

# **Trauma and Healing**

## **Family and Domestic Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities**

Samantha Wild & John Brady

Queensland Indigenous DFV Conference 2019

# Acknowledgement of Country

**We acknowledge the Yuwi people of Yuwibara nation as the traditional custodians of the land, winds and sea of this country**

We would like to acknowledge the Australian South Sea Islander people as important stakeholders in the local community. We pay our respects to the ASSI people past and present.

We extend respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

We do this, to seek the blessing of the ancestors and Elders of this country, to acknowledge we come together to share knowledge.



# **Respectful Acknowledgement**

**We acknowledge the lived experience of people who have experienced domestic and family violence.**

## **Recognition of the strength and resiliency of our mob:**

- People with lived experience of interpersonal violence
- People who have loved and cared for someone experiencing violence
- We remember and pay tributes to the loved ones who are not here today because of violence

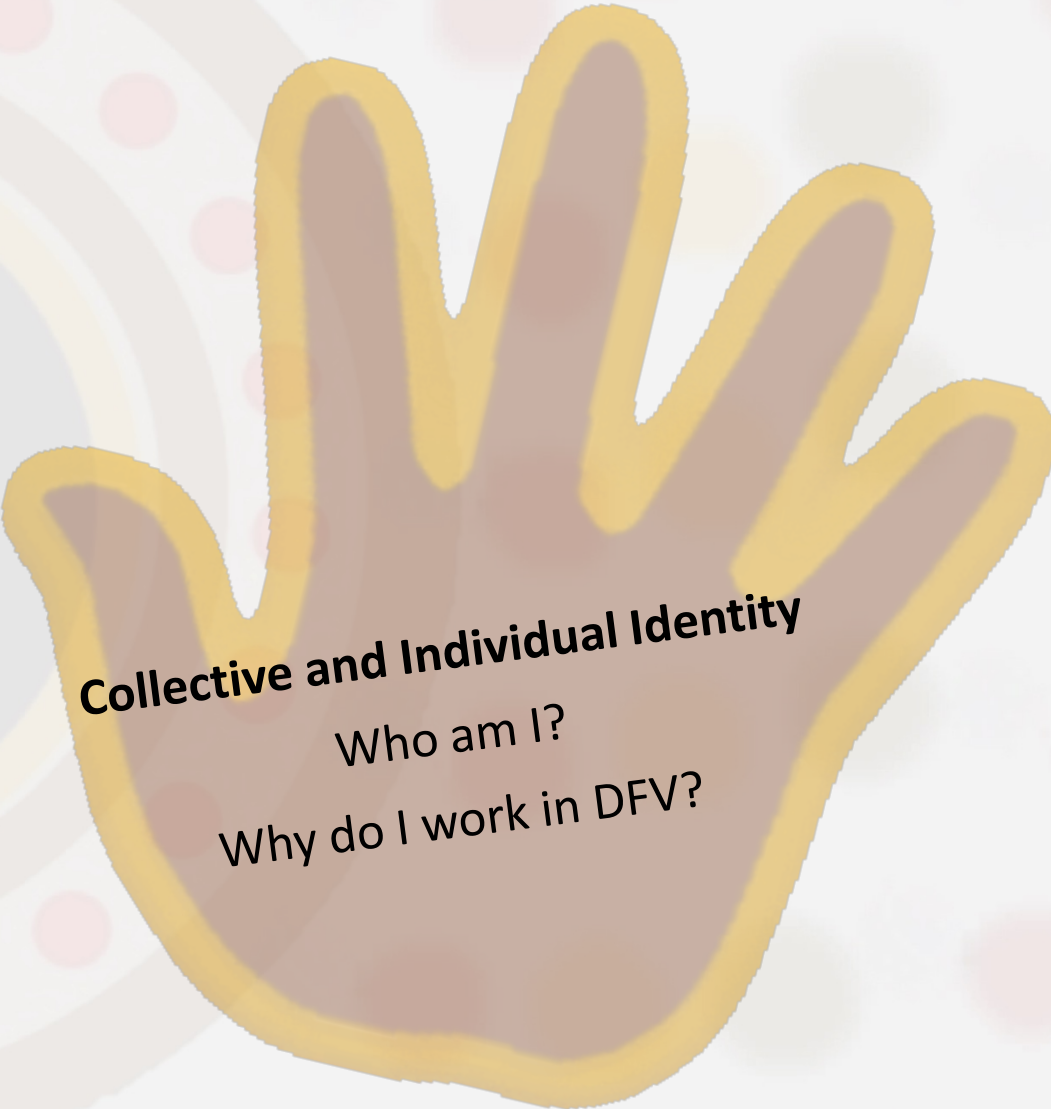
# Introducing the Facilitators



## Workshop Objectives:

- Barriers to DFV reporting
- Trauma and survival
- Healing
- Self Care





## Collective and Individual Identity

Who am I?

Why do I work in DFV?





# Self Help Tip – Deep breathing

- Learning to calm anxiety by slowing down your breathing – reduce the body's fight/flight responses.
- Rapid breathing increases heart rate, blood pressure, psychological activity
- Breathing slow reduces tension and stress.
- Slowing the breathing rate is an effective method of turning off the 'fight/flight' response.
- It is helpful to use controlled breathing techniques at the first sign of anxiety or panic.
- Calm breathing is a quick and easy tool that you can use to “bring the volume down” on some of those anxious feelings.



# Self Help Tip – Grounding

- This can be anything you find works for you such as relaxation breathing, visual imagery, mediation, yoga, or mindfulness.
- Activities where you focus on your five senses – what you can see, hear, smell, touch, taste – encouraging you to stay in t
- Orientation to present (if trauma is in the past) or current safe place
- Maintain eye contact (where possible and safe)
- Remind others to use a calm reassuring tone of voice at near normal pitch and volume
- Visual contact with cues in the environment
- Be in the present moment.

# Self Help Tip – Self Compassion

- Greater understanding of why you respond in certain ways allows you to have more compassion for yourself and your experience
- Don't believe the shame, guilt and blame thoughts for difficult situations and circumstances beyond your control
- Remind yourself that the way you respond is understandable

# Preparing to Practice Self Care

**Everyone has got a lot going on! Life is full of challenges.**

When you have work or personal challenges you can;

1. Ignore and deny
2. Let it define who you are
3. Learn from it and allow it to strengthen you

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are more vulnerable!

*There is little distinction between those men who use “culture” as a justification for the abuse of Aboriginal woman physically, from those who use “culture” as a mechanism for silencing Aboriginal women politically.*

<https://indigenoux.com.au/chelsea-bond-because-she-is-black/>



# BARRIERS TO REPORTING VIOLENCE...





# DFV Under Reporting

How does this affect your role?

# DFV Under Reporting

Personal and cultural factors of shame, guilt & fear

## Institutional barriers

- Fear, mistrust & loss of confidence in police
- Justice system failures
- Government agencies & media stereotypes
- Belief perpetrators will not be punished
- Fear of racism
- Fear a child may be removed from the community
- High number of deaths in custody

## Culture as justification

- High levels of violence
- Normalisation of family violence
- Belief reporting is betrayal of the culture
- Retaliation from the perpetrator or their family

## Using culture to silence

- Community silence and denial
- Social and cultural pressure not to report
- Fear of being shunned by the community

# What Improves DFV Reporting

- Local solutions addressing the code of silence
  - **Don't forget our men and don't stereotype them as abusers.**
  - **Look for the positives and celebrate the victories.**
  - **Re-assert our cultural norms and regain respect in our communities.**
- Community education about human rights, violence is not tolerated, there are legal obligations and protections
- Statutory officers meeting their obligation and duty of care
- Specialised DFV response services (DFV court)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific DFV services

# Working With Trauma

- Understanding Trauma and Its Impact (it is messy and hard work)
- Support people to regain control over their lives
- Strengthening autonomy and capacity to make good choices
- Psychological and biological changes inhibit the regulation of emotions when living in a state of constant stress.

# Trauma – Behaviour is Language

## **Externalising Behaviours**

- Behaviour problems
- Delinquency and criminal behaviour
- Violent behaviour

## **Internalising Behaviours**

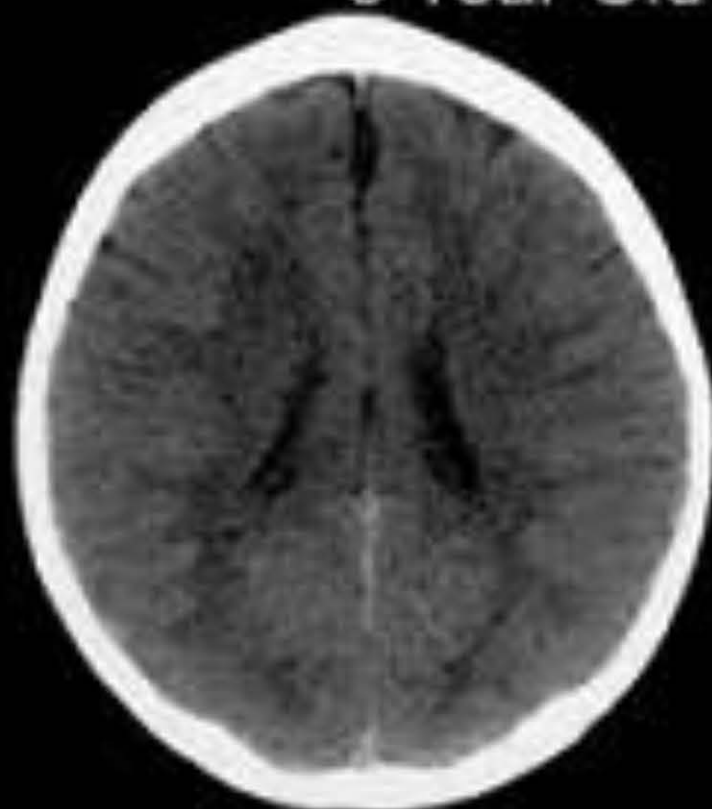
- Depression
- Suicide risk
- Guilt, shame, poor self esteem
- Disassociation



# Trauma and the Brain

- Prolonged abuse and neglect effect **brain** development
- The **longer** the abuse and the more likely it is **permanent** damage can occur
- Neural circuits are disrupted causing changes in the brains **memory** and **emotional** centre
- Psychological and biological changes inhibit the regulation of emotions when living in a state of constant **stress**
- This affects how a someone with trauma can **think, behave, learn** and interacts in **relationships**

### 3 Year Old Children



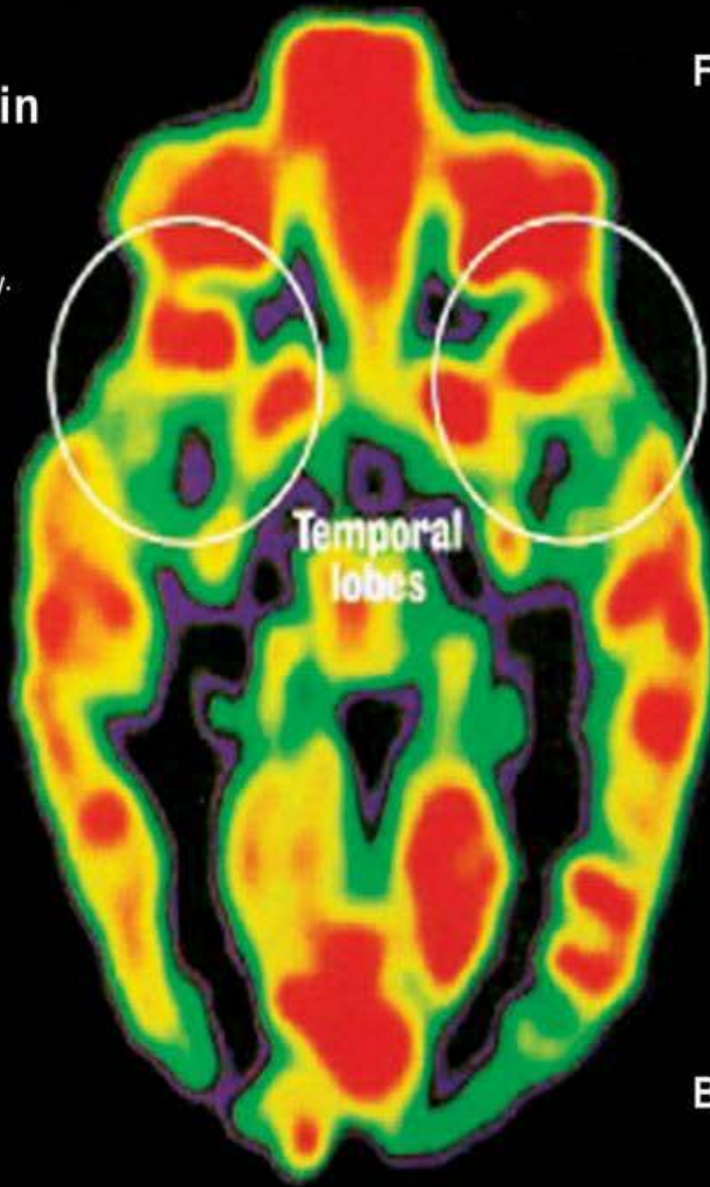
Normal



Extreme Neglect

## Healthy Brain

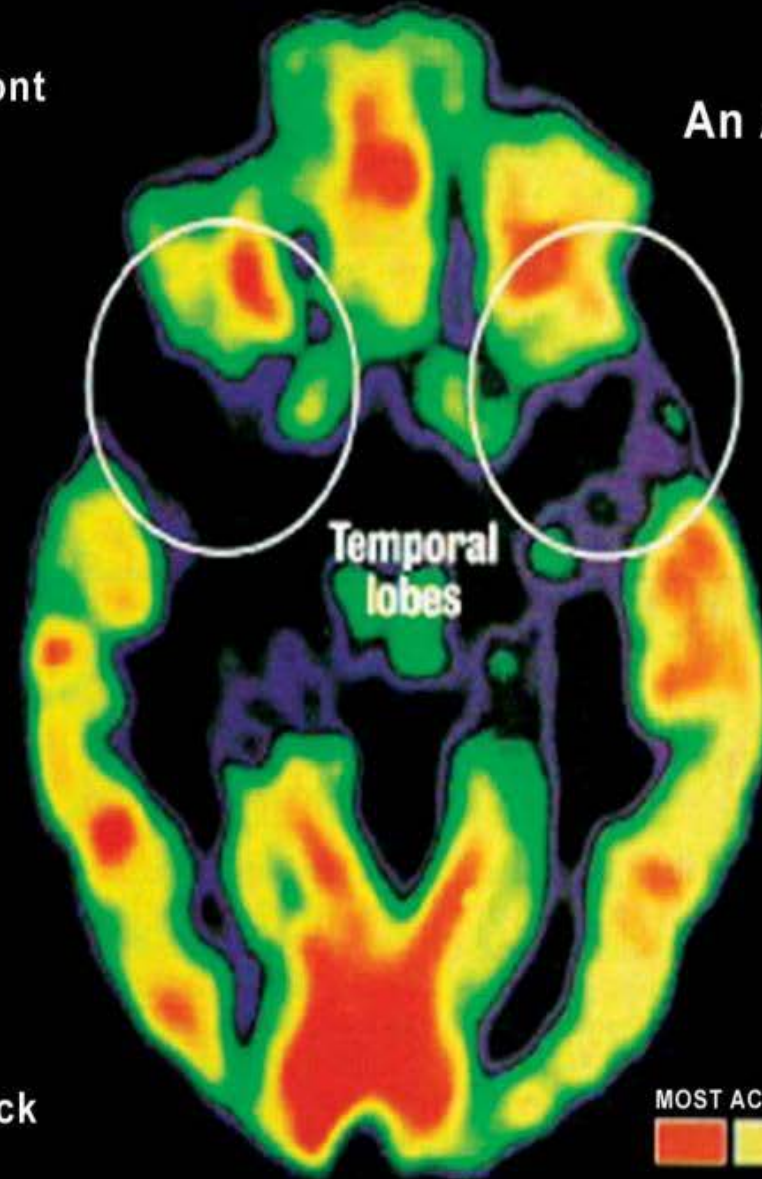
This PET scan of the brain of a normal child shows regions of high (red) and low (blue and black) activity. At birth, only primitive structures such as the brain stem (center) are fully functional; in regions like the temporal lobes (top), early childhood experiences wire the circuits.



Front

## An Abused Brain

This PET scan of the brain of a Romanian Orphan, who was institutionalized shortly after birth, shows the effect of extreme deprivation in infancy. The temporal lobes (top), which regulate emotions and receive input from the senses, are nearly quiescent. Such children suffer emotional and cognitive problems.



Back



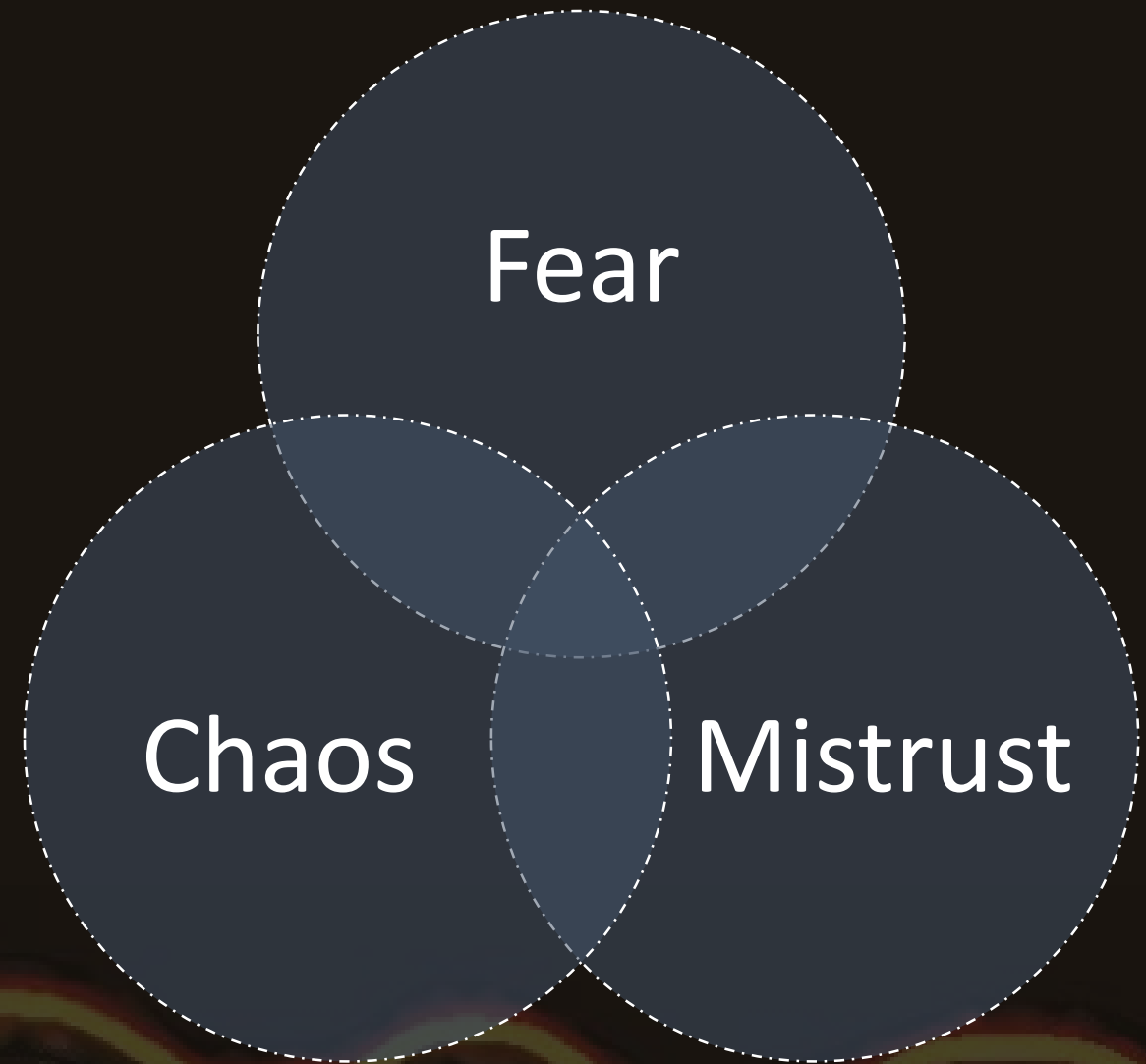
# Trauma Brain Only Knows....

Brain is programmed for **Survival**

It's always alert looking for **threats**

Safety in **Chaos & Dysfunction**

Anything outside of is perceived as unsafe





# What Does Trauma Look Like?

- Change is a source of stress - uncertainty and unpredictability of routines and reactions
- Struggle with collective rules and understanding the consequences for breaking them.
- Poor adaptability
- Insecure and unstable in forming relationships



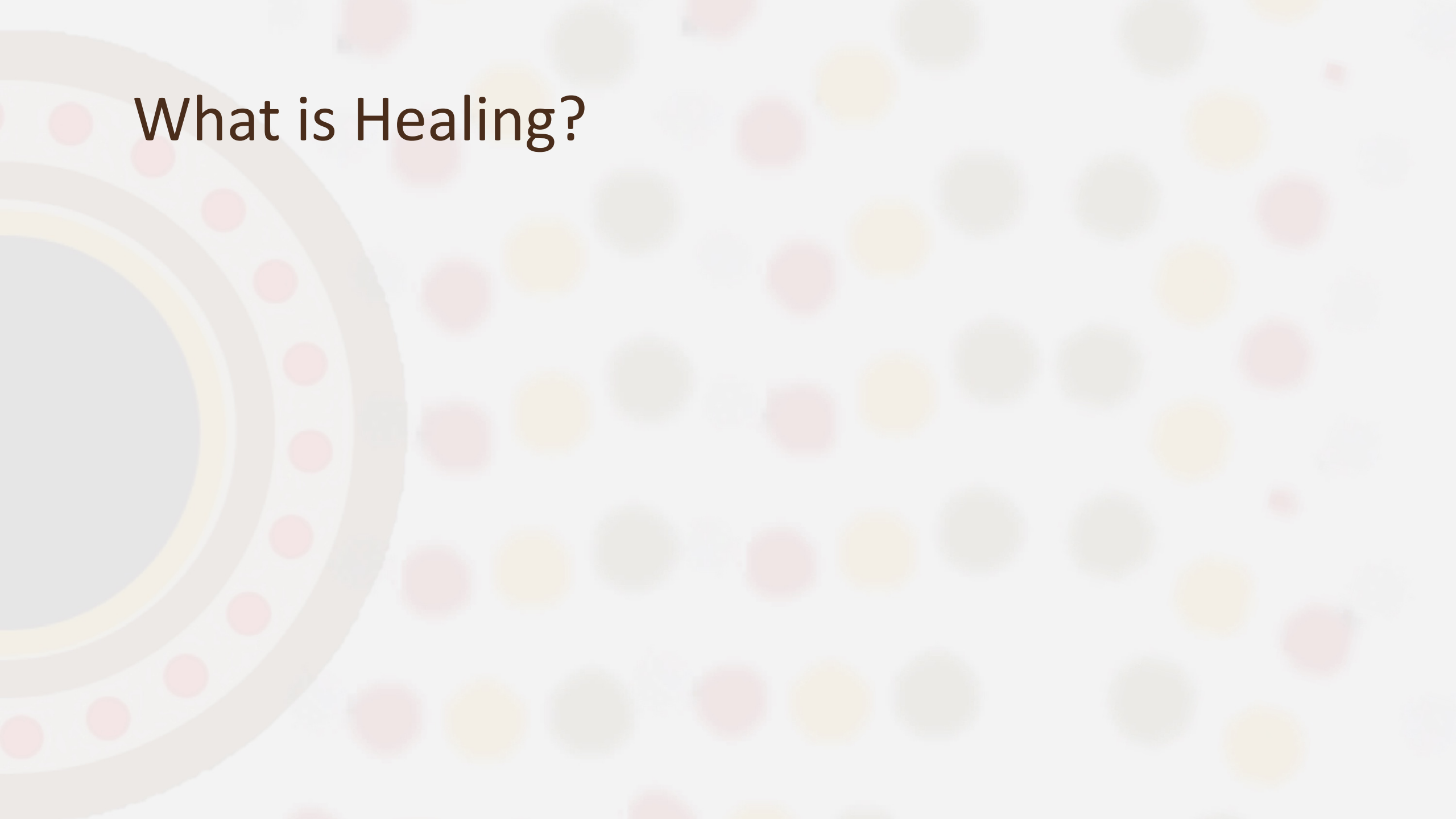
# Reprogramming Trauma Brain



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Trauma Response Work

- Deep listening (dadirri)
- Walked the path of life experiences
- Understand the apply knowledge and actions (actions are language)
- No hierarchy
- Acknowledges the value of Eldership
- Wellbeing and spirituality are central to healing
- Promotes and ensures relationships of mutual respect
- Strive to achieve cultural safety and to work with integrity

# What is Healing?



# Expression & Learning is Healing

Repetitive learning helps the brain healing

Re-telling a story without the emotional trigger is healing

Cultural identity is expression of culture and varies between groups of people, it includes traditional cultural practices, land, family, languages, spirituality and Elders.

- Art projects
- Music, song and poetry
- Storytelling and narrative approaches
- Talking circles
- Performance projects
- Dance and movement
- Traditional rituals and ceremonies
- Meditation, prayer and other spiritual elements
- Use of traditional language



# What is Healing?

- Restoring cultural norms and repairing the social fabric
- Repetitive learning and actions
- Positive social connections and loving relationships
- Healing has foundational concept of “renewal” not recovery
- Social nurturing, cultural reclamation and spiritual maintenance
- Give meaning to experiences of the past, the thoughts and the actions.
- Help make sense of the immediate reactions.
- Reconnect to identities which are hopeful.
- Not just the physical well-being of the individual but the social, emotional, and cultural well-being of the whole community. This is a whole-of-life view and it also includes the cyclical concept of life–death–life.

# Healing in practice

- Promoting safety
- Ensuring cultural safety
- Finding and telling the stories
- Making sense of the stories
- Feeling the feelings
- Moving through the layers of loss and grief, to acceptance
- Reclaiming cultural and spiritual identities

# Reinstating Ceremony

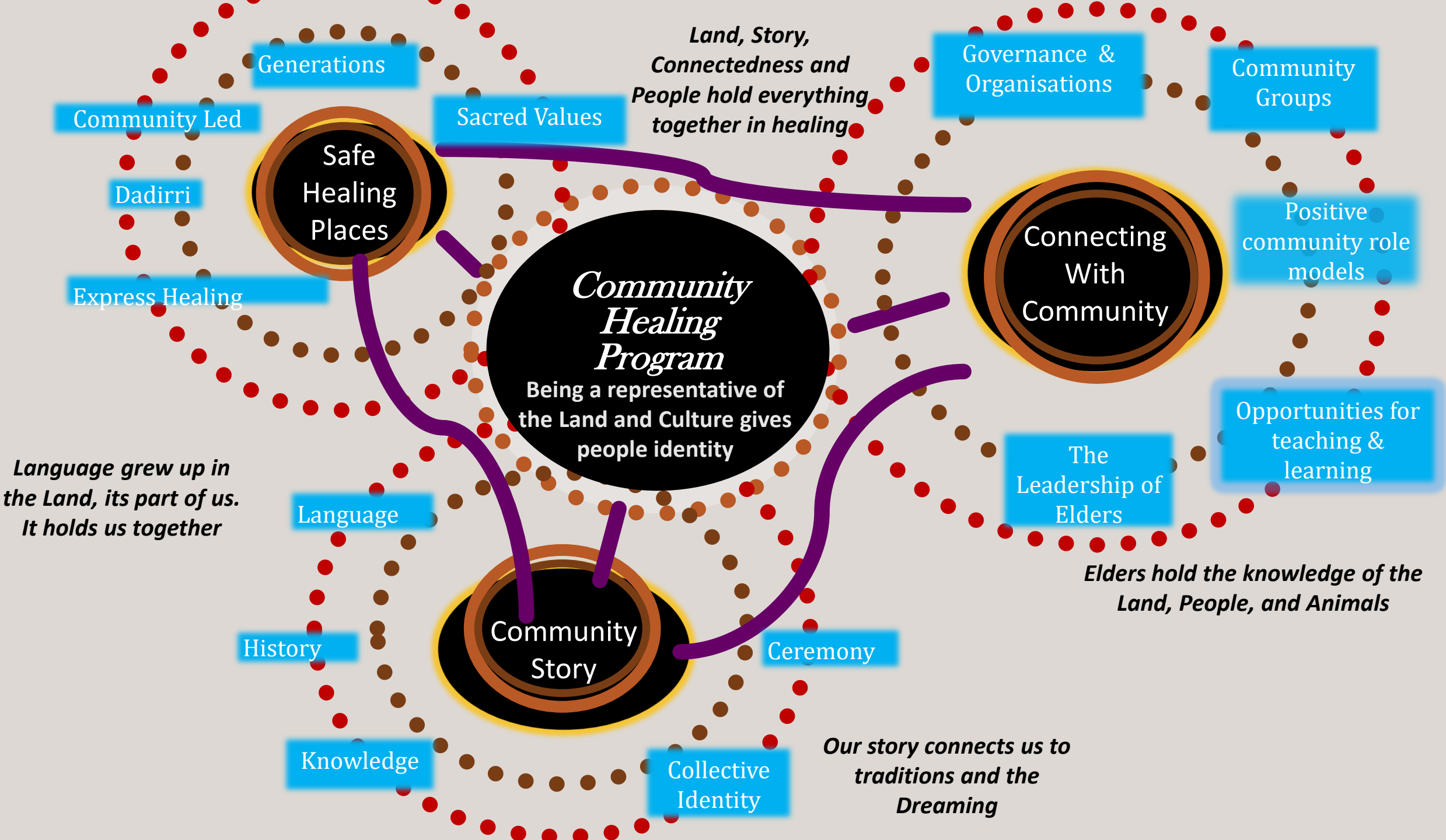
- **Preparation**
- **Ceremonial Activity**

In ceremony we celebrate the awareness of our lives as sacred

- **Closure**

Preparing to carry what we have learnt and put it into practice







## Men's kinship

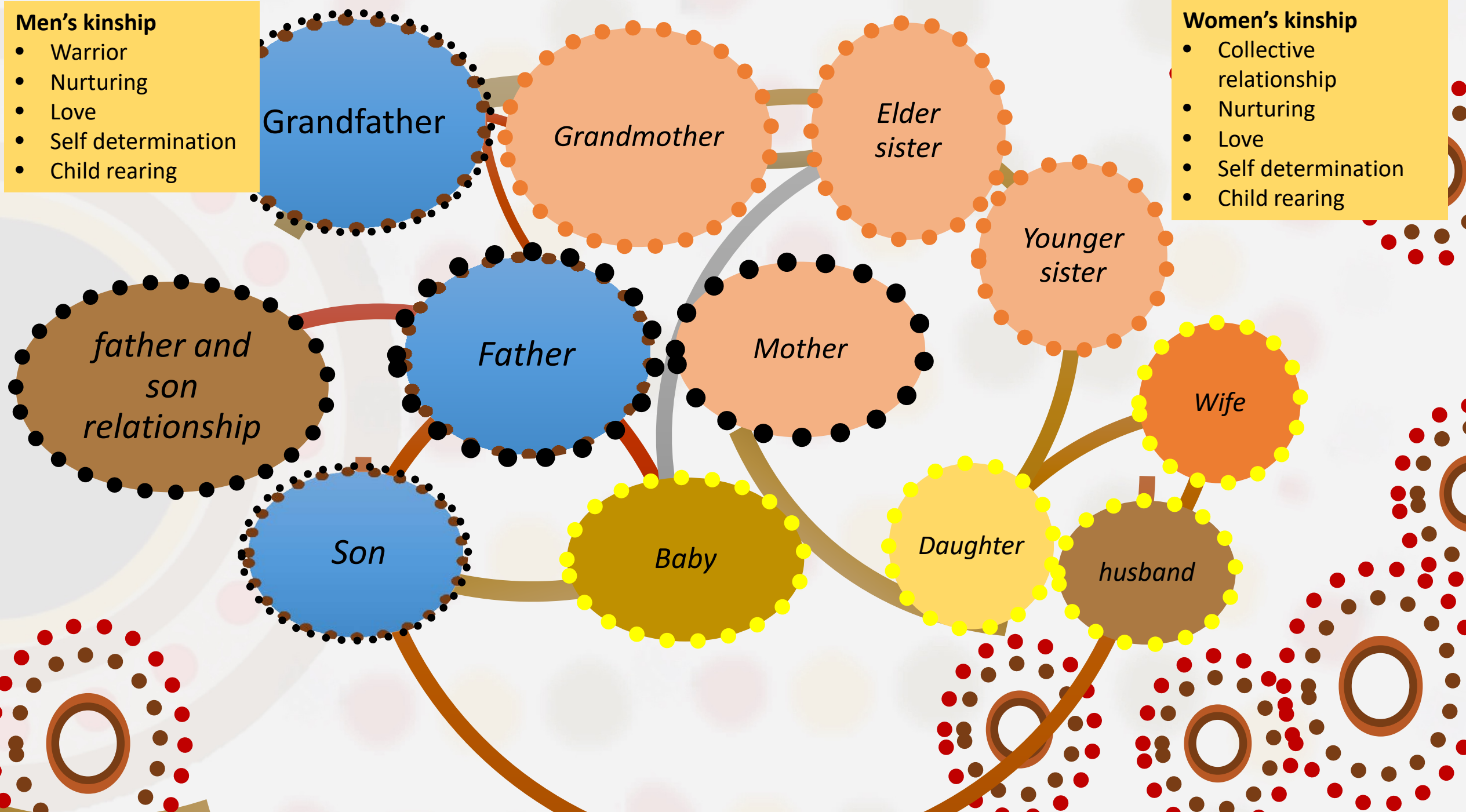
- Warrior
- Nurturing
- Love
- Self determination
- Child rearing

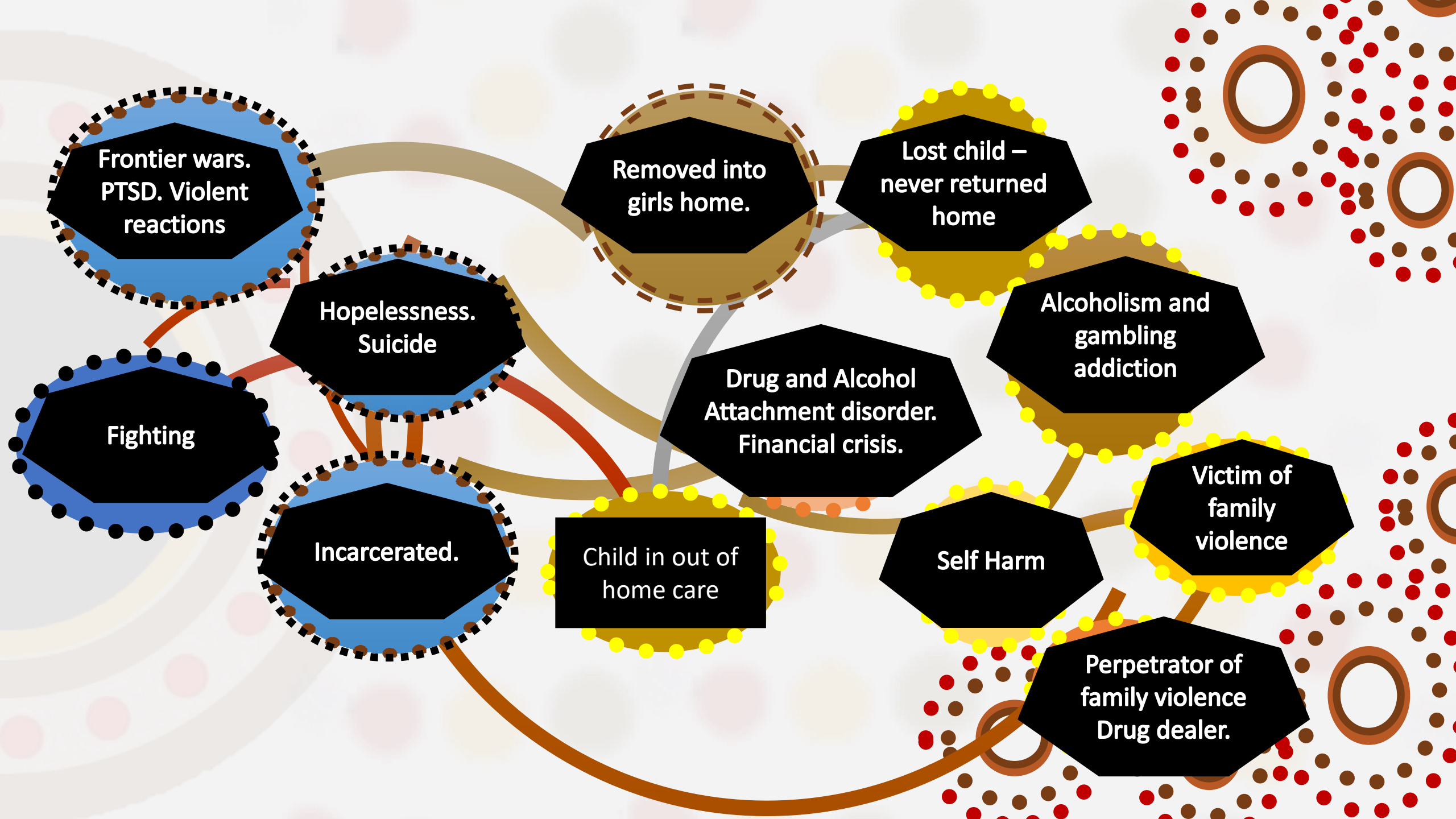
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## Women's kinship

- Collective relationship
- Nurturing
- Love
- Self determination
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- ## Women's kinship
- Collective relationship
  - Nurturing
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