

# CREATING SAFETY

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

**Week 6**

**Building on Our Strengths**

NOTTS  
SVS  
SERVICES

LISTEN  
BELIEVE  
SUPPORT

# **Week 6**

## **Building on Our Strengths**

**This week ends the course with some ideas about how to build on any positive progress you have made.**

**It starts with a self-compassion exercise which can be used whenever difficult feelings arise.**

**It then gives an exercise in creating an art gallery or collection of phrases which identify our assets.**

**It offers a writing exercise about identifying possible setbacks and vulnerabilities and how to keep progressing.**

**It offers an exercise in creating our own positive shield. The course ends with an exercise in identifying what has been most helpful.**

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## Soften, Soothe and Allow

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**SOFTEN-SOOTHE-ALLOW - You can practice this exercise whenever you feel stress in daily life. Find a quiet place to sit down for about 10 minutes. Take three deep breaths to relax.**

First discover where the stress or a difficult emotion manifests in your body.

Then try the following:

- Begin softening into that location in your body.

Letting the muscles be soft without a requirement that they become soft, like simply applying heat to sore muscles.

Softening...softening...softening... Remember that we are not trying to make the sensation go away—you are just holding it in a tender embrace.

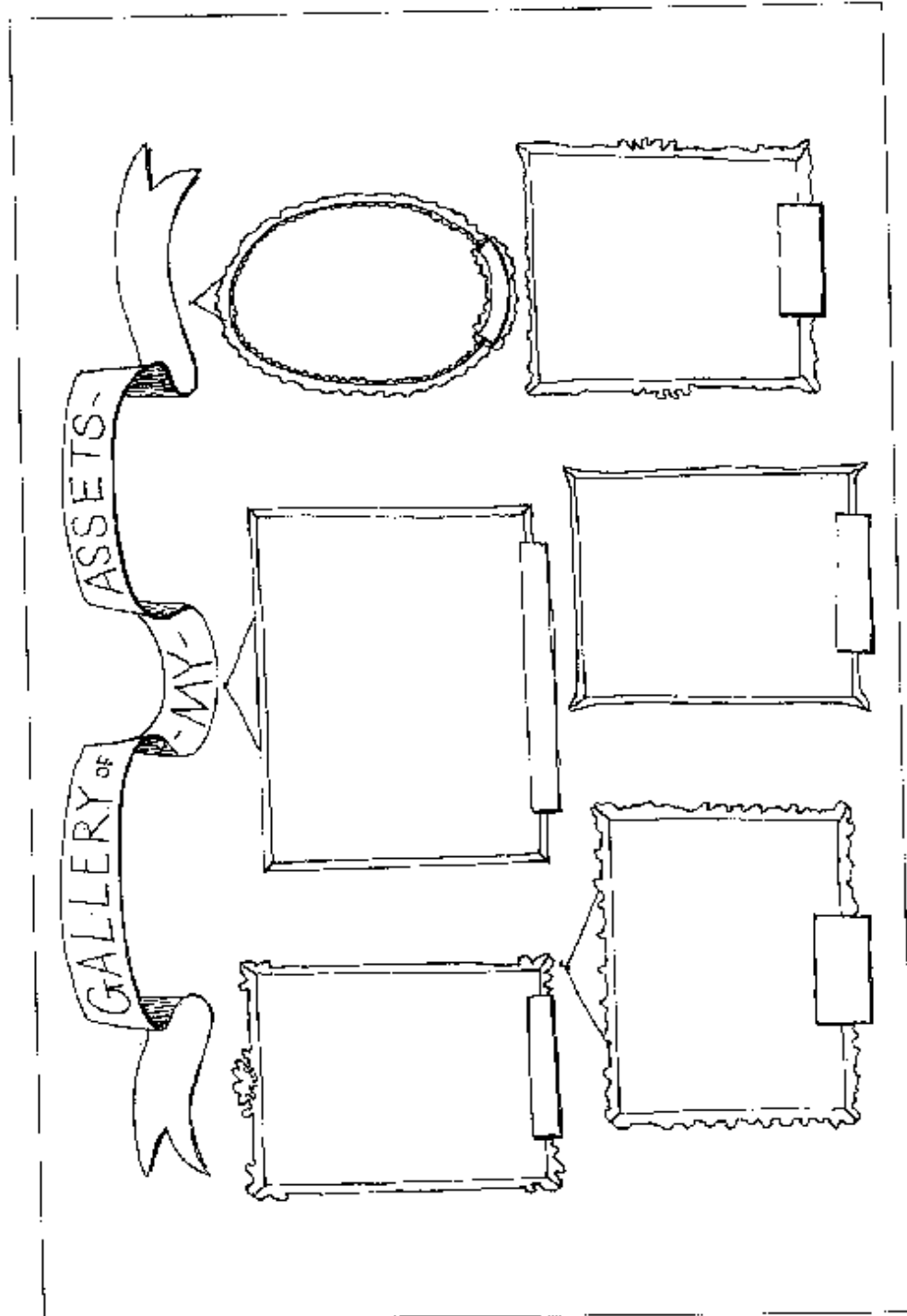
- If you wish, letting yourself just soften around the edges, like around the edges of a pancake.
- If you experience too much discomfort with an emotion, just staying with your breath until you feel better.
- Now starting to soothe yourself because you struggle in this way. Perhaps putting your hand over your heart again and feeling your body breathe.

Perhaps bringing kind or encouraging words to mind, such as, “Oh, it’s so hard to feel this. May I be kind to myself.” “May I hold myself in loving awareness.”

- If you wish, directing kindness to an uncomfortable part of your body by placing your hand over that place. Maybe even thinking of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child, and gently soothing...soothing...soothing.
- Finally, allowing the discomfort to be there. Letting go of the wish for discomfort to disappear. Allowing the discomfort to come and go as it pleases, like a guest in your own home. Allowing...allowing...allowing
- Softening...soothing...allowing. Softening...soothing...allowing. Repeating these words like a mantra, if you wish, reminding yourself to incline with tenderness toward your suffering.
- As you do this exercise you may find that the emotion moves in your body, or even changes into another emotion. Try staying with your experience, continuing to use the technique of soften-soothe-allow.
- Slowly stop the exercise when you’re ready.

**As with all the other mindfulness exercises you can use these words as a script or you can search for a script on the internet and use that.**

Can you write or draw some of your positive qualities or anything that you do well however small in this art gallery? Can you write or draw anything positive you have done while following this course?



### **Maintaining Progress**

<b>What have I learned?</b>
<b>What was most useful?</b>
<b>What can I continue to do to prevent a setback?</b>
<b>What are my high risk situations of this happening?</b> What events / situations / triggers cause me to be more vulnerable?
<b>What are the signs?</b> Thoughts / feelings / behaviours
<b>What can I do to avoid losing control?</b> What could I do differently? What would work best? When I'm struggling or feeling bad, what could I do that will help?
<b>What could I do if I did lose control?</b> What has helped? What have I learned? Who can help?

The path isn't a straight line; it's a spiral.

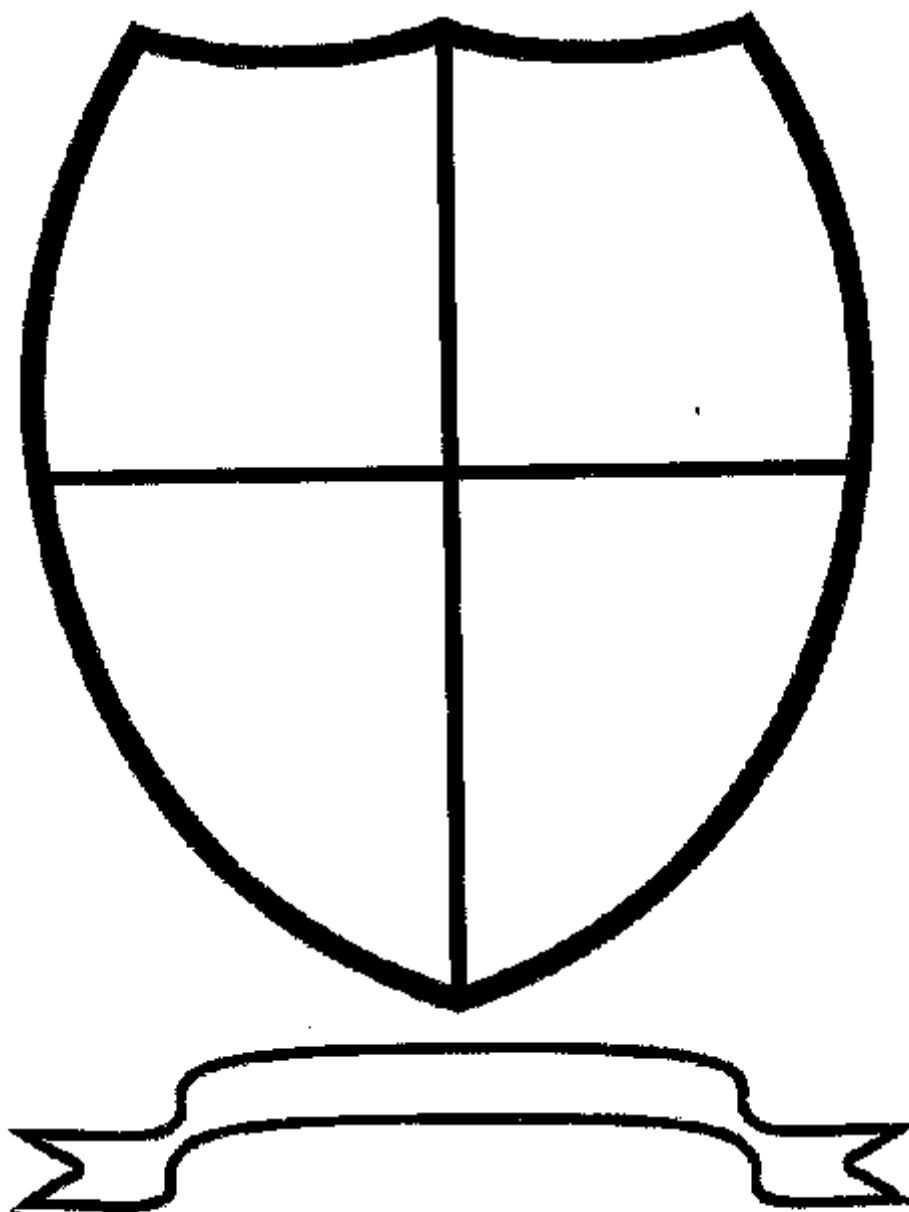


You continually come back to things you thought you understood and see deeper truths.



## My Shield

Look at the shield on the next page. Can you create a '**shield of resilience**' to take with you from this course? You could draw positive meaningful pictures about your strengths and abilities, or you could cover the shield in positive phrases or words that mean something to you or feel protective.



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## Autobiography In Five Short Chapters

### **Chapter I**

I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I fall in.  
I am lost... I am hopeless.  
It takes forever to find a way out.

### **Chapter II**

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I **pretend** I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in this same place.  
It still takes a long time to get out.

### **Chapter III**

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I **see** it there.  
I still fall in... it's a habit... but,  
my eyes are open.  
I know where I am.  
I get out immediately.

### **Chapter IV**

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.

### **Chapter V**

I walk down another street.

- *Portia Nelson*

## If it works- do more of it

It might seem obvious but making progress can be about finding what doesn't work and doing less of it; and finding what works and doing more of it. For all the reasons we have looked at we might be prone to doing more of what doesn't work and not noticing what does. Write down your top 5 exercises or coping strategies from the course which have worked for you or that you think will work. Keep them simple and try to do more of them over the next few months. Even managing to use a positive skill once is a good outcome!



1. ....

.....



2. ....

.....



3. ....

.....



4. ....

.....



5. ....

.....

## **The Journey**

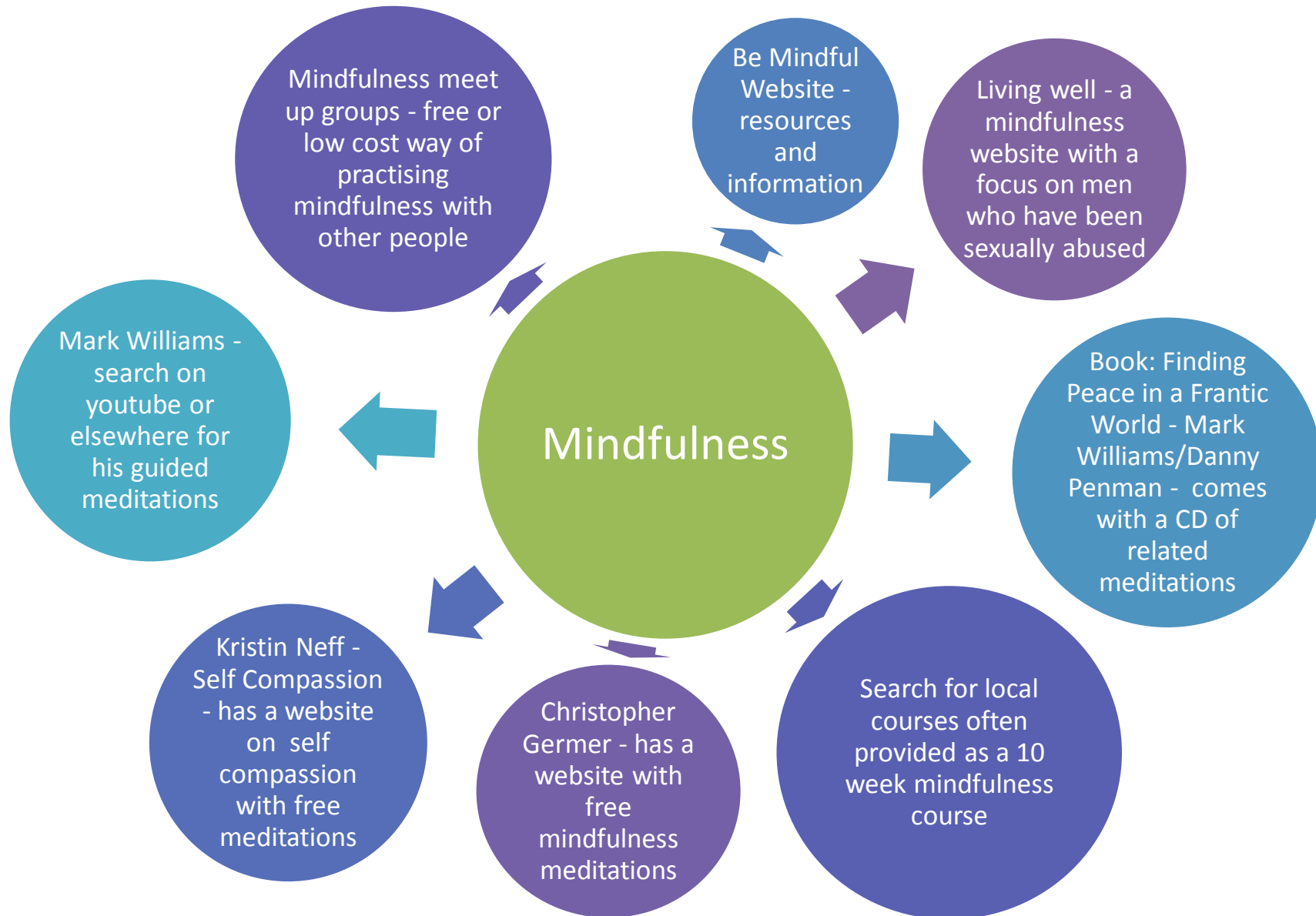
One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,  
though the voices around you  
kept shouting  
their bad advice—  
though the whole house  
began to tremble  
and you felt the old tug  
at your ankles.  
'Mend my life!'  
each voice cried.  
But you didn't stop.  
You knew what you had to do,  
though the wind pried  
with its stiff fingers  
at the very foundations,  
though their melancholy  
was terrible.  
It was already late  
enough, and a wild night,  
and the road full of fallen  
branches and stones.  
But little by little,  
as you left their voices behind,  
the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice  
which you slowly  
recognised as your own,  
that kept you company  
as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do—  
determined to save  
the only life you could save.

**Mary Oliver**

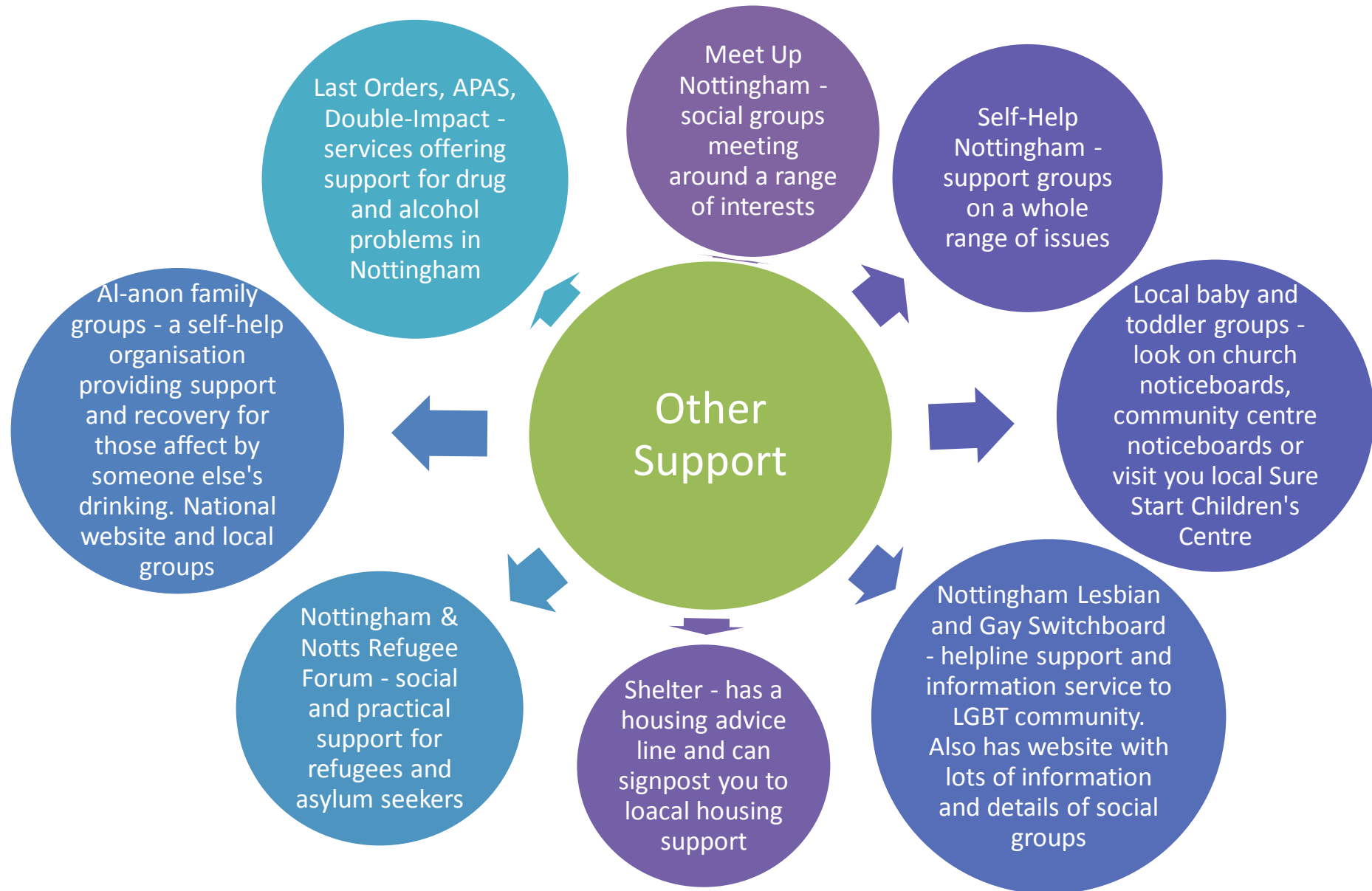
## Homework

- Print out and keep anything from the course that has been particularly helpful to you. Display it or keep it in your purse or wallet.
- Spend 5 minutes looking at your 'maintaining progress' exercise each day this week. Add anything you think of.
- Do soften, soothe and allow once more this week.
- Look back through the course and do any of the exercises as many times as you want to.

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



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# 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](http://www.napac.org.uk)

[www.get.gg](http://www.get.gg) (www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

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