



# Leading from Alongside

How Faith Leaders  
Can Support  
Survivors of Abuse

Suzanne Holsomback  
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# Suzanne Holsomback

Founder | Consultant  
Coach | Advocate  
Researcher | Trainer



# About Me

Bachelor of Arts in Religion & Classics  
Master of Divinity  
Master of Philosophy in Social Anthropology

Worked & volunteered in faith communities  
and religious organizations for 10+ years

Working & volunteering in the  
abuse/violence prevention movement since  
2012

Live in Austin, Texas

# hopes & Expectations

We hope that you will:

- Build new friendships
- Participate fully
- Approach the topics with a growth mindset
- Acknowledge that in discomfort, we grow
- Approach the subject with curiosity

All questions are welcome!

Please keep phones, tablets, other devices off or silenced for the duration of the training.



# Learning Objectives

- Identify and define the different types of harm individuals experience
- Unpack why harm happens and the tactics harm doers use
- Define & understand a “crisis” and types of “trauma”
- Understand the impact of trauma on survivors
- Utilize elements of trauma informed care in your ministry
- Develop a response that is survivor defined and empowering
- Apply knowledge and skill in case studies and activities



Abena

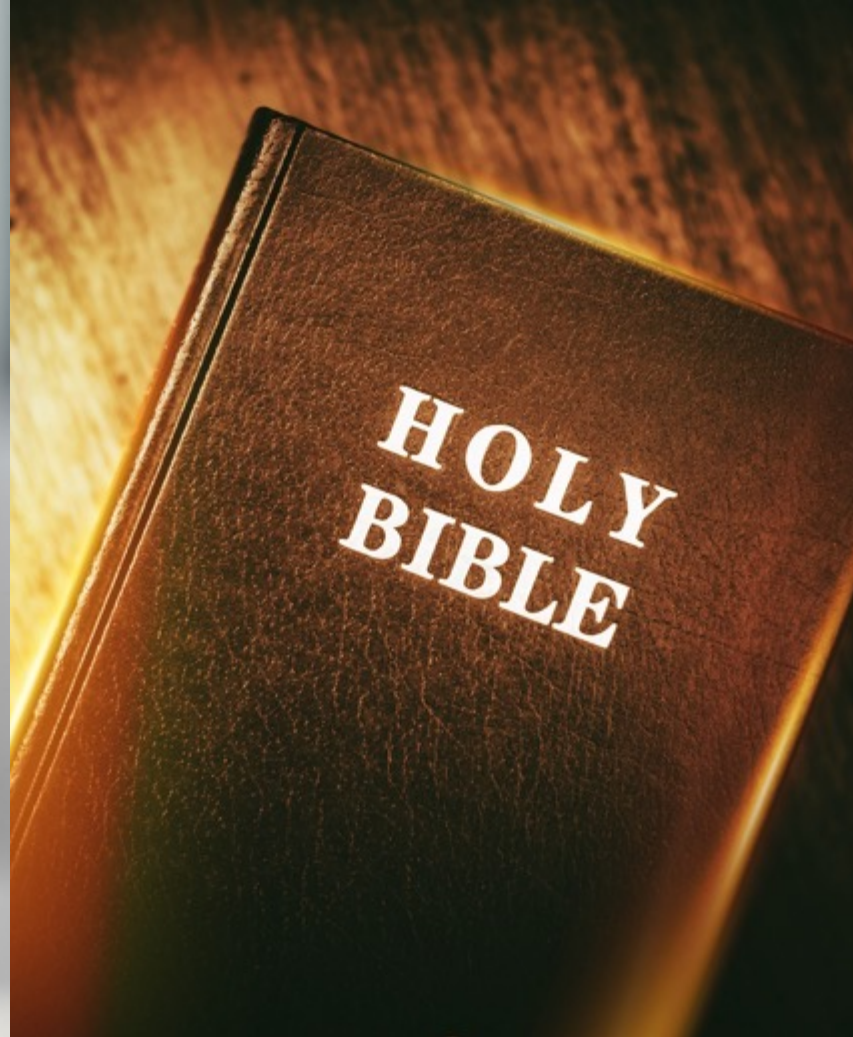




# What Is Abuse & Violence

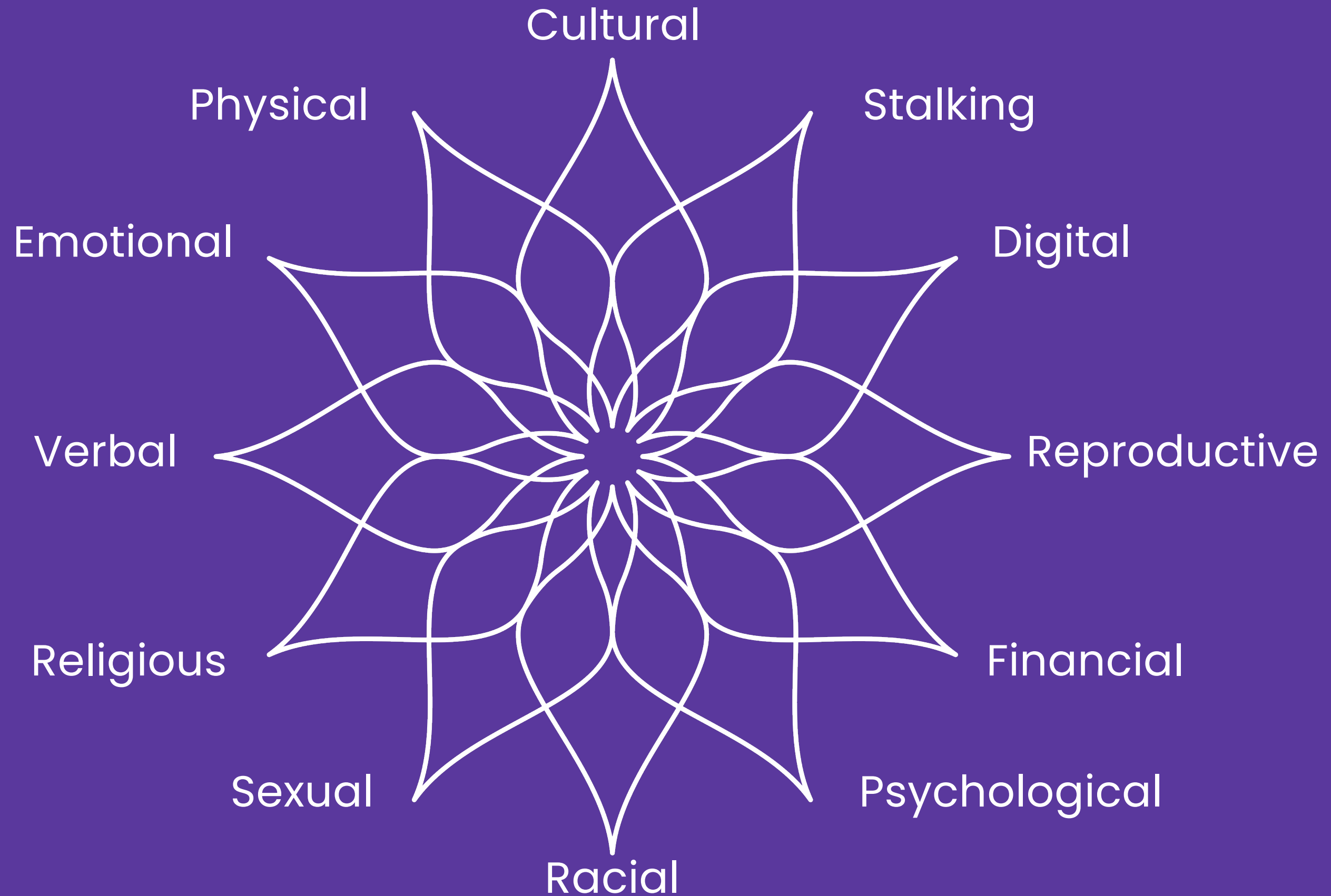






**Abuse or Violence or Harm?**

# Types of Harm



# Definition of Harm

## Harm includes:

- Domestic violence
- Family violence
- Intimate partner violence (IPV)
- Domestic abuse
- Relationship abuse
- Teen dating violence



# Definition of Harm

It is a pattern of behaviors within an intimate or family relationship that is used to gain and maintain power and control over the other partner.



# Definition of Harm

While in most states law enforcement only recognizes physical forms of violence and threats to be offenses, it is vital to recognize that tactics of abuse also includes all other types of harm.



# Gendered Nature of Harm

Harm is by no means just male violence towards women.

Women and same sex partners can harm their partners or former partners.

However, statistically, more harm is caused by men toward women.



# How Harm Happens



~~Anger/Temper~~

~~Alcohol/Drugs~~

~~Stress~~

~~Job/Unemployment~~

~~Male Nature~~

~~Victims' Actions~~

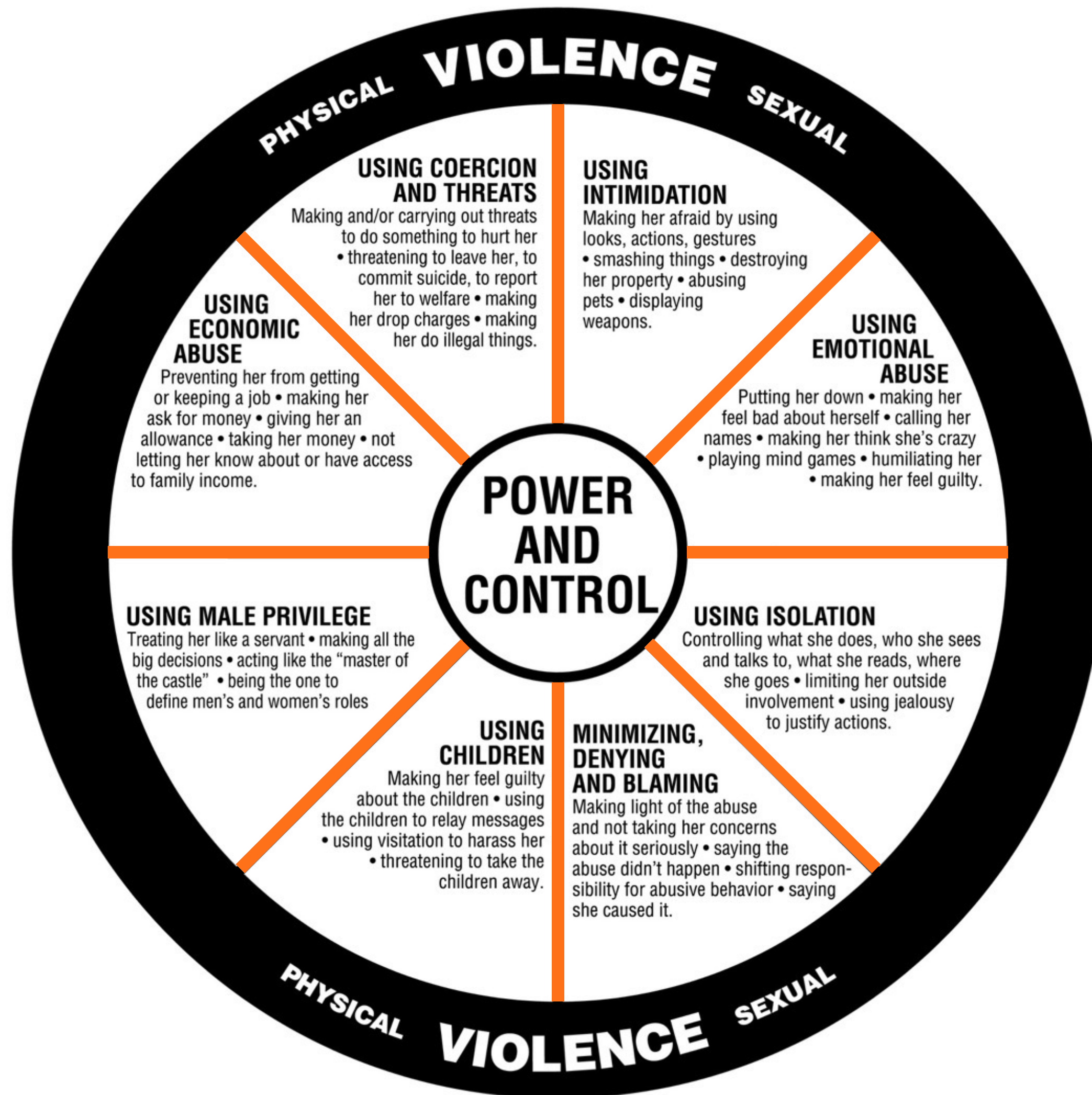
~~Religious Practices~~

~~Mental Health~~

~~Culture~~

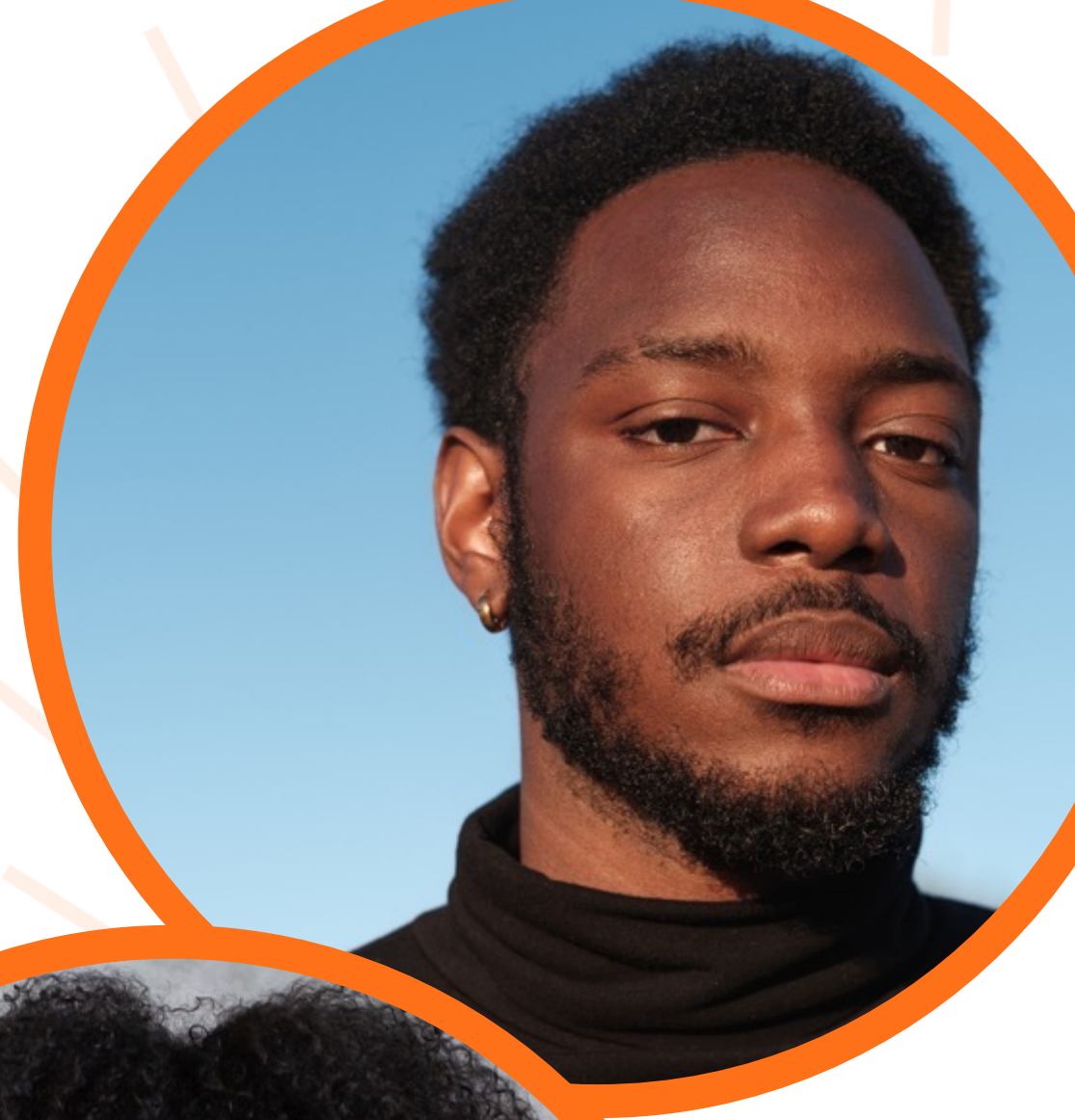
# Power & Control

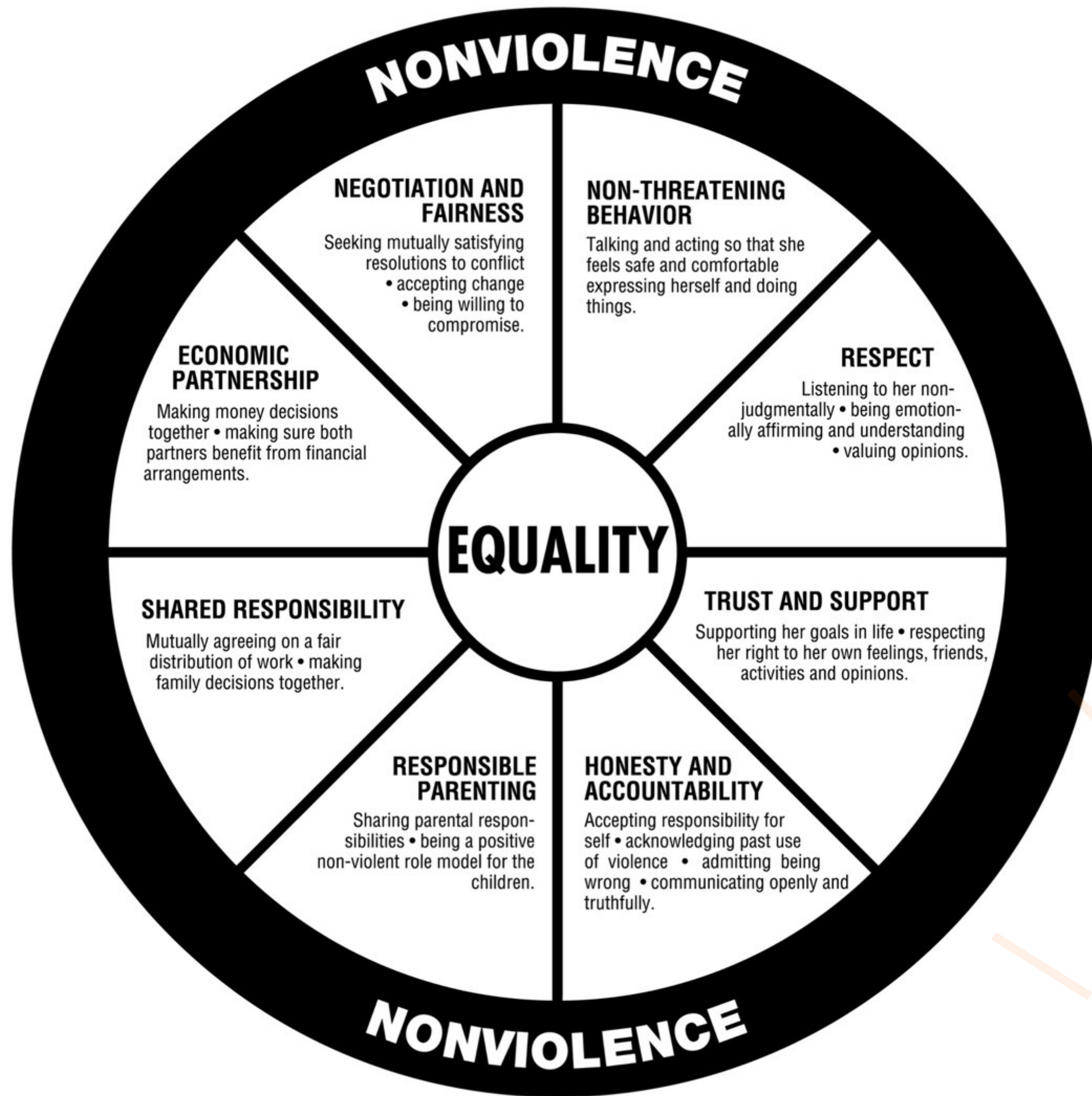


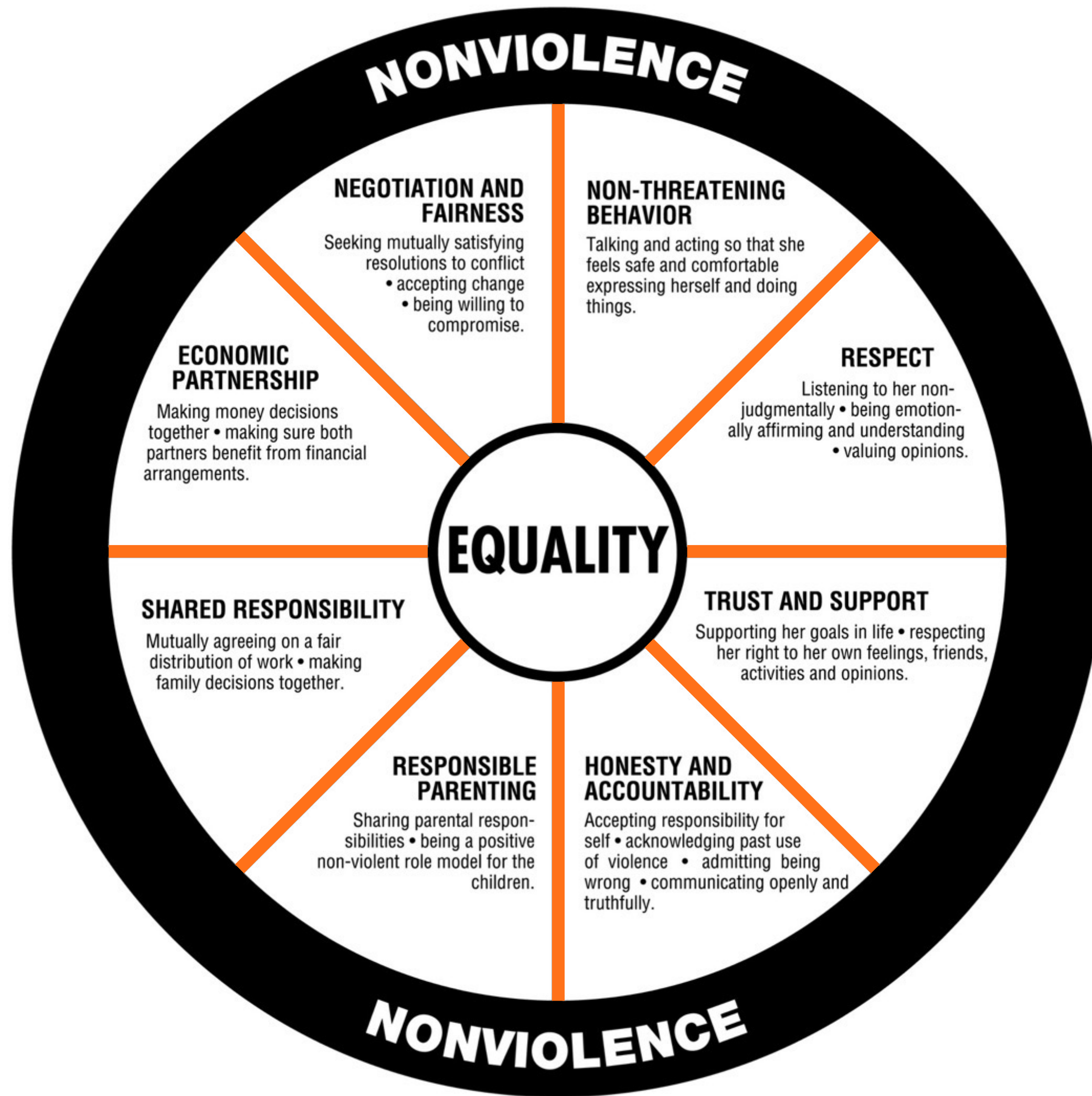


# Case Study Activity

- What tactics of abuse did Jason use toward Abena?
- Where did power and control come in?
- Who was causing harm in this scenario?
- What barriers to support did Abena face?







# Case Study Activity

- Where could Jason have chosen differently to support health relationship characteristics?
- Where could the musical director have chosen differently?
- What are ways Jason can rebuild trust with Abena?



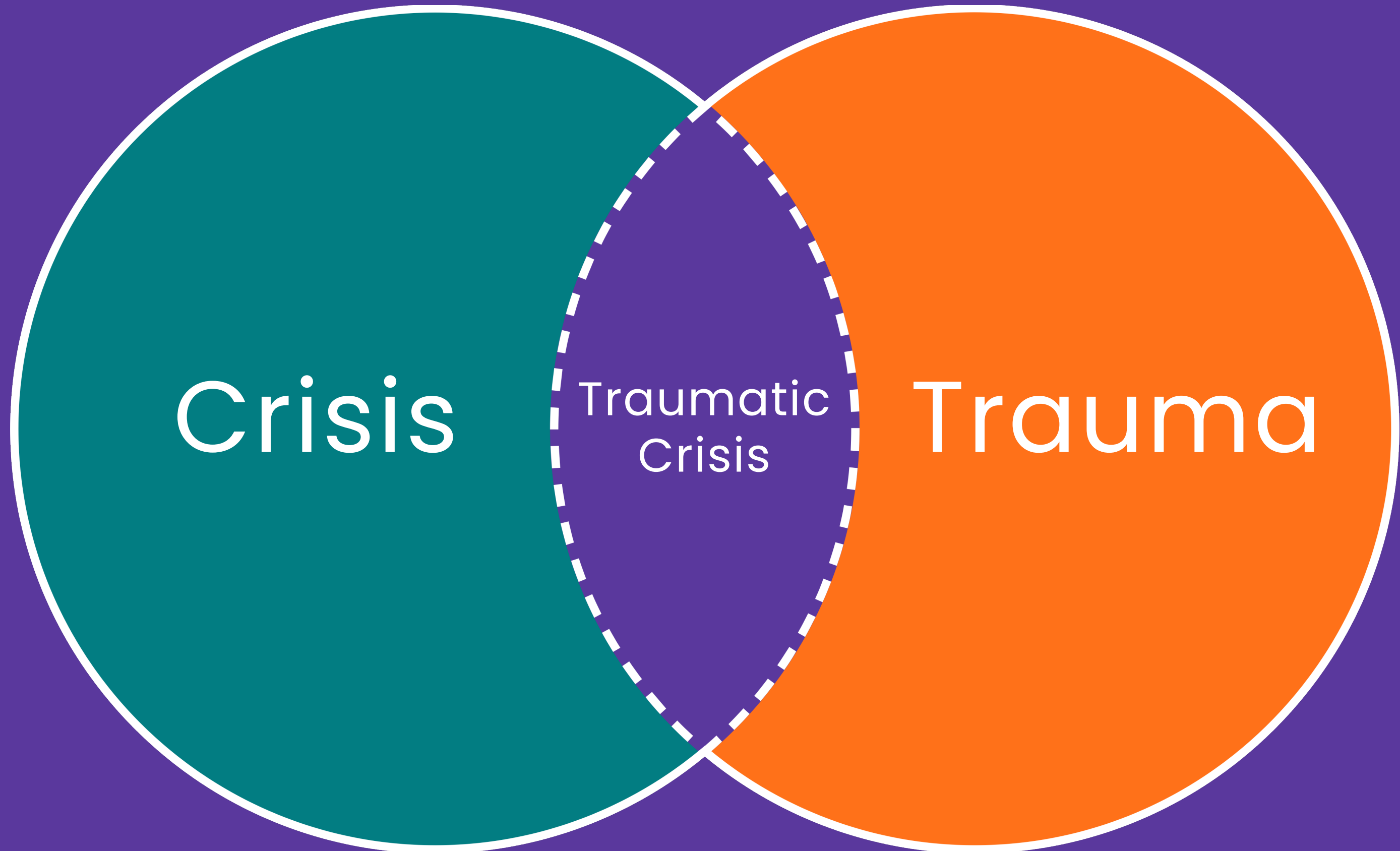


# Break

be back in 15min

# Trauma Informed Ministry

# Crises & Traumas



# What is Trauma

**Acute**

**Chronic**

**Complex**

**Historical**

**Systemic**

# What is Trauma

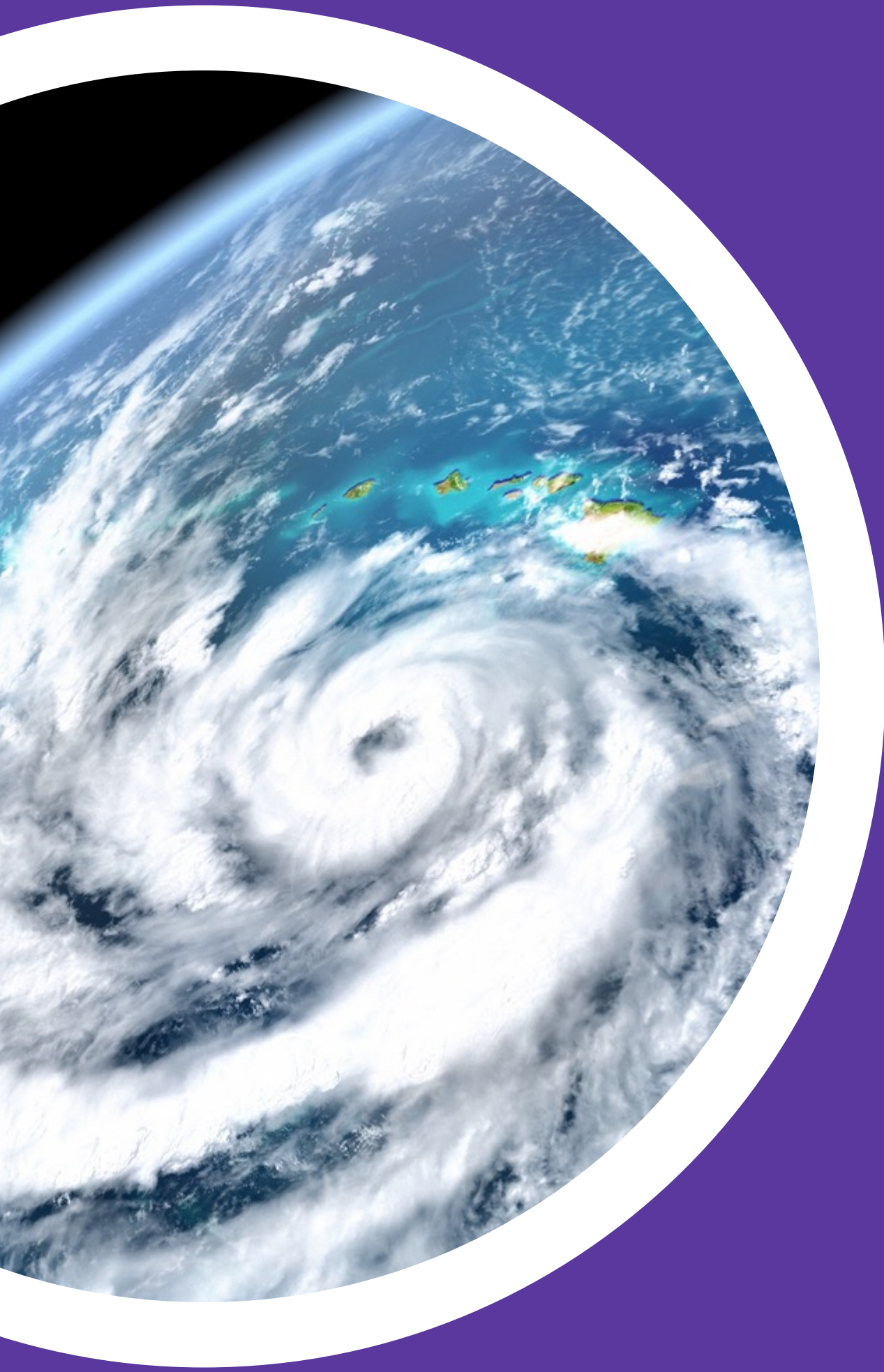
**Acute**

**Chronic**

**Complex**

**Historical**

**Systemic**



# Acute Trauma

Single, isolated event or experience

## EXAMPLES:

- Car accident
- Natural or Human created disaster
- Single act of violence
- Act of terrorism/mass shooting
- Sudden unexpected loss
- Medical emergency

# What is Trauma

**Acute**

**Chronic**

**Complex**

**Historical**

**Systemic**

# Chronic Trauma

Repeated and prolonged experiences

## EXAMPLES:

- Prolonged family or community violence
- Prolonged witnessing of family violence
- Long-term illness
- Chronic bullying
- Chronic poverty and related stressors
- Exposure to war, torture, or forced displacement





# What is Trauma

**Acute**

**Chronic**

**Complex**

**Historical**

**Systemic**

# Complex Trauma

Children exposed to multiple traumatic events without proper support

## EXAMPLES:

- Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse within caregiving systems
- Ongoing neglect by caregivers
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Other forms of chronic violence without support
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Predictor for adult traumatization and victimization



# What is Trauma

**Acute**

**Chronic**

**Complex**

**Historical**

**Systemic**

# Historical Trauma

An event or series of events for a culture, country, and/or group of people that have multi-generational impacts

## EXAMPLES:

- Single trauma
  - Pearl Harbor
  - September 11th
  - Killing of George Floyd
- Chronic trauma
  - War
  - Slavery
  - Forced displacement



# What is Trauma

**Acute**

**Chronic**

**Complex**

**Historical**

**Systemic**

# Systemic Trauma

Multi-generational oppression rooted in oppressive beliefs, policies, and/or procedures

## EXAMPLES:

- Racism
- Discrimination
- Harassment
- Sexism
- Ableism
- Homophobia



# Trauma & The Brain



# Prefrontal Cortex

“executive functioning”

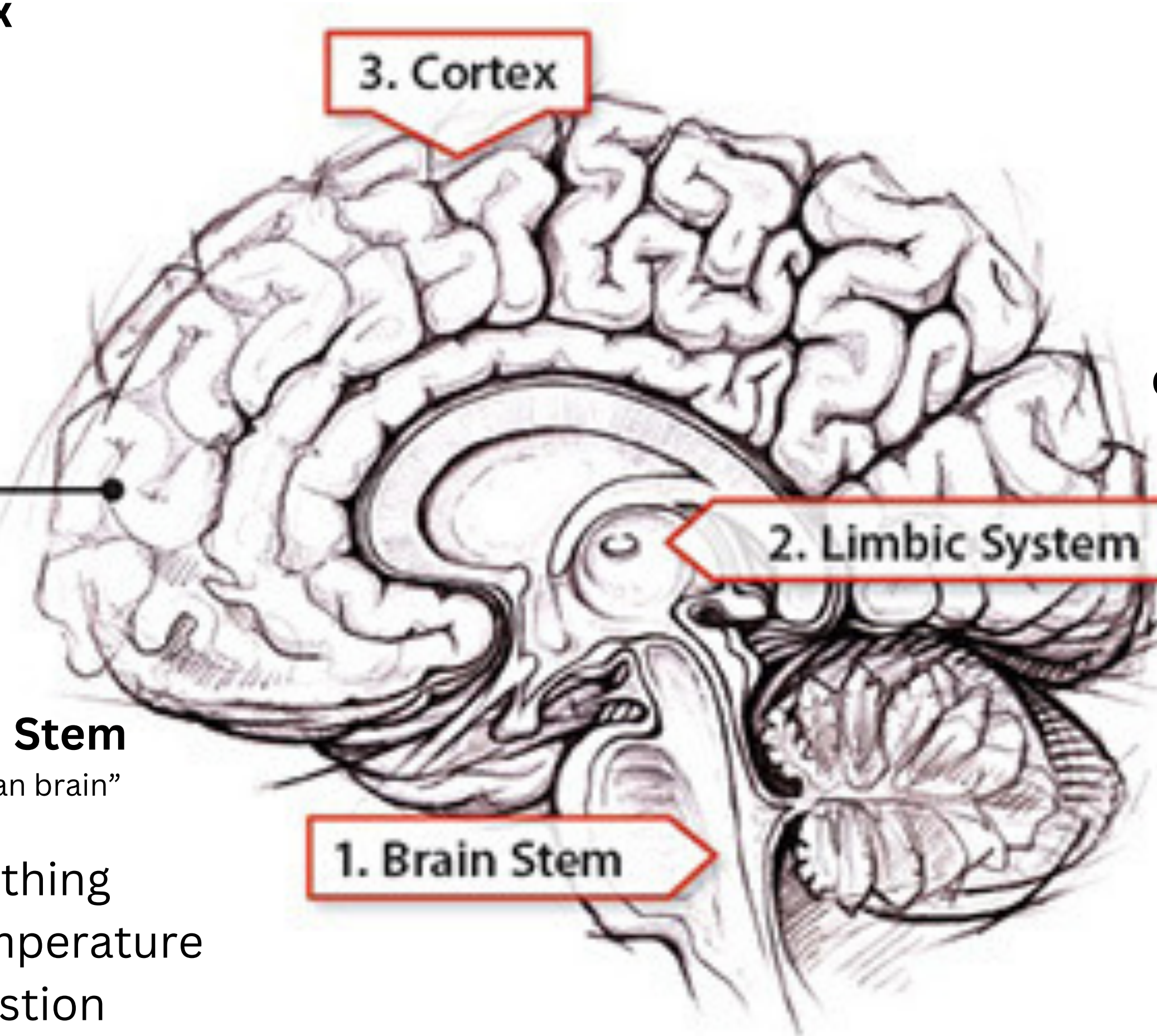
cause & effect  
future planning  
set goals  
consequences

Prefrontal Cortex

# Brain Stem

“reptilian brain”

breathing  
body temperature  
digestion  
sleep



# Cortex

“human brain”

language  
thought  
self-awareness  
perception  
consciousness  
memory

# Limbic System

“mammalian brain”

emotion  
behavior  
motivation  
long-term memory





<https://www.youtube.com/embed/zWxFifu2P2Y?si=x10NOnpKsln1U7Hc&start=7>

# Trauma May Appear As

Emotional &  
Psychological  
Symptoms



Physical  
Symptoms



Cognitive  
Symptoms



Behavioral  
Symptoms



# Recognizing Trauma in Survivors

Suspicion or distrust of systems, people trying to help

Difficulty in making decisions

Memory issues/rumination

Flight/Fight/Freeze

Sensitive or hurt feelings

Detached, might appear not to care

Isolating themselves away from others

Lethargy, depression, physical illness

# Understanding the Effects of Harm

Trauma responses are

**NORMAL**



responses to

**ABNORMAL**



situations

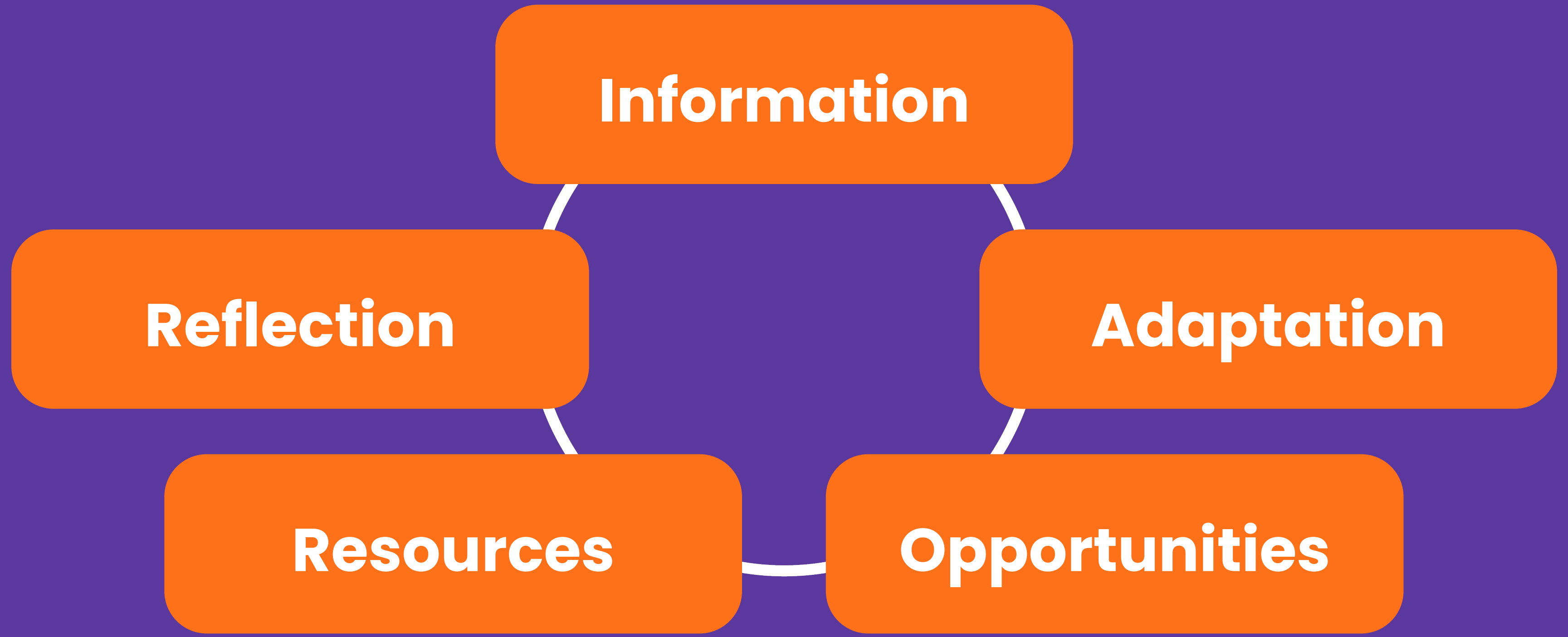
# Violence & Trauma



Intimate partner violence, rape, stalking – all of these forms of violence can create toxic stress on the body that is long-lasting and cumulative and can negatively impact a person's health and well-being for the rest of their life.

Howard Spivak, M.D.  
National Institute of Justice

# Trauma Informed Approach



# Case Study Activity

- What types of trauma has Abena experience?
- What are the impacts of trauma on Abena?
- Has Jason experienced any traumas?
- Have their children experience any traumas?



# Lunch Break

be back at 12:30pm



# Empowering Ministry

# Guiding Principles

Meet survivors where they are

Define success for each survivor

Know your own biases

Prioritize safety



# Guiding Principles

**Meet survivors where they are**

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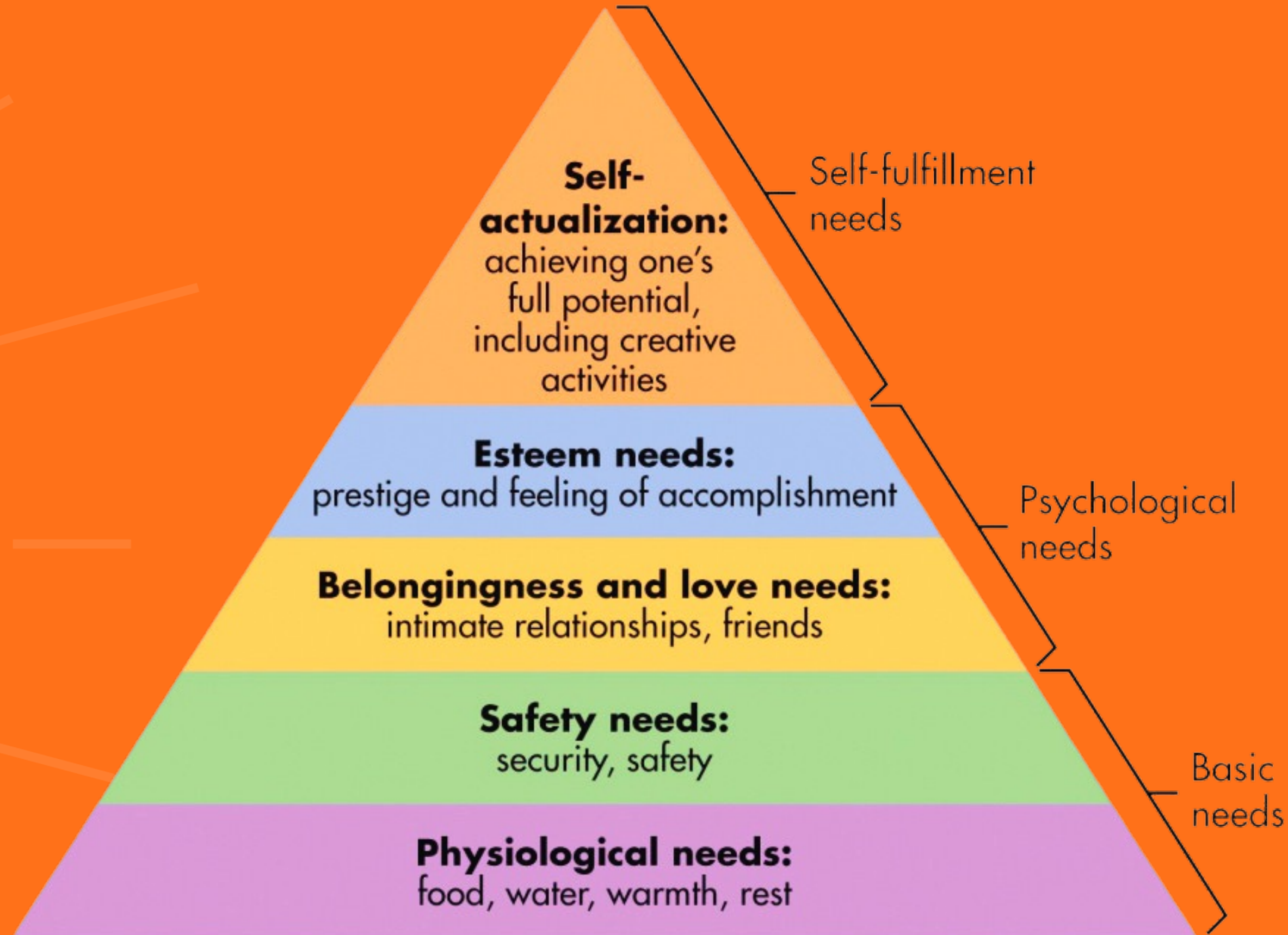


# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



[https://www.youtube.com/embed/IETlvTNWhPg?si=S3nHJJ\\_cuFoVRUjn](https://www.youtube.com/embed/IETlvTNWhPg?si=S3nHJJ_cuFoVRUjn)

# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



# Guiding Principles

Meet survivors where they are

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# Stages of Change

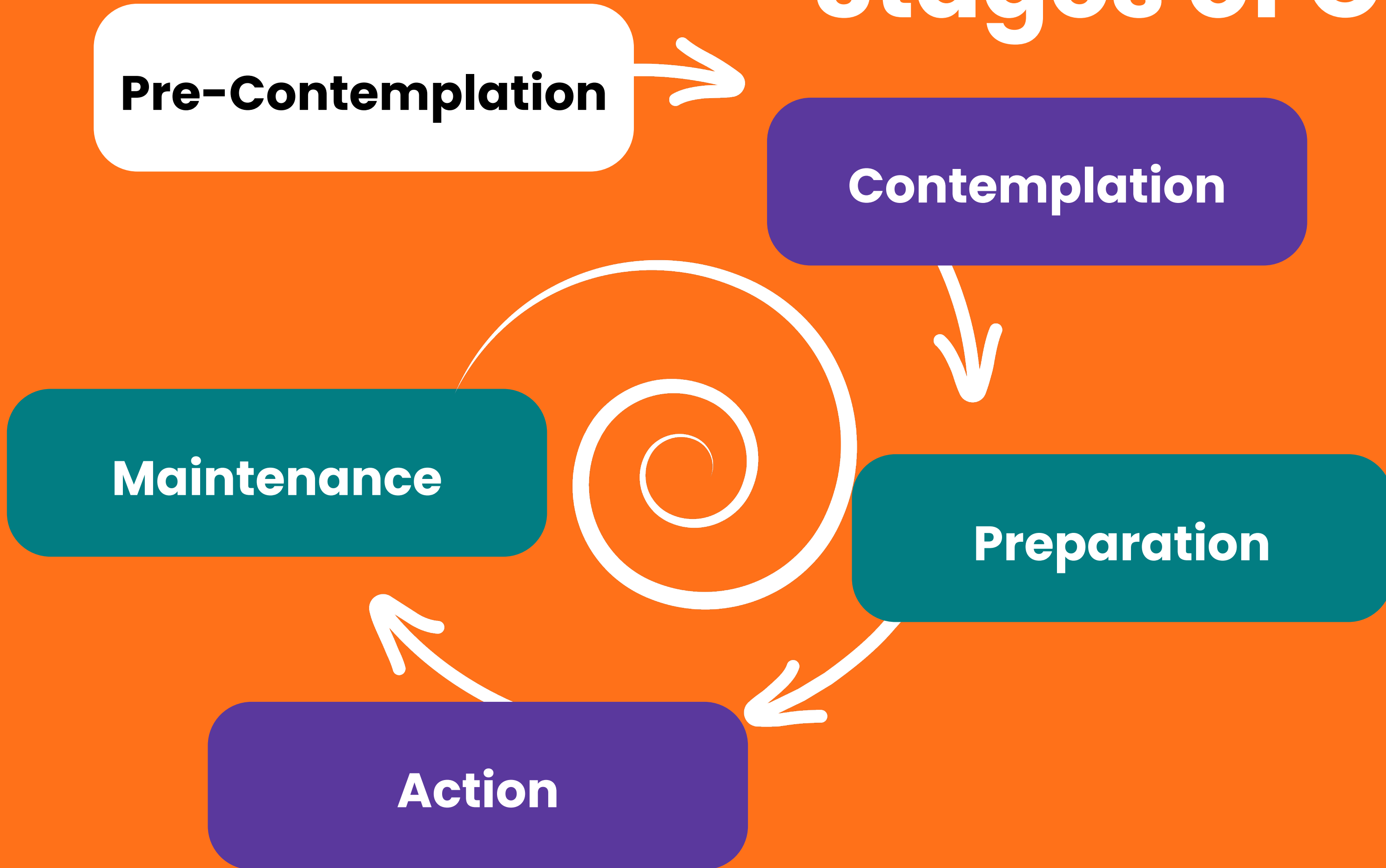
**Pre-Contemplation**

**Contemplation**

**Maintenance**

**Preparation**

**Action**



# Stages of Change

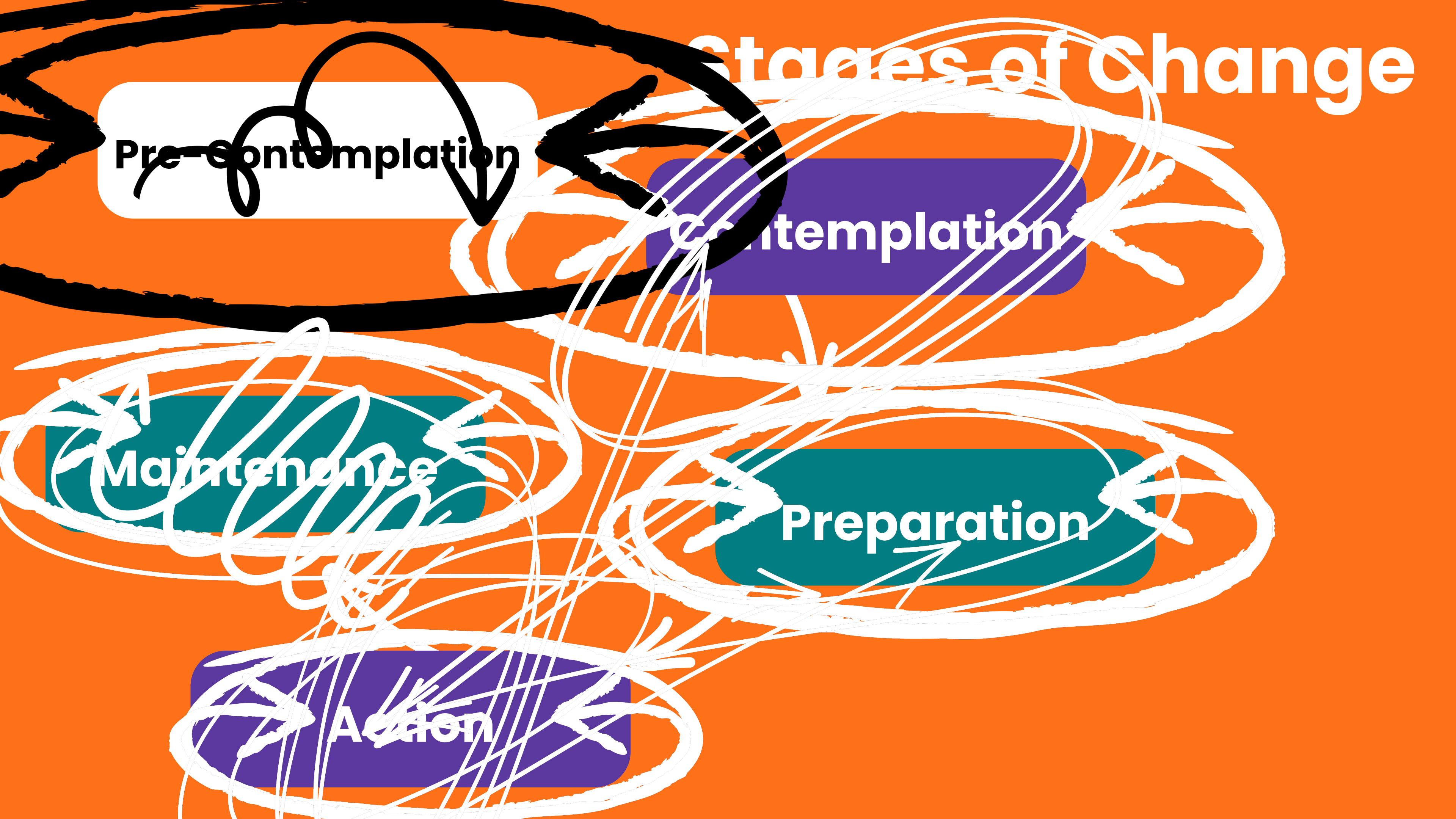
Pre-contemplation

Contemplation

Maintenance

Preparation

Action











# Guiding Principles

Meet survivors where they are

Define success for each survivor

**Know your own biases**

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# Guiding Principles

Meet survivors where they are

Define success for each survivor

Know your own biases

**Prioritize safety**





Safety of survivor, children, family,  
friends, property

Physical, psychological, spiritual  
safety

**THE MOST DANGEROUS TIME  
FOR A SURVIVOR IS WHEN  
THEY DECIDE TO LEAVE AND  
ARE LEAVING**



# Strategies

Respect confidentiality

Believe & validate experience

Acknowledge injustice

Respect autonomy

Help plan for safety

Promote access to community services





# Strategies

**Respect confidentiality**

Believe & validate experience

Acknowledge injustice

Respect autonomy

Help plan for safety

Promote access to community services



Discussions happen in private

Conversations are with survivors alone

Information is not shared

This builds trust and safety

EXCEPTIONS:

Undisclosed abuse/neglect to a child, disabled person, or elderly person



# Strategies

Respect confidentiality

## **Believe & validate experience**

Acknowledge injustice

Respect autonomy

Help plan for safety

Promote access to community services



**Listen Actively**



**Empathize**



**Validate**



**Ask Strategic Questions**



**Problem Solve\***



# Strategies

Respect confidentiality

Believe & validate experience

**Acknowledge injustice**

Respect autonomy

Help plan for safety

Promote access to community services

**Share that the harm is not their fault**

“ You didn't do anything to cause this. ”

**The only person responsible is the person causing harm**

“ Your spouse is the only person responsible for their own actions. ”

**Communicate that no one deserves to be treated this way**

“ Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and kindness. ”



# Strategies

Respect confidentiality

Believe & validate experience

Acknowledge injustice

**Respect autonomy**

Help plan for safety

Promote access to community services

Respect their right to make  
decisions in their own life

Respect their timeline and when  
they feel it is safe to take actions

The survivor is the expert in their  
own life







# Strategies

Respect confidentiality

Believe & validate experience

Acknowledge injustice

Respect autonomy

**Help plan for safety**

Promote access to community services

The first question we ask in any situation should always be about the safety of those involved

Survivors are experts at navigating their own safety

Not every situation will be easily solved

Sometimes staying is safer than leaving

Supporting choice keeps survivors connected

Consider personal safety and survivor safety and reassess on a continual basis





# Strategies

Respect confidentiality

Believe & validate experience

Acknowledge injustice

Respect autonomy

Help plan for safety

**Promote access to community services**

Know what resources are in your wider community

Learn what services are provided by different resources

Might include housing, medical, childcare, mental health,  
food, and clothing resources

Have relationship with local family  
violence program

Keep information on hand and  
publicly displayed

**YOU DO NOT HAVE OR NEED  
TO DO THIS ALONE!**



# Empowering Ministry

Trauma-informed & Survivor Defined

Survivor chooses what services or programs to access

Services or programs meet survivor's goals

Faith Leader shares their knowledge and resources

Faith Leader assists in analyzing risks

**Survivor is the Expert**

# Break

be back in 15min

# Activity

# Improv Prototyping

- Instructions (2min)
- Setting the stage (3min)
- Action! (5min)
- Group discussion & in-group reenactment (5min)
- Large group reenactment (5min)
- Group discussion & in-group improved reenactment (5min)
- Large group reenactment (5min)
- Group discussion & in-group improved reenactment (5min)
- Large group reenactment (5min)





# Reflection

- Reflect on how you would have handled this situation.
  - What opportunities do you see?
  - What ideas for action do you see?
- Partner up and share your reflections, build on your ideas from self-reflection.
- Move to groups of four and share and continue to develop your ideas.
  - Where are there similarities?
  - Where are there differences?
- As a large group, each group shares one important idea that stood out to them



# Debrief

# What?

What stood out in this training?

What did you observe?

How did you feel exploring these topics?



# So What?

Why are your observations important?

What patterns or conclusions do you see?



# Now What?

What action makes sense moving forward?

For you personally?

For your faith community?

What if...



# Questions and/or Comments



# Resources

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