

THE RECOVERY TOOLKIT

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The Recovery Toolkit has been written to assist any individual or agency working with women who have experienced domestic abuse/violence and are in a position to take part in a group designed to assist each of them in looking at ways to develop positive lifestyle coping strategies. We do not recommend this group for women who are still living with the perpetrator unless he is on a recognised perpetrator programme.

Living with domestic abuse/violence forces women to develop coping strategies that keep them and their family safe within the context of unequal power divides and extremely controlling behaviour by the perpetrator.

Women who have experienced and lived with domestic abuse frequently tell support agencies that the hardest part of recovery is to deal with the psychological distress caused by such abuse. The psychological distress affects how a woman perceives herself (self-esteem, self-image), how she interacts with others (passively or angrily), how she copes with the emotional pain (depression, anxiety, alcohol or drug use), how she uses her parenting skills; it can also leave her with confusion about issues of trust, boundaries and respectful relationships (both with adults and with children).

Any individual experiencing the isolation, exhaustion, humiliation, degradation and threats that are part of the abusive behaviour would encounter these difficulties. The aim of the group is not to hold the woman responsible for what happened to her, nor to blame her for those actions or decisions taken at the time of the abuse that may in retrospect be found not to have been safe. Rather the purpose of the group is to recognise the tremendous effort the woman has made in keeping her and her family as safe as possible, while helping her to acknowledge that coping strategies used under duress may not be helpful in her recovery and development of a new life free of abuse.

Facilitators' skills.

Facilitating groups requires certain skills. Group leaders need to build an empathy with the group participants, but also to know how to keep the group 'on time' and to deal with unhelpful interventions and distractions. The group leaders have a responsibility to all group members, not just to those that are more vocal or articulate. Involving quieter members or those that are finding the process more difficult is a skill, and group leaders need to support each other in this process.

It is advisable and recommended that this group is run by **two facilitators**. One facilitator takes the lead and the other has responsibility for observing the group process, making sure each individual group member has an equal opportunity to take part (by prompting or supporting quieter members) and being available to take time out of the room if an individual becomes distressed. Facilitators can take it in turns to be group leader each week and should explain this to the group members at the beginning of the course.

At least one of the facilitators should have a sound working knowledge of domestic abuse/violence and have experience of working with individuals who have lived with abuse/violence. This person needs to be familiar with and able to explain the dynamics of abuse, Biderman's cycle of coercion, the Stockholm syndrome and the effects of domestic abuse on children.

Group facilitators need to have time available to prepare adequately for the group and also to have agreed time to debrief after the group and to write notes as agreed with the group members.

It may be appropriate to bring in 'experts' for some topics; for example, a children's worker from a Women's Refuge for session 5.

Notes to facilitators

While this Toolkit covers the range of issues that women may still find themselves affected by, each woman attending is an individual and will have particular needs and areas that she will particularly want to concentrate on. If a group participant finds, for instance, that working on her self-esteem is of primary importance, and managing her anger is less of an issue, it may be appropriate for this woman to focus her homework each week on self-esteem issues.

However if a facilitator is concerned that a group member is focusing on one area as a means of avoiding a more difficult issue then this needs to be challenged in a supportive manner.

This group is designed along psycho-education lines. Psycho-education is a term that is used in mental health work to refer to the education offered to people, who suffer from a psychological disturbance. In mental health work a goal is for the patient to understand and be better able to deal with the presented illness. Also, the patient's own strengths, resources and coping skills are reinforced, in order to avoid relapse and contribute to their own health and wellness on a long-term basis. The theory is, with better knowledge the patient has of their illness, the better the patient can live with their condition. The Recovery Toolkit uses this model believing the more individuals know and can understand about domestic abuse/violence the better equipped they are to deal with the impact of it and therefore their own recovery and well-being.

There are a range of techniques and self help ideas suggested over the 12 (24) weeks and several follow basic Cognitive Behavioural Therapy principals.

The structure of the group does not provide person centred, reflective group therapy and this needs to be made clear to participants before they begin.

However, due to individual differences and issues that they bring, it may not always be possible to cover all the topics in the session plans. The facilitators need to be responsive to the group needs without losing sight of the topics to be covered over the complete programme. This is where pre group planning between facilitators is so important. If facilitators are aware that there will be a need to spend longer in the 'check in' section to cover issues raised the previous week, then planning together can enable facilitators to work out what can be altered in the coming week. Remember the session plans are there to guide facilitators through the topics but individual interpretation will be necessary at certain times.

All women who are referred / self refer to this programme MUST be offered an initial assessment interview with one of the facilitators (particularly if the woman is not previously known to either facilitator). During this interview the facilitator should explain the style and format of the group (including providing her with a list of session topics). This assessment should explain what the group can and can't offer and what support is available outside of the group.

The women should also be asked whether they are being supported by other agencies. If they are receiving support from other agencies it needs to be agreed whether the group is appropriate for them. For example someone receiving support from a mental health team needs to consider whether the group would be the right thing for them and should be encouraged to discuss this with the professional supporting them.

In Appendix 1 is a suggested checklist for use in initial assessments which can help facilitator and potential participant decide if the group is suitable for them.

The programme

The programme is designed to run over 12 weeks. However after two evaluations it was learnt that the women had enjoyed it so much and had found it so beneficial that they had wanted it to go on for longer. If funding and time permits this can be run over 24 weeks and there are session plans (labelled part A's) in the book to enable this. The second session of each topic is a chance to revisit the topic, explore it in greater depth and give the participants more opportunity to share their experiences. These sessions need to be facilitated as they have less structure and no new content. However in the same evaluations where the women had attended for 12 sessions they described making huge changes in their beliefs and behaviour in that time. In deciding whether to run over 12 or 24 weeks facilitators need to consider their client group. More vulnerable women who may not have been away from the abusive relationship for long may be better suited to 24 weeks, however it is best assessed on the individuals needs.

During the time that women are attending the group their circumstances and support needs may vary. This can be for a variety of reasons: eg housing issues, perpetrator making contact, child contact issues. It is suggested that a risk assessment is carried out before women attend the group and if circumstances alter this should be repeated. It must be made clear to women before they attend that, if group facilitators feel that a significant risk to the women or the children of those women arises while they are on the programme, referrals to appropriate agencies may be necessary. This would only be done after informing the women of concerns and intended actions.

This course carries a Level 1 Accreditation with Open College Network and on completion of the course and worksheets participants will be awarded a Level 1 in 'Developing Personal Confidence and Self Awareness'

For group members who are registered through Sue Penna Associates for the accreditation it is important that individuals are given the details about the requirements from them as participants and the moderation process. These are to be found in Appendix 2.

Session One

Introduction to the course and to each other

Aims of Session One:

- To make a safe space where women will feel comfortable as they share together and work towards recovery
- To introduce the psychological frameworks which underpin the programme.
- To answer queries and concerns members may have about attending the group

To make a safe space where women will feel comfortable as they share together and work towards recovery

It is the responsibility of the group facilitators to create a safe and supportive environment for the women to work, share and learn in.

Time taken for personal introductions and exercises that help group members to learn each other's names is time well spent. It reduces anxieties and embarrassment, and enables group members to develop a sense of belonging to the group at an early stage.

The exercises should be fun and simple, and it is quite likely that there will be laughter and silliness at this stage. Laughter is a good way of alleviating anxiety and physiologically enables large intakes of breath to be taken and prevents hyperventilation: a common occurrence when individuals are anxious.

Ground rules

The setting of ground rules is another mechanism for creating safety within the group setting. While there are numerous examples of ground rules and lists can be found in hundreds of books dealing with running groups, it is more helpful to facilitate the group members to agree their own. The group facilitator needs to describe the purpose of ground rules, which is to create a safe space for learning and sharing of difficult and personal information. Use a flip chart to write down the group's rules (an example is given as Handout 1a). If any changes are made, then the new version should either be brought each week to remind the group or transcribed so that members can each have an individual copy.

Self-assessments

Self-assessments can also contribute to feelings of safety and security within the group. By conducting self-assessment the facilitators are clearly stating that they have confidence that areas which the women are currently finding difficult will be addressed during the lifetime of the group, and so offer the women opportunity to develop skills and coping strategies which will contribute to freeing them from the negative effects of domestic abuse.

Included in Appendix 3 and 4 is 'Rosenberg's self-esteem checklist' and a short assertiveness questionnaire both of which should be completed by each member at the beginning and at the end of the course. This is so that a comparison can be made by the women to see where change has happened.

It should also be made clear to the group members that the self-assessment conducted at the beginning and end of the course may be used as a method of evaluating the course, so that the toolkit can be consistently updated and kept relevant for women who are recovering from the effects of domestic abuse.

Obviously group members would not be identified in the evaluation.

To introduce the psychological frameworks which underpin the programme.

The key psychological theories that inform **The Recovery Toolkit** are **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy**, and **Rogerian and Humanistic therapies**. The exercises, homework, and knowledge shared in this programme are eclectic in nature: the authors have selected from a range of therapies those parts which they believe will be most helpful to women in the recovery stages and will equip them with techniques and tools that can be used long after the group has finished.

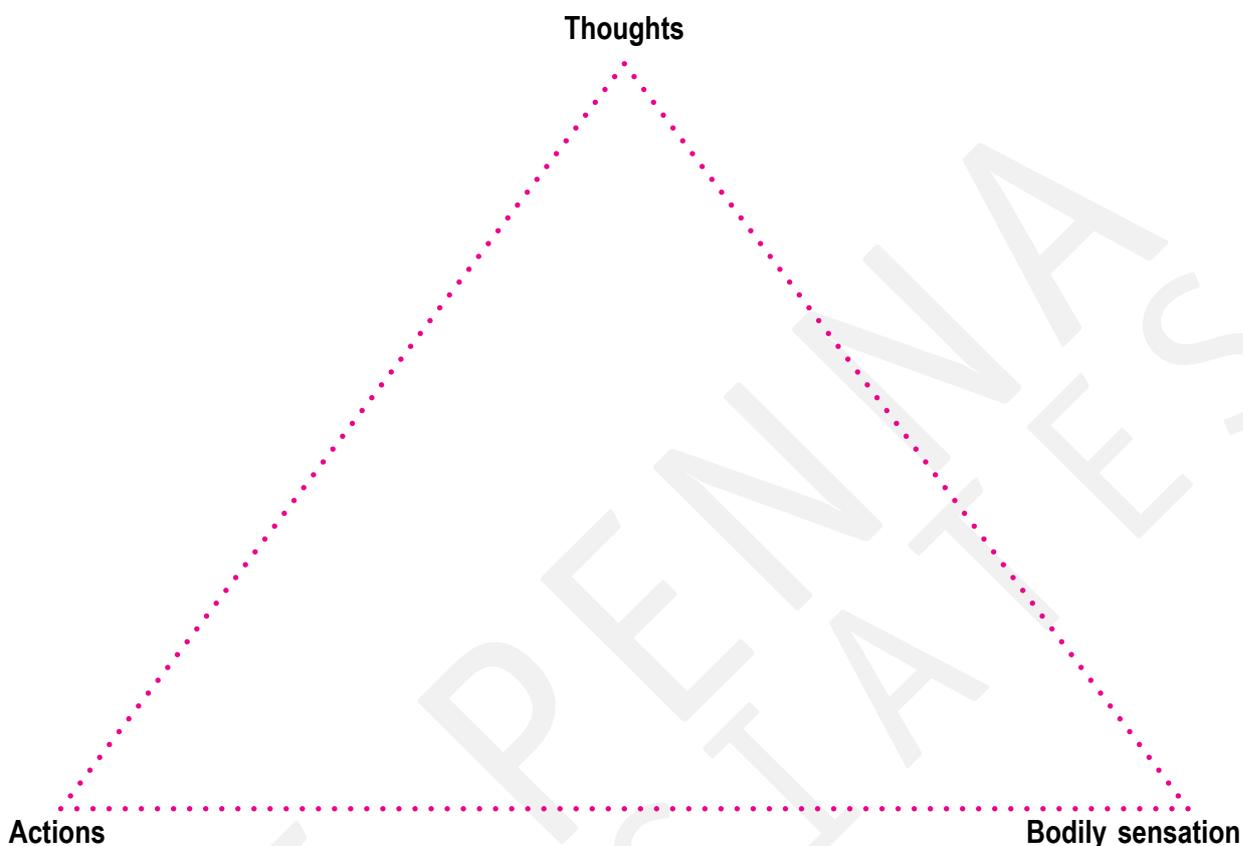
The key message is that all women are entitled to equal respect and are in no way responsible for the abuse they have received. However, during stressful, psychologically damaging times in our lives we can learn ways of coping that, whilst useful and based on self-protection and minimisation of risk during the period of abuse, can be less than helpful when trying to rebuild lives and relationships.

The facilitators need to provide group members with a copy of Handout 1b which outlines the topics to be covered over the twelve weeks.

It is also now appropriate to introduce the concept of **Negative Automatic Thinking** (Handout 1c and 1d) and **Thought Diaries** (Handout 1f). However, it must be reinforced to the women that there will be lots of explanation and support given to fill them in; and while for some individuals they will be very helpful, some individuals may never use them.

Negative automatic thoughts

It is important to explain the basics of CBT to the group. **The simplest way to do this is to draw the following diagram**



Explanation

The way that we think is instrumental in how we behave; eg the night before joining this group a potential group member may have lain in bed thinking about it with such thoughts as 'I don't want to go tomorrow', 'I won't know what to say', 'I won't know anyone', 'I will look stupid'.

Obviously there is a lot of apprehension for the potential group member. She is comparing herself badly with others and it is very likely that these thoughts will trigger Bodily Sensations

BODILY SENSATIONS

By having these thoughts her anxiety will be rising and with it her bodily symptoms. Her heart may be racing and she feels generally tense. She may make a decision now not to attend the group or wait until the morning but whenever she makes a decision the thoughts are following bodily sensations and likely to affect a change in her Actions

ACTIONS

She avoids going to the group by simply not turning up or phoning and cancelling. This will lead to further negative thinking eg 'I am hopeless', 'I let people down'.

THOUGHTS

She might start to think 'I'm hopeless and not worth bothering with', 'there is no point in me going again'.

As the diagram shows the symptoms feed each other; caught in a vicious circle it is easier to get sucked further and further into a negative way of thinking that can pervade all aspects of life.

After explaining how it works, it is useful to open the session up to the group and ask them to share experiences where negative thinking may have affected their behaviour.

To answer queries and concerns women may have about attending the group

Time should be spent at the end of the group giving members opportunity to express their fears and anxieties about the coming sessions. It is best to ask the group members to divide into groups of two or three to share with each other their anxieties. This can then be shared with the whole group and the facilitators can again write the key points down on a flip chart and then either bring it each week or transcribe it so that members can have an individual copy. The mechanism of asking the members to identify anxieties in pairs enables them to be honest without fear of upsetting one of the facilitators and avoids individuals feeling that they are the only one with concerns. The facilitators need to stay aware of the anxieties and address them each session in the hope that as the sessions go by the anxieties will be addressed and alleviated.

Closing exercise

There needs to be a closing exercise each week as a method of grounding individuals.

One way of doing this is to go around the room and ask individuals to name one point of learning they will take away from the group and to share what they will be doing that evening.

Session One Plan

Introduction to the course and to each other

Activity		Time
Introductions	Whole group	10
Ground rules (Handout 1a) Brainstorming exercise	Whole group	10
Warm-up exercise In pairs share: name, favourite TV programme, favourite food and favourite fantasy day	Small groups Then introduce each other in whole group	15
Overview of programme (Handout 1b) Presentation by facilitators and give out copy of index	Whole group	10
Self-assessments (Appendix 3 and 4) Self-esteem, Assertiveness. Ask individual group members to complete forms on their own and then hand back to facilitators	Introduce to whole group and ask to complete as individuals then individuals	15
BREAK		10
Concept of thoughts, feelings, behaviour (Handouts 1c and 1d) Facilitator led session	Whole group Ask group members to share situation where they recognise how negative thinking has affected their behaviour	10
Keeping diaries (Handout 1e) Facilitator led session	Whole group	10
Fears and anxieties about group. Discussion in pairs, then share as large group	Pairs then whole group	20
Closing exercise, one thing they will take away from group and what they will be doing for the rest of the day.	Whole group	10
		Total 2 hours

Session One A Plan

Introduction to the course and to each other

Activity		Time
Introductions	Whole group	10
Reminder of ground rules	Whole group	10
Check in, how was last week, how were people when they went home. Take turns around the group and try and encourage everyone to share	Whole group	25
Re visit the concept of thoughts, feelings, behaviour (Handouts 1c and 1d) Facilitator led session	Whole group Ask group members to think about what was talked about last week and whether they have thought about it during the week and comments.	20
BREAK		10
Keeping diaries (Handout 1e) Facilitator led session	Whole group, has anyone kept them, do we need to go over how to use them again	15
In pairs, try and identify a situation where you think negatively and how the diaries may be kept then share as large group	Pairs then whole group	20
Closing exercise, one thing they will take away from group and what they will be doing for the rest of the day.	Whole group	10
		Total 2 hours