

CREATING SAFETY

A trauma information and self-help
course for survivors of sexual violence

Week 5

Stories We Tell Ourselves

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SUPPORT

Week 5

Stories We Tell Ourselves

This week introduces the idea that the stories we tell ourselves - about what happened, who was to blame, and about our abilities and worth can be very powerful.

We start with some information about how perpetrators might tell particular 'stories' to manipulate and have power over children in sexual abuse. This is followed by some information about sexual consent and the kind of myths which exist in society about rape and sexual assault.

It then looks at writing our own story, and offers an exercise which looks at identifying the strengths and abilities we have used to survive.

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"Trauma stories are monologic, without connection to other voices - frozen narratives. Trauma time is flat time - it repeats without space for reflection. Resilience, in contrast, is like water, it flows around and seeps into every nook and cranny seeking the source - expansive yet penetrating."

(Gerrilyn Smith, 2013)

Abusers and Manipulation

Perpetrators of sexual violence usually blame survivors for the offences in some way in order to avoid their own responsibility and the consequences of their actions. It can be useful to do some reading about this kind of blame and manipulation as understanding it can help us to see through these messages and reduce their power. The first part of this section starts with some ideas about how perpetrators manipulate children during childhood sexual abuse.

There is then some information about consent and we then look at some of the myths about rape and sexual assault which might be used by perpetrators to blame survivors.

Unfortunately these myths are also present in our society and media, which can add to a sense of self-blame.

How do Perpetrators Abuse and Manipulate Children?

Below is some information about how perpetrators abuse and manipulate children, taken (with permission) from the NAPAC website.

They use the fact that it's natural for... children to be trusting. Here's how:

Children naturally trust people older than themselves.

Abusers therefore tell children lies from a position of authority.

Resulting in survivors believing lies to be true.

They use the fact that it's natural for... children to love attention. Here's how:

Children naturally love attention.

Abusers therefore combine abuse with giving the children attention.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that they wanted the abuse (because they wanted the attention).

They use the fact that it's natural for... children to compete for attention. Here's how:

Children naturally compete for attention.

Abusers may therefore create an attention competition between siblings/other children whilst combining it with abuse.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that they were jealous of others being abused more than they were (whereas in fact they were jealous of others getting more attention than they did).

They use the fact that it's natural for... children to love treats. Here's how:

Children naturally love sweets, presents, outings and other treats.

Abusers therefore combine abuse with giving children sweets, presents, outings and other treats.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that they accepted the abuse (because they accepted the treats).

They use the fact that it's natural for... children not to know the law. Here's how:

Children don't know the law unless told about it.

Abusers therefore tell children lies about how the law works. For example, abusers may say "If you tell anyone about this you'll be put in prison" or "I know the police and they say..."

Resulting in survivors believing lies about the law (because they have no reason to know otherwise).

They make children think that they have made the abuse up, or that people will think they are lying. Here's how:

Due to the trauma of being abused, children are not always able to remember all of the details, including times or dates.

Abusers therefore tell children that "If you were abused you'd remember all of the details... you're just making it up.

This results in survivors thinking that they if they complained about the abuse, that they would not be believed.

They use the fact that it's natural for children to be protective over people and animals they love. Here's how:

Children are naturally protective over people and animals they love.

Abusers therefore tell children lies that harm will come to the people and animals they love if they don't comply.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that they are protecting their loved ones by complying and remaining silent (because they may feel it's too frightening and risky to find out if their abuser is lying).

They use the fact that it's natural for... children not to know how widespread child abuse is. Here's how:

Children don't know how widespread abuse is.

Abusers can therefore easily make children feel like they are all alone.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that they are alone.

They use the fact that it's natural for... children to believe that the abuse is normal. Here's how:

Children often believe that what's happening to them is normal.

Abusers can therefore manipulate children into believing that this happens to everybody.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that there isn't anything to report (because they believe it was normal).

They use the fact that it's natural for... children not to want to get into trouble. Here's how:

Children don't like getting into trouble.

Abusers threaten children with getting into trouble if they don't comply.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that the abuse is their fault and they will get into trouble because of it (because that's what they've been told).

They use the fact that it's natural for... children to believe you only get punished if you do something wrong. Here's how:

Children believe that if you are punished it's because you've done something wrong.

Abusers therefore tell children they are being punished for something.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that the abuse was their fault (because they think they deserved it).

They use the fact that it's natural for... children to love family members. Here's how:

Children naturally love members of their family.

Abusers who are related to their victims will know they love them as family members.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that loving the abuser must mean loving the abuse (because they haven't been taught that it's possible to love a person and hate their behaviour).

Abusers also take advantage of other things that are natural/common (in addition to a child's nature):

They use the fact that it's natural for... the human body to react to sexual stimulation. Here's how:

The human body naturally reacts to sexual stimulation. Consensual and non-consensual.

Abusers therefore stimulate children sexually and sometimes state to the child that if it feels 'nice' they must be enjoying it.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that if their bodies reacted to the stimulations they must have enjoyed the abuse.

They use the fact that it's common for... the media to focus more on 'stranger danger' than on abuse within the family. Here's how:

The media focus more on the danger of strangers abusing children than the far more frequent cases of children being abused by family members in their own homes.

Abusers therefore know that children won't hear many (if any) stories of abuse within the family in mainstream media.

Resulting in survivors believing the lie that not much abuse within the family takes place (because they don't tend to hear about it in the media).

Perhaps this information fits easily with how you were abused - or perhaps it doesn't. Everyone's experience is different and unique. You might find it helpful to read about abuse and manipulation, child sexual exploitation or grooming. This can also help with realising that you are not alone and in fact childhood sexual abuse and sexual violence are very common.

There are many stories on the internet or in books about people who have survived childhood sexual abuse - if you find it helpful to read these

The Crown Prosecution Service has produced this leaflet to clarify what is meant by sexual consent. It also helpfully clarifies why some of the myths around sexual violence are not true, and how perpetrators may use vulnerabilities and manipulation

What is consent?

Consent is defined by section 74 Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Someone consents to vaginal, anal or oral penetration *only* if s/he agrees by choice to that penetration and has the freedom and capacity to make *that* choice. Consent to sexual activity may be given to one sort of sexual activity but not another, e.g. to vaginal but not anal sex or penetration with conditions, such as wearing a condom. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity and each time activity occurs.

In investigating the suspect, it must be established what steps, if any, the suspect took to obtain the complainant's consent and the prosecution must prove that the suspect did not have a reasonable belief that the complainant was consenting.

There is a big difference between consensual sex and rape. This aide focuses on consent, as allegations of rape often involve the word of the complainant against that of the suspect. The aim is to challenge assumptions about consent and the associated victim-blaming myths/stereotypes and highlight the suspect's behaviour and motives to prove he/she did not reasonably believe the victim was consenting. We provide guidance to the police, prosecutors and advocates to identify and explain the differences, highlighting where evidence can be gathered and how the case can be presented in court.

Targeting

Victims of rape are often selected and targeted by offenders because of ease of access and opportunity - current partner, family, friend, someone who is vulnerable through mental health/ learning/physical disabilities, someone who sells sex, someone who is isolated or in an institution, has poor communication skills, is young, in a current or past relationship with the offender, or is compromised through drink/drugs. This list is not exhaustive. Victims may be chosen for grooming because of their vulnerabilities. The suspect/offender may hope that these vulnerabilities will limit belief in the complainant by authority and a court.

Context

Context is all important to the consideration of freedom and capacity to choose. It is necessary to focus on complainant's state of mind in the context of all the relevant circumstances.

These will include:

- their age, maturity and understanding;
- whether s/he knew or understood the position they were in and what they were being asked to do;
- the history of the relationship between the complainant and suspect;
- position of power over the complainant;

and, especially for younger and/or vulnerable victims:

- any earlier provision by the suspect of any gifts, alcohol or drugs;
- promises by the suspect of a more secure or exciting way of life;
- insincere compliments and/or kindness shown by the suspect;
- any other evidence of exploitation or grooming so that s/he may not understand the full significance of what they are doing.

Vulnerable victims

Vulnerable victims are targeted by offenders for a whole range of reasons, including the belief by offenders that:

- the complainants are more likely to succumb to pressure or intimidation on them to "comply" with the offender's sexual advances;
- in some cases they may be less likely to have "home support" where the suspected abuse will be noticed or acted on;
- they are less likely to report the abuse in the first place due to their vulnerabilities;
- if they do report, they are less likely to follow it through to giving evidence;
- they will not be believed by those to whom they report it, the CPS when deciding if to charge and, ultimately, the jury;
- overall, the likelihood of detection and prosecution is low.

Myths Vs Realities

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are understandably topics that many people find difficult to talk about. But this reluctance to acknowledge sexual violence contributes to a society in which myths and misinformation are common. Myths are also fuelled by ill-informed or unbalanced media reporting of sexual violence-related stories.

Through our frontline work, we know that sexual violence survivors often struggle with feelings of shame, guilt and self-blame that can make it difficult to talk to anyone about their experiences. Survivors also often fear that others will blame them or that they won't be believed. Sexual violence myths can reinforce these feelings and fears.

This is why Rape Crisis England & Wales and its member organisations are committed to dispelling myths and raising awareness and understanding of sexual violence, as well as providing services to survivors. Our aim in this is to help to create a wider environment in which survivors feel safe and confident to seek the support and justice they need, want and deserve, as well as to reduce, prevent and ultimately end sexual violence.

Here are a few examples of common sexual violence myths:

Myth: Women are most likely to be raped outside, after dark and by a stranger, so women shouldn't go out alone at night.

Fact: Only around 10% of rapes are committed by 'strangers'. Around 90% of rapes are committed by known men, and often by someone who the survivor has previously trusted or even loved. People are raped in their homes, their workplaces and other settings where they have previously felt safe. Rapists can be friends, colleagues, clients, neighbours, family members, partners or exes. Risk of rape shouldn't be used as an excuse to control women's movements and restrict their rights and freedom.

Myth: Only young, 'attractive' women and girls, who are flirtatious and wear tight clothes, are raped.

Fact: People of all ages and appearances, and of all classes, cultures, abilities, genders, sexualities, races and religions, are raped. Rape is an act of violence and control; the perceived 'attractiveness' of a victim has very little to do with it. There is no excuse or mitigation for sexual violence and it is never the victim/survivor's fault. What someone was wearing when they were raped or how they behave is irrelevant.

Myth: When it comes to sex, women and girls sometimes 'play hard to get' and say 'no' when they really mean 'yes'.

Fact: Everyone has the legal right to say 'no' to sex and to change their mind about having sex at any point of sexual contact; if the other person doesn't stop, they are committing sexual assault or rape. When it comes to sex, we must respect the wishes of our sexual partner and believe what they tell us about what they do and don't want.

Myth: If two people have had sex with each other before, it's always OK to have sex again.

Fact: If a person is in a relationship with someone or has had sex with them before, this does not mean that they cannot be sexually assaulted or raped by that person. Consent must be given and received every time two people engage in sexual contact. It is important to check in with our sexual partners and make sure that anything sexual that happens between us is what we both want, every time.

Myth: Alcohol, drugs, stress or depression can turn people into rapists.

Fact: Drugs and alcohol are never the cause of rape or sexual assault. It is the attacker who is committing the crime, not the drugs and/or alcohol. Likewise, stress and depression don't turn people into rapists or justify sexual violence. There are no excuses.

Myth: Someone who has willingly drunk lots of alcohol or taken drugs shouldn't then complain about being raped.

Fact: In law, consent must be fully and freely given by someone with the capacity to do so. If a person is unconscious or incapacitated by alcohol or drugs, they are unable to give their consent to sex. Having sex with a person who is incapacitated through alcohol or drugs is therefore rape. No-one asks or deserves to be raped or sexually assaulted; 100% of the responsibility lies with the perpetrator.

Myth: It's only rape if someone is physically forced into sex and has the injuries to show for it.

Fact: Sometimes people who are raped sustain internal and/or external injuries and sometimes they don't. Rapists will sometimes use weapons or threats of violence to prevent a physical struggle or sometimes they will take advantage of someone who isn't able to consent, because they are drunk or asleep for example. Many people who are sexually attacked are unable to move or speak from fear and shock. Just because someone doesn't have visible injuries doesn't mean they weren't raped.

Myth: Men of certain races and backgrounds are more likely to commit sexual violence.

Fact: There is no typical rapist. People who commit sexual violence come from every economic, ethnic, racial, age and social group.

Myth: Once a man is sexually aroused he cannot help himself. He has to have sex.

Fact: Men can quite easily control their urges to have sex; they do not need to rape someone to satisfy them. Rape is an act of violence and control, not sexual gratification.

Myth: People often lie about being raped because they regret having sex with someone or out of spite or for attention.

Fact: Disproportionate media focus on false rape allegations perpetuates the public perception that lying about sexual violence is common when in fact the opposite is true. False allegations of rape are very rare. The vast majority of survivors choose not to report to the police. One significant reason for this is the fear of not being believed.

Myth: People who were sexually abused as children are likely to become abusers themselves.

Fact: This is a dangerous myth, offensive and unhelpful to adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, which is sometimes used to explain or excuse the behaviour of those who rape and sexually abuse children. The vast majority of those who are sexually abused as children will never perpetrate sexual violence against others. There is no excuse or explanation for sexual violence against children or adults.

Myth: Men don't get raped and women don't commit sexual offences.

Fact: The majority of sexual assaults and rapes are committed by men against women and children but a small number of women do perpetrate sexual violence. Often people who've been sexually assaulted or abused by a woman are particularly fearful that they will not be believed or that their experiences won't be considered 'as bad' as being raped by a man. This can make it especially difficult for these survivors to access services or justice.

Men are also raped and sexually assaulted. Notts SVS Services recognises that the impact of sexual violence on men and boys is no less devastating and we believe all survivors of sexual violence deserve specialist support.



Drunk does not mean yes.

**No matter what our relationship...
...‘no’ means NO.**

www.drink.com/consent

SEX WITHOUT CONSENT IS RAPE

FOR HELP AND ADVICE CALL

<p>POLICE 101 In a non-emergency</p>	<p><small>2244, The Island's Independent Sexual Violence Advice Centre</small> 07930 932249 <small>24/7 telephone based crisis helpline service operating in central Isles of Scilly, Isles of Lundy, Isles of Tresco, Isles of St. Martin and Isles of St. Agnes</small> 023 8063 6313</p>	<p><small>TREETOPS - Hampshire and Wiltshire Sexual Assault Referral Centre</small> 023 9221 0352 <small>ISLAND INDEPENDENT SERVICE - Rape and sexual assault advice for the Isles of Wight</small> 01983 825981</p>	<p>POLICE 999 In an emergency</p>
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ISLE OF WIGHT DOMESTIC ABUSE FORUM

Treetops HT

Isle of Wight

FACTS

- The majority of rapes are committed by persons known to the victim
- Date or acquaintance rape is very common
- Victims are often raped in their homes

Victim vs Survivor

At Notts SVS Services we often talk about survivors rather than victims. We do this because it affirms that people have been through very difficult experiences but have had the strength and resilience to survive. A simple change of words seems to take power away from perpetrators and return it to survivors.

Finding Our Own Story

"Starting to believe that I survived rather than just having been overwhelmed, and seeing myself as someone with resilience and worth, was a major healing step. I began to understand - slowly - that it's not what happens to us that defines who we are. It's how we view ourselves as a result of what happens to us that defines who we are. I could see myself as a guilty, defective victim, or I could see myself as someone to whom terrible things were done - illegal, immoral, indecent things - and it was the person who did them who was bad, not me. I was the person who survived and I can survive now."

Carolyn Spring, 2015

We have had a think about the myths and manipulations around sexual abuse, rape and sexual assault. Perhaps one of the first stages in recovery is to start to understand how we have been manipulated and what myths we have come to believe. This may be a long process and will probably continue if you begin counselling.

Another part of our journey may be to choose our own version of our story which acknowledges our strengths and good qualities. Maya Angelou, who was sexually abused as a child, wrote the poem *Still I Rise* (found on the following page) which in a way is her story of reclaiming her strength and ability to survive.

Still I Rise

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Maya Angelou

Appreciating our Strengths and Capabilities

We may not be used to thinking about our strengths and qualities - even thinking of just one quality is great!

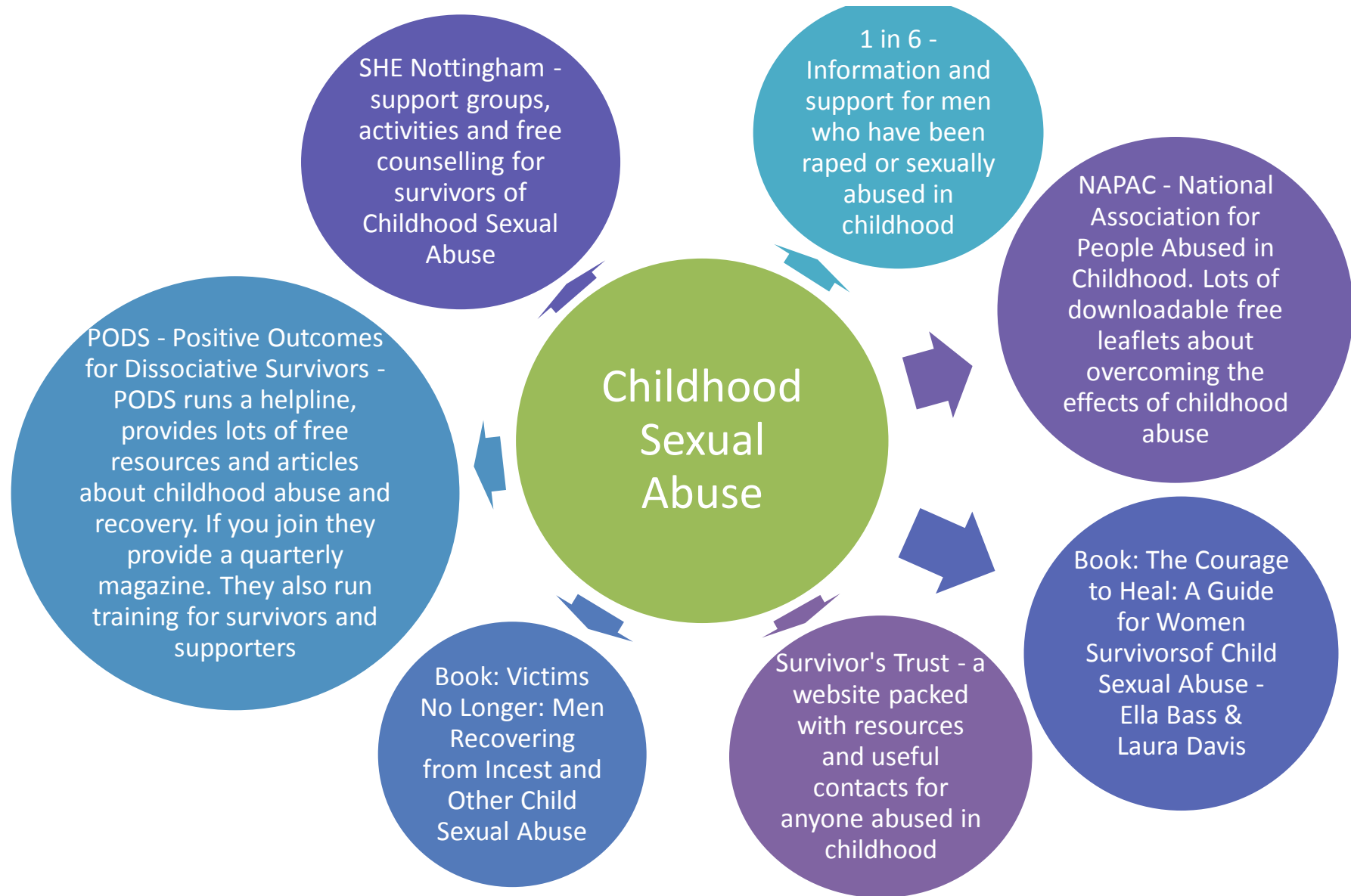
"If we ask people to look for deficits, they will usually find them, and their view of the situation will be coloured by this. If we ask people to look for successes, they will usually find it, and their view of the situation will be coloured by this" Kral (1989)

What strengths have I used in my life?
Are there moments when I have had to use these strengths to survive?
What qualities do I have?
How have my qualities developed through understanding struggle and adversity?

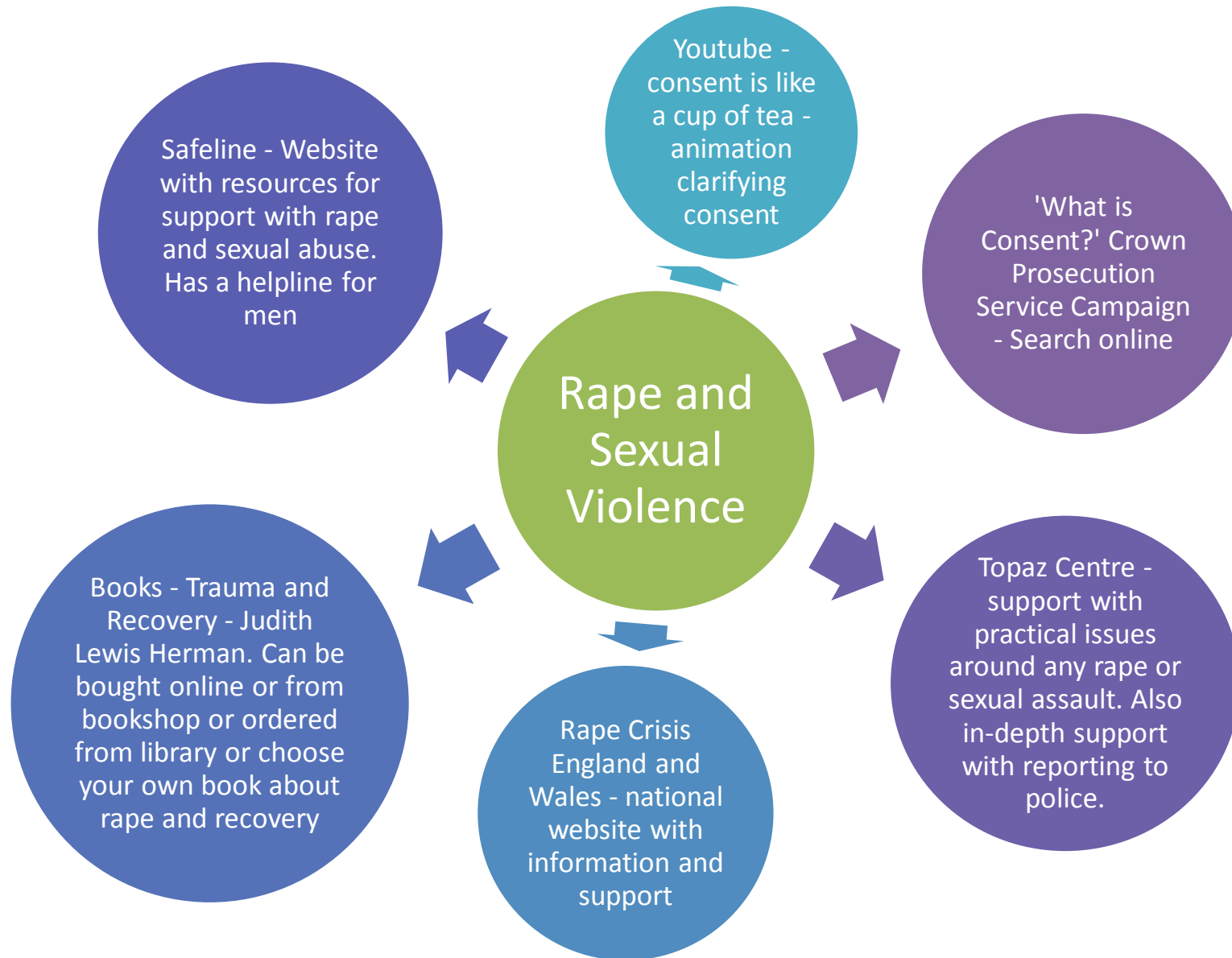
Homework

- Have a look at the information on the NAPAC - National Association for People Abused in Childhood - website about sexual abuse and recovery www.napac.org.uk
- Have a look at the CPS campaign 'what is consent'
- Every evening write down 2 positive qualities you have in yourself.

There's a world of help out there...



There's a world of help out there...



Acknowledgements

Notts SVS Services would like to thank the following organisations who allowed us to use their materials in writing this course.

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood www.napac.org.uk

www.get.gg (www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

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