Coping with the baggage means finding a way to meet each-other's needs in a balance way.

Vulnerability stress adaptation model



VSA model - Bradbury and Karney (2012)

How you cope as a couple when stressful things effect you, is important as it can make your relationship unstable if you struggle a lot under pressure. Life throws all sorts at you as a couple. In order to cope you need to find a way to use your strengths when your partner feels vulnerable and visa versa.

Learning how to meet one another's needs creates a synchronisation that is essential for a relationship stability.

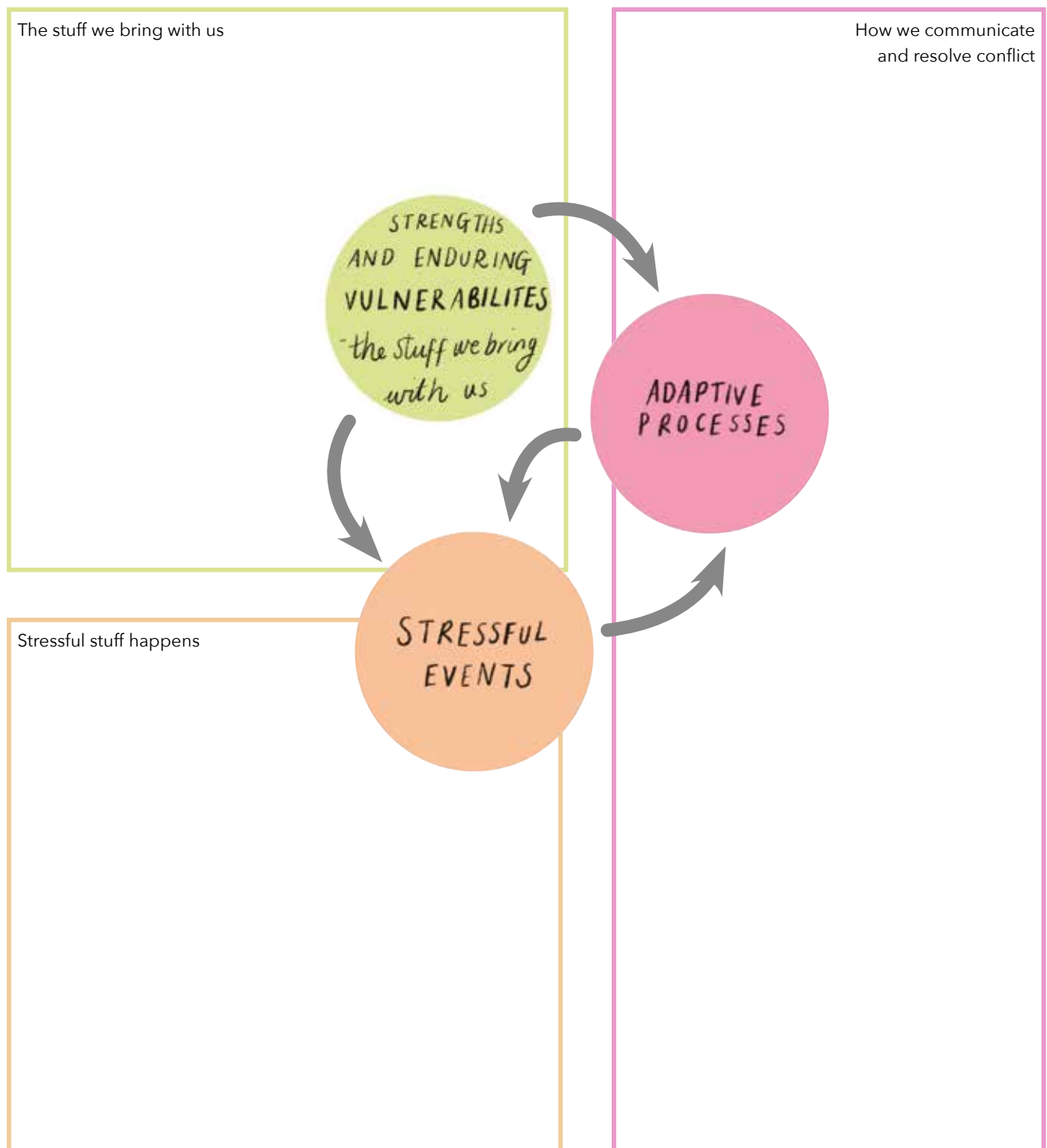
This synchronisation is like hula hooping, a little bit of your way and a little bit of their way and you find a way to adapt together when things get difficult.

Sometimes your hula hooping will be rubbish, sometimes it will be brilliant.



What's going on for us

You can use these boxes to help you to think about yourselves and what your strengths and vulnerabilities are, what you find stressful and how well you cope with all this together. Are you good at meeting each other's needs? If not, what could you start to do differently to improve that?



SESSION THREE

A little check in...



What does more positive communication look like?

Have you ever played a game of toxic tennis? You have, you just don't know it!

Toxic tennis is a situation that you get drawn into when you are feeling negative about your relationship, there is a bit of a disconnect and lack of warmth between you. You start to look for/notice annoying/irritating things your partner does.

You criticise them...."You forgot to put the bins out"

They respond defensively

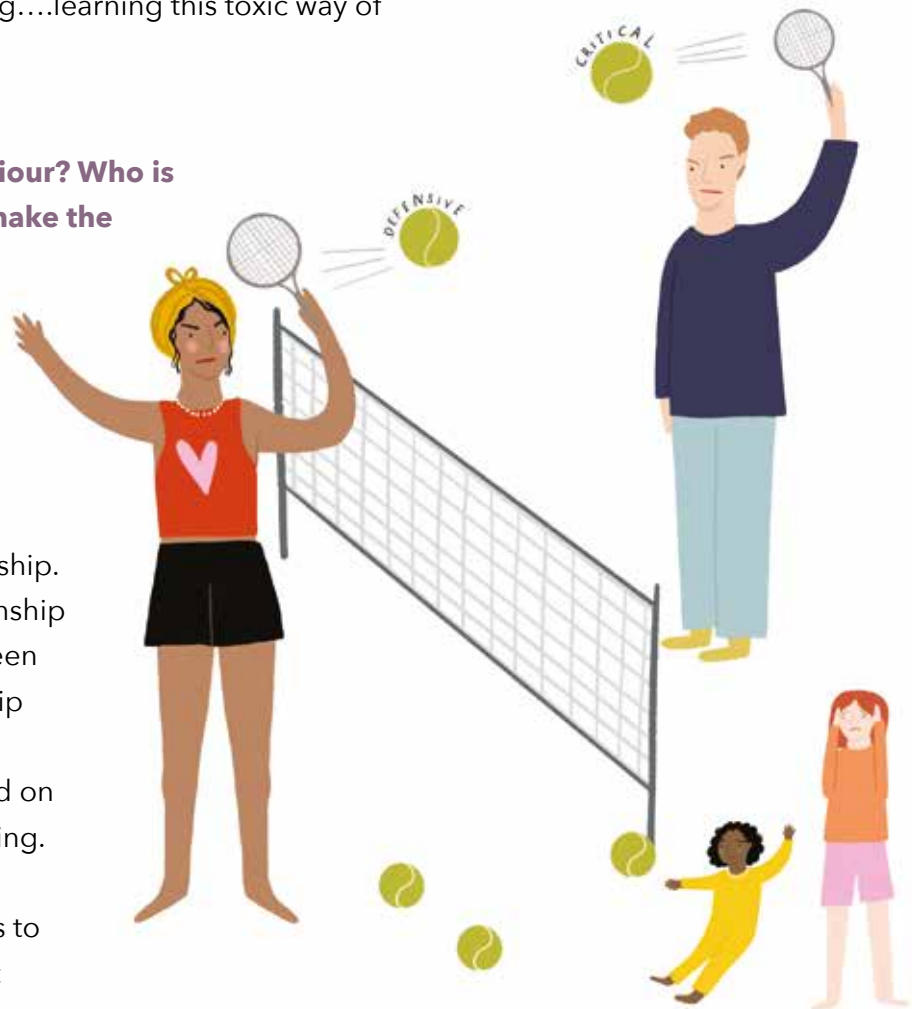
"Well you forgot to pick the kids up from school and that's worse"

This exchange of criticism and defence goes backwards and forwards....toxic tennis.

Not only does this erode the warmth between you, but a lot of the time your children are watching....learning this toxic way of communication.

Do you recognise this behaviour? Who is going to catch the ball and make the decision to communicate in a different way, a more positive way?

Conflict is about disagreeing. How/if you can work out the way to find resolution is what shapes the health of a relationship. It is normal in a healthy relationship to argue. The difference between arguing in a healthy relationship versus unhealthy is that the argument tends to be focussed on finding resolution not on winning. In an unhealthy relationship arguing is personal, never gets to a solution and becomes about winning at all costs.



HEALTHY



CONSTRUCTIVE

(ie. helpful)

- ACKNOWLEDGING
- CALM
- FOCUS ON TOPIC
- NO BLAMING
- FIND A SOLUTION
- SHOW RESPECT

OR

UNHEALTHY



DESTRUCTIVE

(ie. unhelpful)

- SHOUTING/ SWEARING
- TRYING TO WIN
- MAKE PERSONAL COMMENTS
- DON'T LISTEN
- NO RESOLUTION
- LACK FOCUS

Constructive and Destructive - Goeke-Morey, Cummings, Harold and Shelton (2003)

Helpful conflict tends to involve an apology when things escalate away from resolution as at the heart of the conversation is the desire to find a solution.

Relationship damaging conflict does not have this focus on a solution. It is damage on top of damage. There is only rupture and no repair.

This kind of communication between a couple is not positive role modelling for a child to be exposed to. Experiencing parents shout and speak disrespectfully towards one another is confusing and scary for children. Children need to be exposed to arguments that are based on finding a solution, that show compromise and healthy negotiation. If an argument turns a bit sour a parent needs to recognise that it makes the child feel vulnerable and confused about what might happen as result of the conflict. The parent might know that their relationship isn't on the verge of breakdown, but the child doesn't.

In these situations where the couple apologise and make up in privacy, it's important that the child knows that the repair work happened. This way they learn how a healthy relationship works and what constructive communication looks like in action.

If that doesn't happen the risk is that the child learns that shouting and blaming is ok because the next day things seem back to normal. Try to remember to take a moment to explain that there was a disagreement but it was worked out and there were apologies and there is nothing to worry about.

How you behave once you are in the conversation is important. This exercise may help you to recognise which behaviours are constructive/helpful/healthy and destructive/unhelpful/unhealthy.

ACTIVITY: HELPFUL OR UNHELPFUL?

Choose which behaviours are helpful and unhelpful.

Are some hard to do? Why? What might you do differently now you have thought about this?

Being interested
in each
others opinions

Talking over
the other person
to make your point

Showing respect
by listening to
the thoughts

Storming out as you
are not winning

Try to control your
partners choices

Being critical of your
partner as you don't feel
they are on your side

Getting the moment
right to talk

Using historical
information against
partner to back up
your point

Saying nasty
personal things to
try and win

Shouting to try
and make your
feelings heard

Showing respect
for your partners view
even if
you don't like it

Bossing your
partner around

Interrupting your
partner as you feel your
point is more relevant

Give each other
the space to share
your thoughts and listen
to them properly

Use personal things
you know about the
other to get one over
on them

Does your child ever feel caught in the middle of your arguments or negative behaviours?

In some relationship where there is poor communication and perhaps bitter feelings have developed you may observe these kinds of behaviours in your parenting. Putting the child in the middle is most commonly observed when people split up but we also see it when people are still together and things aren't going well. Over 50% of referrals to psychological therapy services for children are as a result of exposure to destructive conflict and poor parental relationships. These are 5 golden rules of what NOT to do, therefore avoiding making a child feel in the middle of a destructive relationship.

How do you think it feels for them?

What could you do differently to stop this from happening?

What do you think the dangers are of behaving in a way that makes your child feel stuck in the middle of your negative relationship?



ACTIVITY:

- Do you recognise doing any of these behaviours? They are easy to slip into and can become a habit if we don't recognise that we are putting our children in the middle of our arguments.
- What do you think the impact of these behaviours could be on the children?
- What do you think could be difficult for your child if you put them in the middle?
- Do think you could agree to try and avoid putting your child in the middle?
- What support might you need?

Putting a child in the middle of a relationship where there is poor communication puts them at risk of developing poor relational skills of their own and not being able to stick up for themselves in a healthy way.

The danger of using a child to pass on messages...they become involved in details about their care and arrangements that are not appropriate for them to know, they are just a child, they shouldn't be worrying about adult information.

The danger of using a child to mediate between two adults...the child feels like they have to try in some way to keep the peace, that can feel like a heavy and uncomfortable burden.

The danger of making a child feel like a judge...is that they are put in the difficult position of feeling like they have to decide which parent is right and which parent is wrong in a situation. They might be made to feel like there always has to be a 'goodie and a baddie' in every situation.

The danger of making a child spy...is that they may learn to lie and adopt sneaky behaviour, they may feel pressure to report back details about each parent that they would normally not be interested in as a child and it confuses them.

SESSION FOUR

A little check in...



Who's angry?



Is your partner angry?

Are you angry?

Do you know what feeling is behind their anger?

YOU NEED TO KNOW!

Being angry is a common state to be in, what you need to know about your partner is

why, where is it coming from, what is fuelling the eruption?

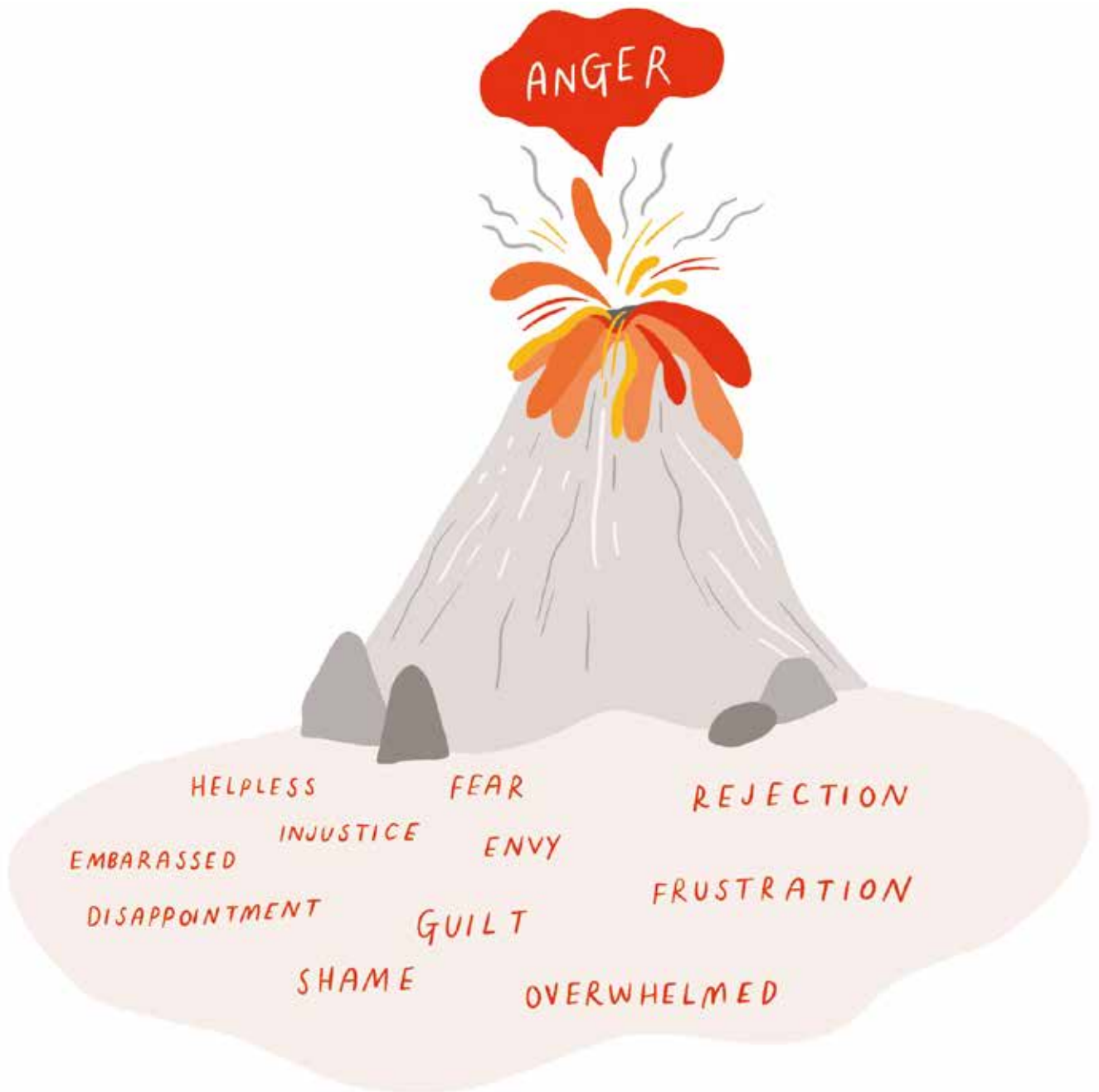
Imagine they are angry because they feel isolated and lonely or overwhelmed and tired.

It is useful to understand that isn't it?

Because now you can ask yourself....what can I/we do about that?

YOU IDENTIFY A WAY FORWARD

THE ANGER VOLCANO



In the same way that lava builds up before the volcano erupts, you need to identify what's going on for your partner that is unseen, hidden below their obvious feelings of anger.

Being angry indicates that something isn't right - it's important to find out what that is and address it so that it doesn't blow.

Think about and reflect the last time you or your partner responded with anger. What was really going on for you or them?

Thoughts, feelings and behaviours

What are your thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and why do they matter?

The cycle of 'you do this...so I do that' often results in consistently expecting the worst of one another. This makes you more likely to pick up on/look for negatives. So creating the all too familiar situation of once one thing you do annoys me, everything you do annoys me!

You begin to create a negative cycle. The energy for this downward spiral can come from observing one another's behaviour.

You can't read each others minds, only their behaviour and then what we do is...

Assume you therefore know what your partner must be thinking

This affects how you feel and the thoughts that you have that then drives behaviour in response

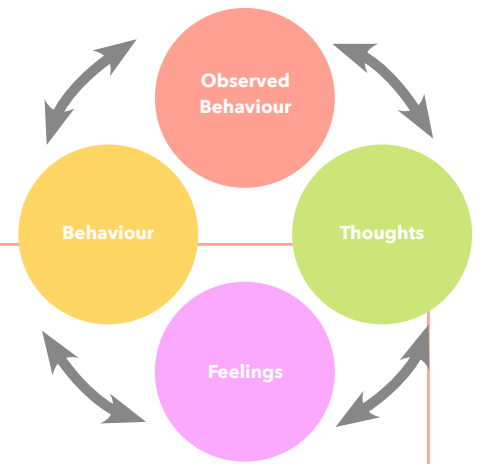
You then respond to those assumptions with your behaviour

For example

- When you ignore me when you are watching TV **Observed Behaviour**
- I think this means you don't want to be around me **Thought**
- This makes me feel unwanted **Feeling**
- I do the washing up loudly in the kitchen to let you know I'm not happy **Behaviour**

Think of the last argument you both had. Try and fill in the diagram on the next page based that argument.

Thoughts, feelings and behaviours



I saw...

I thought...

I felt...

I behaved...

What have you learnt?

**What needs to change
to make things better?**

**What will you both do
differently next time?**

How does our behaviour impact on the quality of our relationship?

You behave in one of three ways:

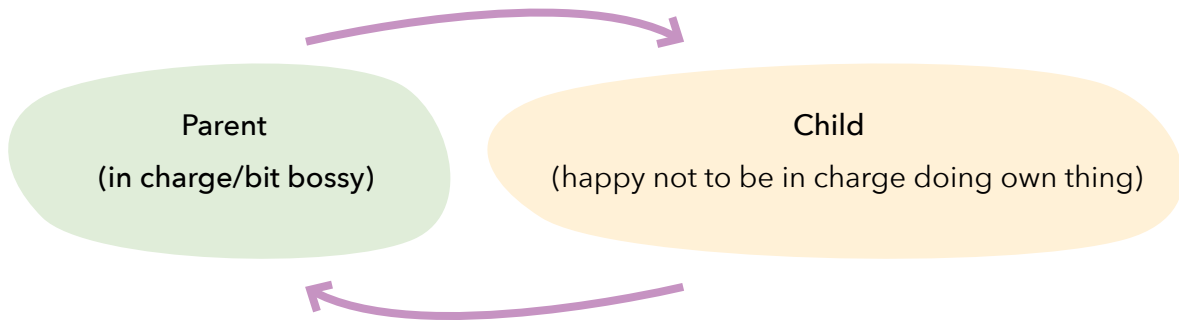
Like a parent

Like a child

Like an adult

People are their best when they are creating an adult to adult dynamic as much as possible. Being respectful, taking responsibility and being a team player.

It is common for a couple relationship to have a dynamic that looks like this. If one behaves like the parent it makes the other feel like the child and visa versa. Neither is in Adult very often and that can have consequences. Nobody likes to be bossed about the whole time, and it's not fun if you feel that you have to 'parent' your partner!



What is your dynamic?

What is good about it?

What is bad about it?

What is your family dynamic?

What might you change?

What does dynamics means in a relationship?

Relationship dynamics are the patterns of behaviour that happen between people in the ways we relate to each other, interact with each other and communicate with each other. It is important to be aware of the dynamics so you can make positive changes.

SESSION FIVE

A little check in...



What is your arguing style?

Everyone has their own way that they argue. Over time some people learn to adapt to one another's behaviour in times of conflict, but not everyone adapts successfully.

Recognising a different way of resolving disagreements can take your relationship to a deeper level. Every time you 'work it out' together you strengthen your string and make it more like a rope.

A need to win = unsuccessful outcomes

The feeling of needing to win can be a hangover from childhood behaviours that we haven't grown out of. It's extremely unhelpful in your relationship.

What do you gain by sticking to wanting to win? What do you lose? (the ability to resolve and comprise)

How about this instead:

HIT THE HOLD BUTTON!

HOLD that behaviour when the communication becomes unhelpful

HOLD on to the aim of finding a resolution

Maybe have some time out from the conversation to allow a bit of processing and time to calm down and gather yourselves

PLAY Resume later and when you do

Be honest about your thoughts and feelings • Listen to your partner

Be prepared to compromise • Apologise if you need to

What might be hard about hitting the HOLD button?

How might the HOLD button help you?

Sulker

A person who uses silence and withdrawal to get what they want. They often feel resentful and are trying to gain sympathy from others to get a certain outcome that suits them. Some people are capable of long periods of sulking.

Often the partner of a sulker can't stand the atmosphere so will give in to the demands being made in order to restore peace.

walker

Walking away from conflict is a self-preservation strategy a lot of the time. You feel overwhelmed by the conflict and are struggling to find a resolution, walking away provides the opportunity to process what is happening and hope that things calm down so a more productive conversation might follow later on.

pusher

Pushing for discussion, for the other person to engage and 'get things sorted out' in the moment is a common arguing style. This behaviour is often what causes the other person to walk away. The need for discussion to be immediate, to see things through at the time that they happen feels important but that feeling may not be shared by the other person.

- Which style describes you best?
- How does it effect how the argument goes?
- How does it effect your partner do you think?
- Why is knowing your style helpful do you think?

You may be a mix of styles

How a person behaves during conflict is obviously going to have a significant impact on whether a resolution is found.

How the other person behaves is often misunderstood by their partner. For example, a 'walker' will often do just that, get away from the conflict to try and process the situation. But if the person they are in conflict with is a 'pusher' i.e. someone who wants to push on with the discussion/argument to get things sorted out they will often see the walking away as disrespectful and end up following them to push them into a discussion...and ultimately make the situation worse.

Misunderstanding a person's behaviour during conflict can be a key contributor to more frequent and unresolved arguments. Taking responsibility for how you behave and the effect that has on others is a positive step towards better communication.

What could you do differently?

Here's what everyone in a relationship needs to try to do to make next time better.

Acknowledge

Show your partner respect by being mature enough to acknowledge that you may have said something that upset them, done something that hurt their feelings and that you care enough to recognise that and offer an apology for upsetting them/hurting their feelings.

As soon as you acknowledge how the other person is feeling they feel heard, feel the respect you are showing them and can start to see that you are trying to repair the situation.

Acknowledging their perspective on the situation and why they might have behaved the way they did.



Use 'I' rather than 'You' when you start a sentence

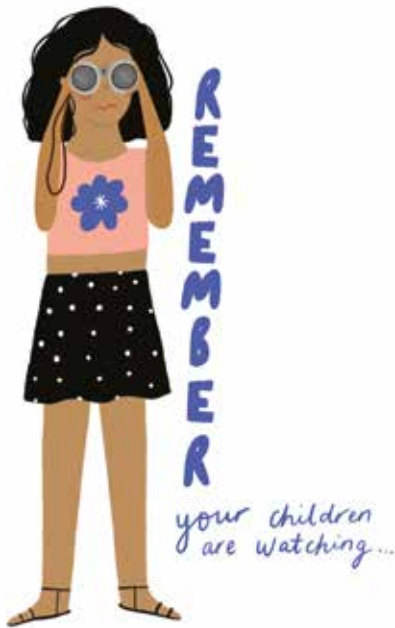
"You never help me tidy the house!"

OR

"I am feeling really tired and what I would like is if we could tidy the house together"

Which of these would make you feel defensive if said to you?

When we say things that begin with 'You' the other person is automatically on the defensive,



they feel criticised and blamed. So what follows is unlikely to be a positive conversation. However, if you use 'I' instead you are owning your feelings and sharing them with the other person in a non-confrontational way, meaning you are more likely to have a positive conversation where you both listen to each other rather than get into the toxic tennis game.

Make a note to yourself to try and notice how much you say 'You' at the start of a sentence to your partner and how often what follows it is positive and how often it is negative.

This is another small win, if you notice that you do a lot of negative 'You's' try to change that. This will help you to start to build a kinder, more compassionate, healthy relationship. And remember your children will be watching and learning from this too.

Be clear about what you need

Let's be clear, we would all like to say we need an all expenses paid holiday to the Caribbean, but this is not really what is meant by being clear about what you need.

Think about why you got so cross or upset about a particular issue that caused a disruption between you and your partner.

What do you need now because of it?

- ★ Do you need a hug?
- ★ Some time on your own?
- ★ Practical help with the things you've been struggling with?
- ★ To hear an apology or acknowledgement?
- ★ Do you need them to do a specific task?
- ★ Do you need to hear "I love and appreciate you" more often?



Whatever it is let your partner know. They can't do it if they don't know you need it, they are not mind readers!



SESSION SIX

A little check in...



So what now?

You have put time and effort into understanding your relationship better and thought about how you communicate with each other and what you might do differently in the future.

Now it's time to put all of this into practice. It's normal that sometimes it will go well and some times not so much...remember hula hooping!

You are a team and every successful team agrees to ground rules and boundaries, so this is our chance to create yours together.

Look after your connection together by using these questions when you need to

At the moment I need.....

(a hug, a cry, some space, you to listen)

.....

.....

.....

I'm worrying about.....

(our lack of intimacy, money, my job, the kids)

.....

.....

.....

I want to say sorry for.....

(not prioritising time together, saying unkind stuff, being critical of you)

.....

.....

.....

I think we need to stop.....

(Criticising each other, assuming stuff, being negative)

.....

.....

.....

I will know our hula hooping is going well when we.....

(We sort our arguments out, we are supporting each other)

.....

.....

.....

I want our children to see us.....

(compromise, respecting each other, supporting each other)

.....

.....

.....

Discuss these questions with the professional who is supporting you:

- Are there things that you are worried about?
- How would you like to be supported now that the work in this book is done?
- What are you going to do if you feel like things start to get difficult again?
- Will you ask for support, who will you seek it from?

It can be hard asking for what you need as we can feel scared of being rejected and the person not being willing to give it to us/do it for us. But if you can get over that awkward feeling your relationship will be much stronger.

Sometimes when a partner recognises an issue they are keen to jump into **fix it** mode. They want to make things better, so immediately start to look for solutions.

For example: If you come home from a hard day and you're feeling tired and stressed and start to explain to your partner the ins and outs of what went on, it can be normal for your partner to hear the issues and start to suggest what you might do to fix it. While this is well intentioned and an effort to help, what you **actually need** is just a cup of tea and a hug, no advice! But that is not what you are brave enough to ask for, for fear of that need not being met or offending them by rejecting their advice.

The more honesty two people have between them the more resilient their relationship is. Couples often operate on **assumptions** and this leads to **misunderstandings** and that leads to **arguments**.

So if you can try to kick the habit of assuming you each know what is going on for the other and try to say how you feel and ask for what you need, it's much easier to avoid misunderstandings. This will encourage a warmer bond between you.

Helpful things you can do for your relationship

- **Be kind.** Simple, look for opportunities to say a kind thing or do a kind thing.
- Show you want to communicate in a positive way by actually **listening to learn not just listening so you can respond.**
- Think about your partners love language and **activate your actions.**
- **Repair as this helps you to prepare.** Repairing (acknowledging/apologising) the damage done by arguments means you will be better prepared to communicate more positively the next time you clash.
- **Try to understand your partners point of view.** What matters to them may not matter to you and visa versa. However, if you don't make the effort to appreciate their perspective on something you can be sure that you will stay stuck, both of you making your points over and over again.
- **Learn to move on.** It's easy to dwell on an issue or bring up the past, this weakens your bond and trust. Learning to put things to bed is recognising whatever it was happened and the feelings it caused, but accepting they can't be changed, so making peace and moving on where you can is very beneficial.

- **Try to be honest and vulnerable if you can.** Honest about how you feel, honest about what you would like to be different, what you need from your partner. Of course it's a bit scary being vulnerable with another person but that is how we get close to other people by showing our real selves. Your relationship will thank you for it!
- If you are not getting on brilliantly it's easy to focus on the negative things about your partner. Once the way they eat a bag of crisps is annoying all of a sudden so is everything else they do. Instead of focussing on these little negatives, **look for the positives.** If you only look for bad, bad is all you will see.



Unhelpful things for your relationship:

- Just because you are not talking does not mean you are listening. Not properly listening to your partner is VERY unhelpful.
- Not valuing your partners perspective on something because you don't share their point of view.
- Saying you are 'over it' when you clearly are not.
- Not being clear with your expectations. Expecting your partner to understand your needs AND meet them when you haven't even shared them with your partner is an impossible task for them to complete successfully!
- Being defensive, it never, ever helps a situation.
- Telling your partner what is wrong with them and what they need to do differently. What you are basically saying is, 'Be more like me because I'm better.'

Some tips for the times when you need to repair when some damage has been done, big or small....

... Repair to Prepare

Try to do some of the following:

Express remorse if you have hurt the other person
(even if they have neglected to do so in the past!)

**Acknowledge the hurt/harm
caused by what you said/did**

**Take responsibility for what
you are responsible for**

Offer an explanation....not an excuse
(do not say "I'm sorry, but...")

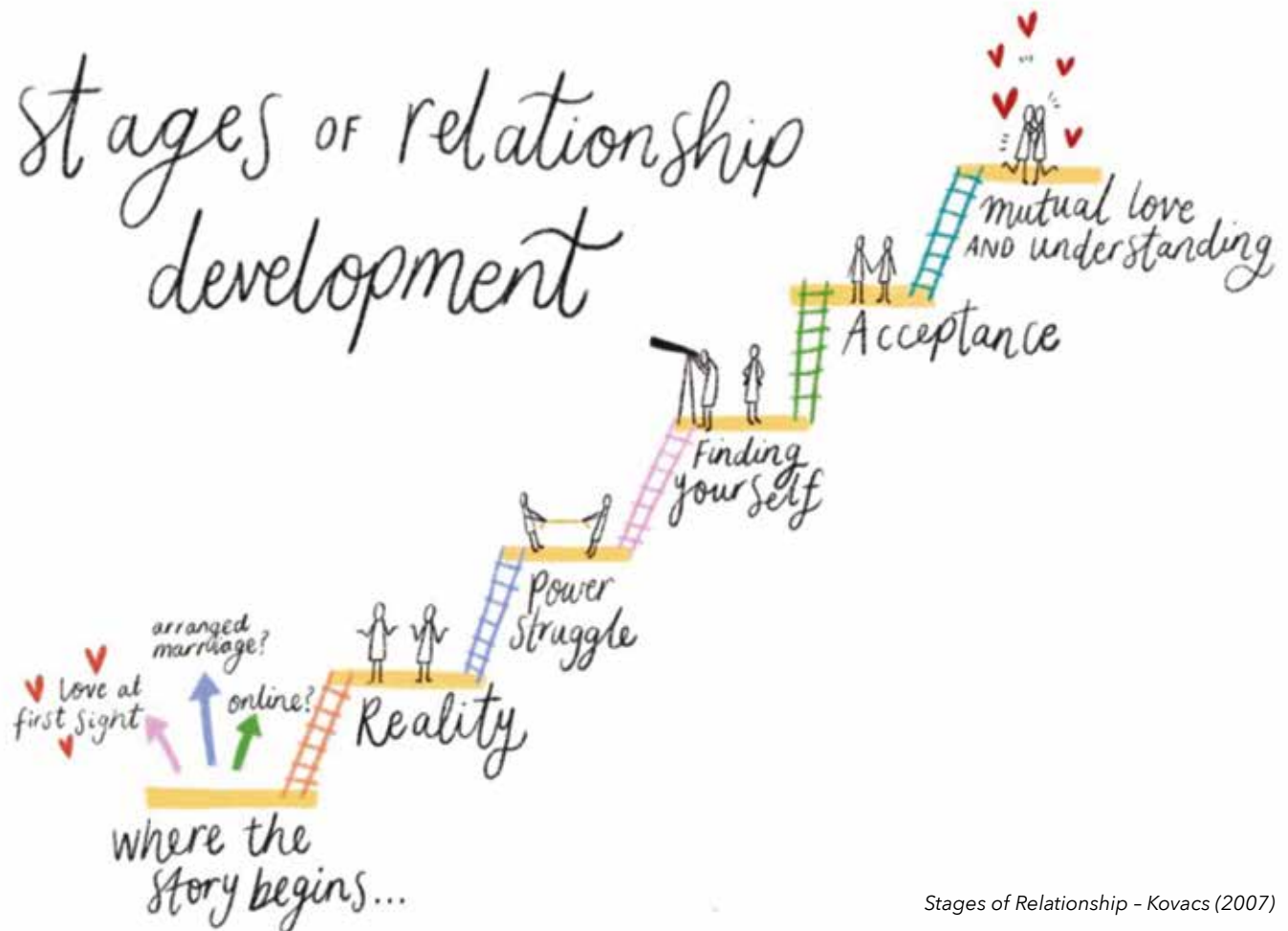
**Show a commitment to change,
try to do things differently next time**

**Request forgiveness if that feels important to you
ie; you want to take back something unkind/untrue**

RESOURCE SECTION

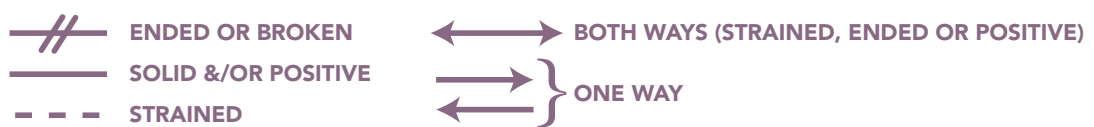
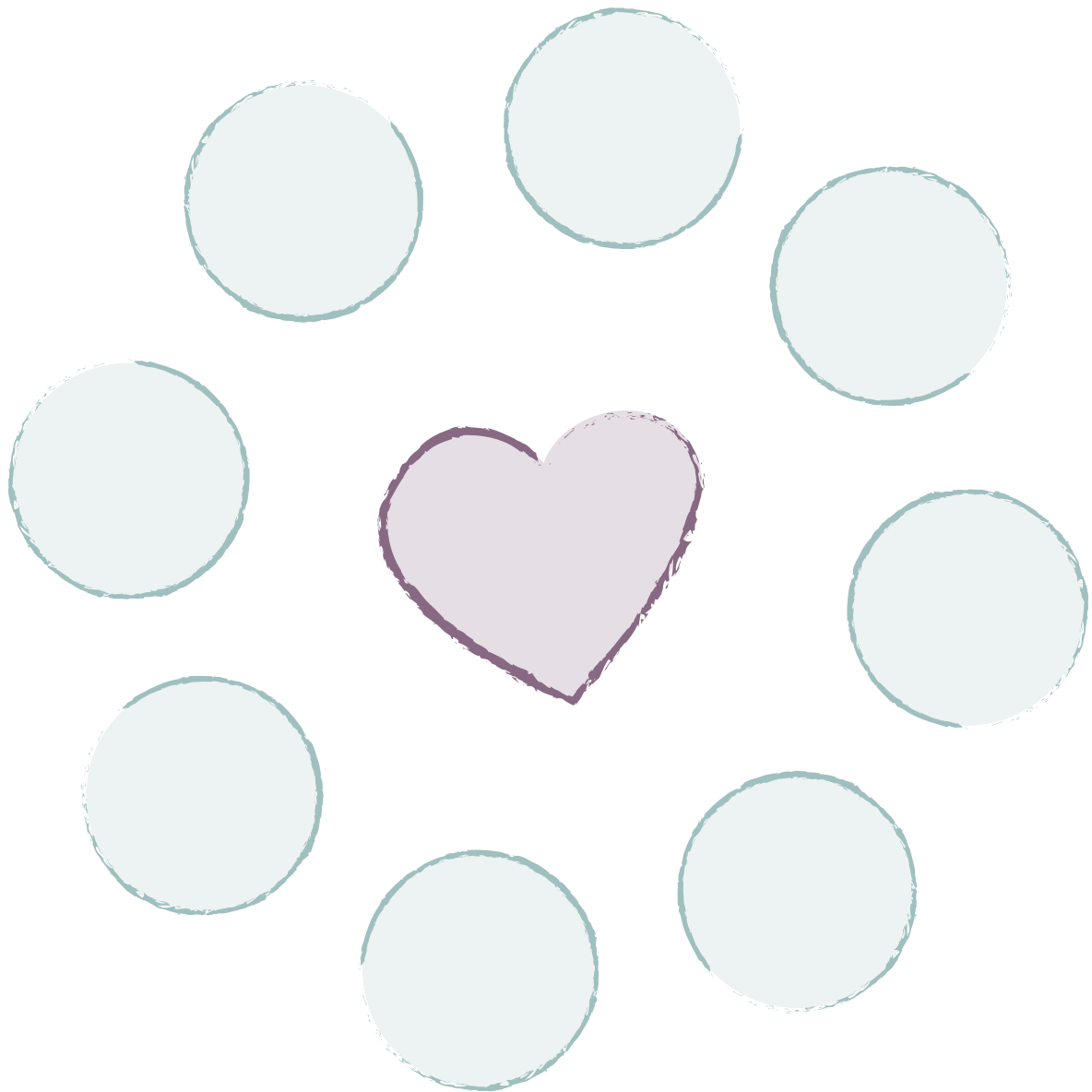


Stages of Relationships



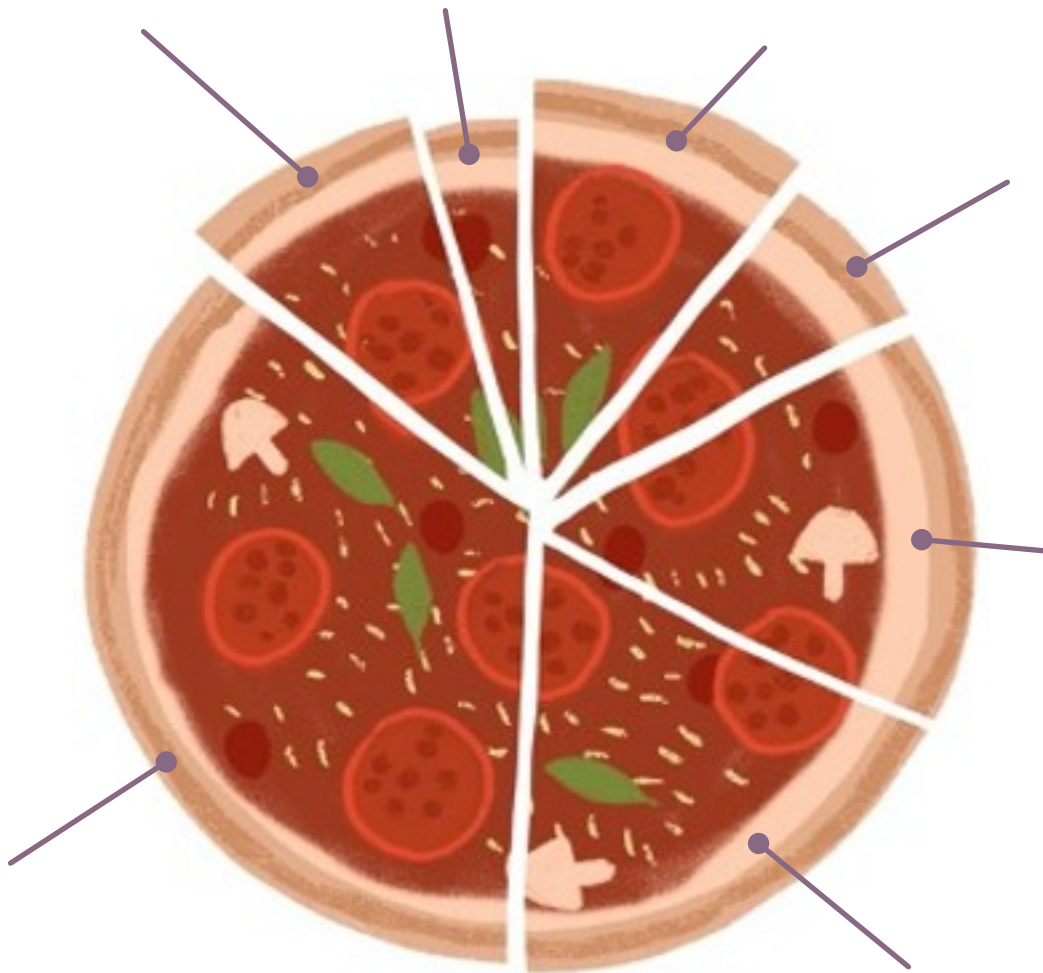
Stages of Relationship - Kovacs (2007)

Amity Relationships Map

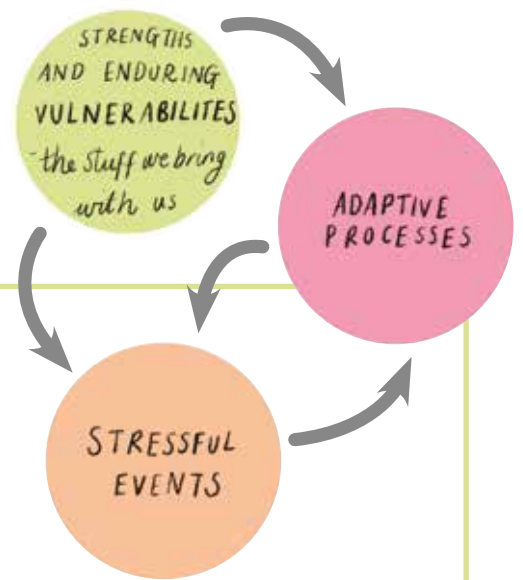


The Problem Pizza

The
Problem
Pizza



VSA Model - What's going on for us



The stuff we bring with us

How we communicate and resolve conflict

Stressful stuff happens

Children's Roles in Conflict

putting children IN THE middle



When you ask your child questions about your partner or ex and rely on them to find out what is going on



When you criticise your partner or ex and expect your child to decide who is right and wrong



When your child feels they have to be the mediator between you, keeping the peace

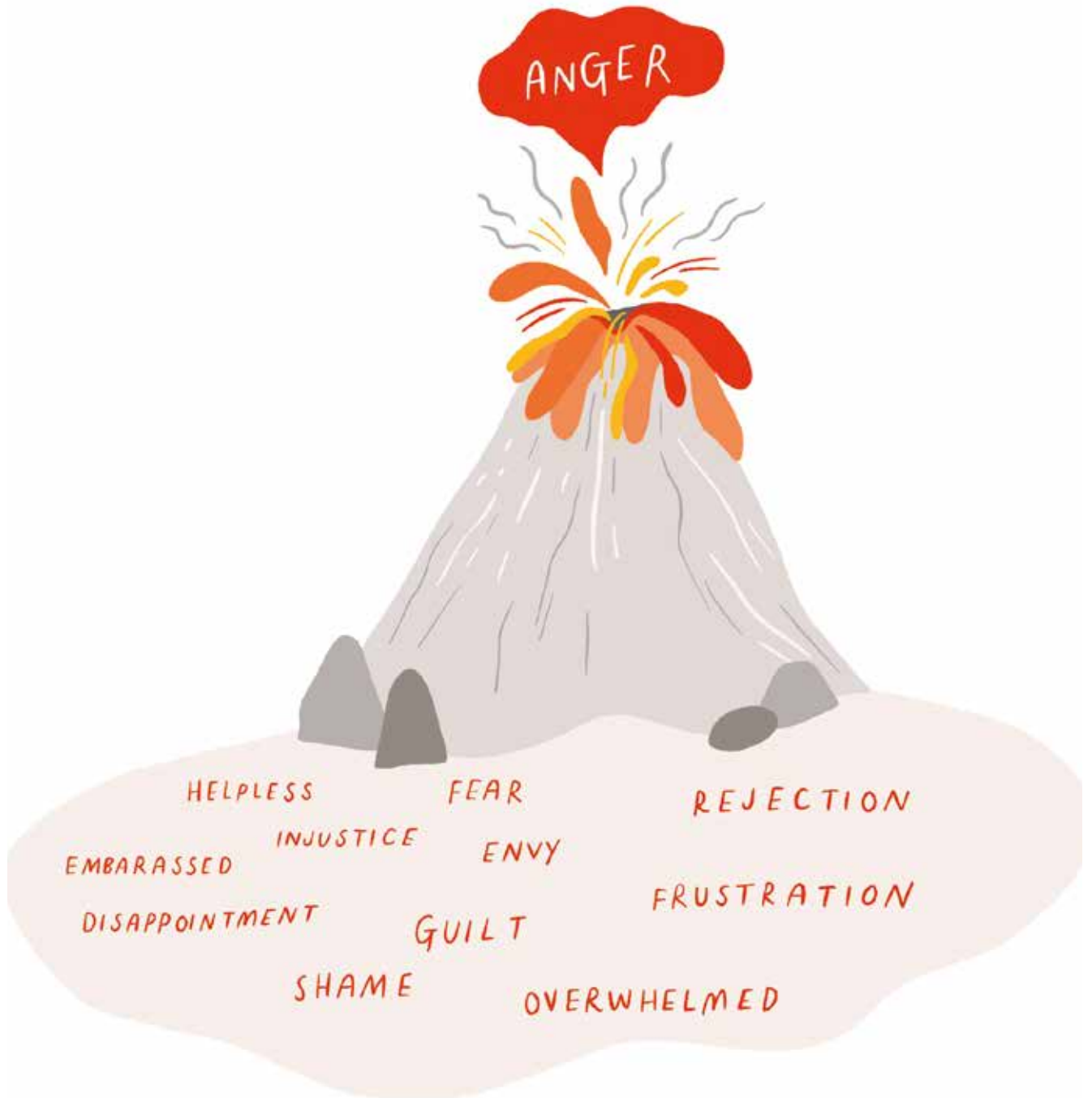


When you share too much info with your child and expect them to fill the emotional gap



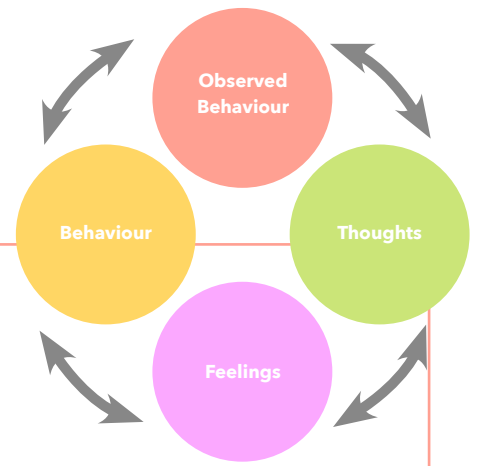
When you ask your child to take info between you and your partner/ex

THE ANGER VOLCANO



In the same way that lava builds up before the volcano erupts, we need to identify what's going on beneath. Being angry indicates that something isn't right - its important to find out what that is and address it so that it doesn't blow.

Thoughts, feelings and behaviours



I saw...

I thought...

I felt...

I behaved...

Amity Relationship Solutions

Family Relationships Self-Reporting Questionnaire

The questions need to be answered based on the current situation, not specifically today but how things have been over the last few weeks. For example, if there has been an argument that day, the questions might be answered differently, therefore it is important to think about how someone feel generally. You might want to make notes in the box of anything mentioned which you can follow up during your support. You will need to complete the questionnaires at the start and the end of your support, separately with each parent.

QUESTION	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Things used to be better than they are now between me and my co-parent or partner			
We argue more than we used to do			
The children we are responsible for are happy			
I think our arguments affect our children			
Sometimes I feel guilty about the happiness of the children because of tension or arguments between the adults around them (including extended family)			
With the right support I think we should be able to work out our co-parenting or couple difficulties			
I am aware why we argue and what it is about			
I want to understand why we argue and how to make it better			
The arguments between us are loud			
We are both as bad as each other			



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