From systemic learned-helplessness to communal presence:

## the learnings from Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) Interventions

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Part 1: NVR and Systemic Empowerment

Systemic approach

▪ Addresses problematic relationships, rather than people as problems.

▪ Strives to alleviate people's problems, by healing problematic relationships.

▪ Sees communities and institutions as stakeholders in problematic relationships and in their resolution

▪ Forms part of larger alliances and movements of practice

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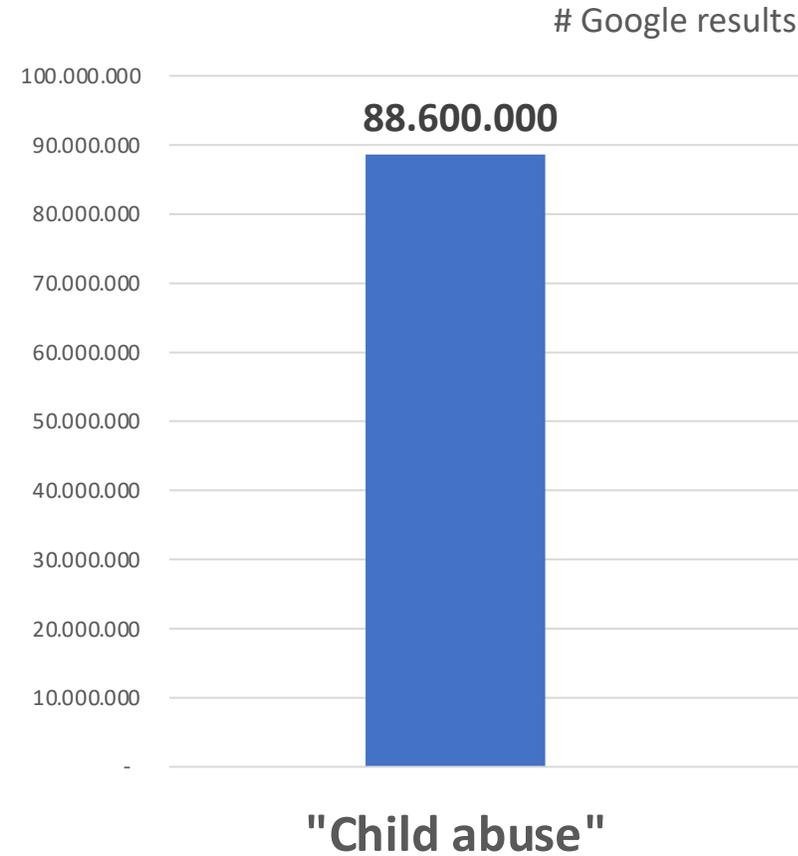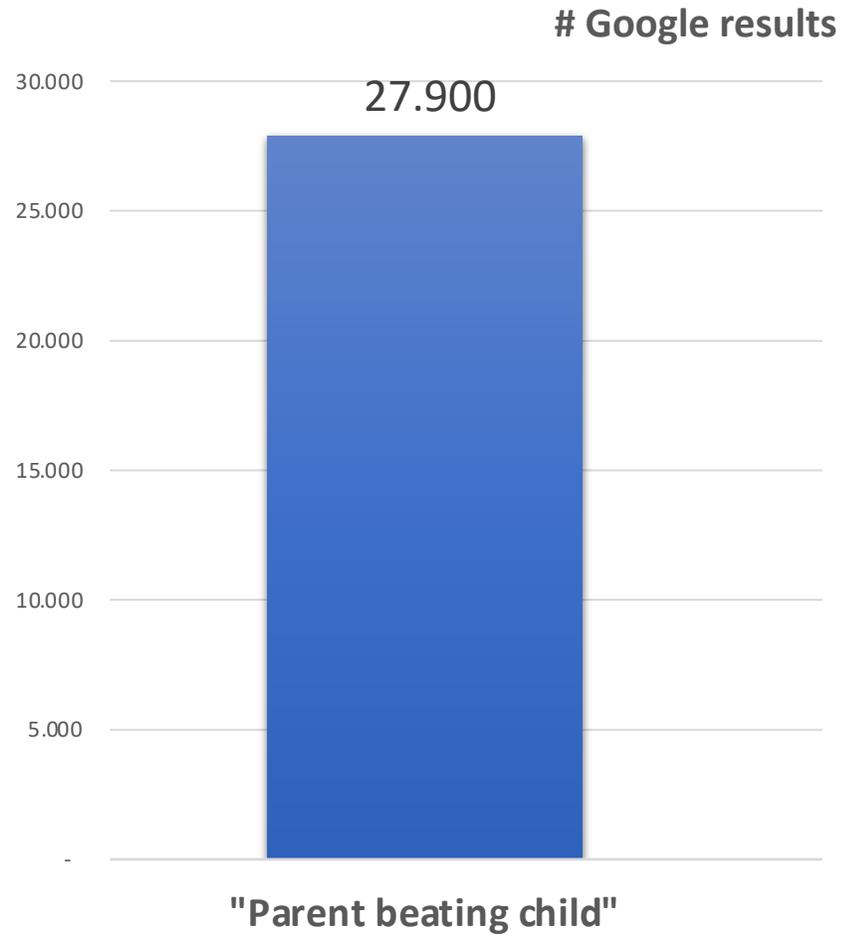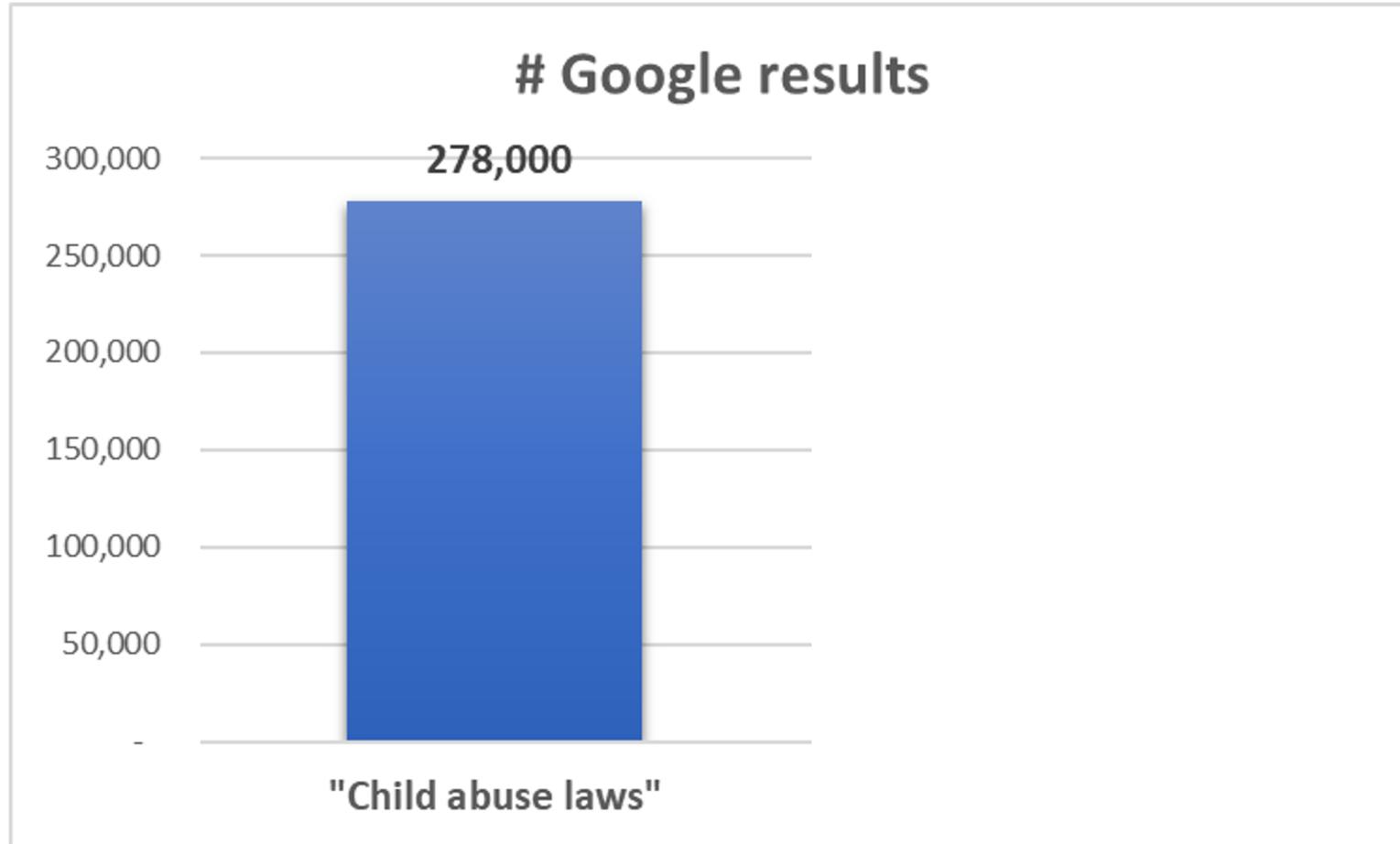
Tampa Bay Times

December 26, 2,000

A month later, the charges were dropped, but Steven, a self-employed insurance salesman, and Debbi have vowed to fight for change.

Early next year, they will launch a media blitz expected to take them on national television as they fight for parent abuse laws and increased facilities and services for troubled children.
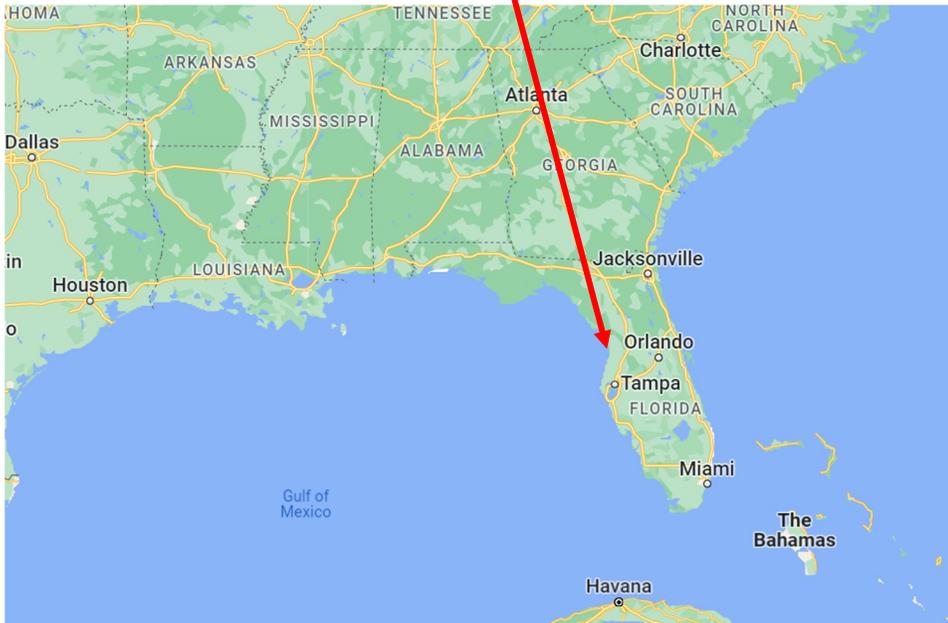
From systemic learned-helplessness to communal presence: the lessons from Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) Interventions

May 7, 2,000

Millers Bayou,
Port Richie, Florida

Neglecting or protecting?

By **CHRISTOPHER GOFFARD**

Published May 7, 2000 | Updated Sep. 27, 2005

Police say a couple neglected their teenage son by locking him out of the house. The parents say they were trying to protect their other 16 kids.

The Ludwigs, who have given their lives to saving the wild ones and the damaged ones and the sick ones, have never been able to banish the devil in their 14-year-old boy.

Dozens of times in the past year and a half, Andrew Ludwig's parents have called police to say: Help us. We are afraid of our son.

In his hair-trigger rages, the parents say, Andrew would terrorize his brothers and sisters, flinging picture frames, punching holes in walls, flailing his fists and elbows. Once, he held a fish-boning blade to his sister's throat. Twice, he was arrested for shoving his mother.

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Neglecting or protecting?

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When Andrew was a young child, Debbi Ludwig remembers, she would hold him for hours, trying to calm him and heal him. "We spent the first year with him just loving him up," she says.

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"We listened to so many professionals, and nobody has any answers," says Steven Ludwig, 46. He says he has a separated rib and a blackened toe from trying to restrain his son.

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"We adopt these kids to give them a family, to give them a home, to love them," Steven Ludwig says. "We couldn't get through to Andrew. We're totally devastated that we couldn't reach him." An insurance salesman, he says he took a 75 percent pay cut last year to deal with his son.

Family trips stopped. More and more, Andrew was missing from the dinner table. Says Debbi Ludwig: "He stopped our life."

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By law, said Port Richey police Lt. Bill Sager, the arresting officer, a caregiver's responsibility is to provide shelter to a child. "The statute is pretty clear," Sager says, "not much wiggle room."

Bill Downs, chief of the agency, describes the Ludwigs as "decent, law-abiding, community-spirited people." But in this case, he adds, the law is the law.

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The Ludwigs, who have given their lives to saving the wild ones and the damaged ones and the sick ones, have never been able to banish the devil in their 14-year-old boy.

The child is stigmatised.

The diagnosis for Andrew, he says, has ranged from bipolar disorder to oppositional defiance disorder to the term that tells them what they already know, "uncontrollable anger."

The behavior is pathologized.

It was his parents, Steven and Debbi, charged with child neglect for refusing to let Andrew back in the house. A few of their 16 other children _ all but one adopted _ were there to watch the squad car take them away.
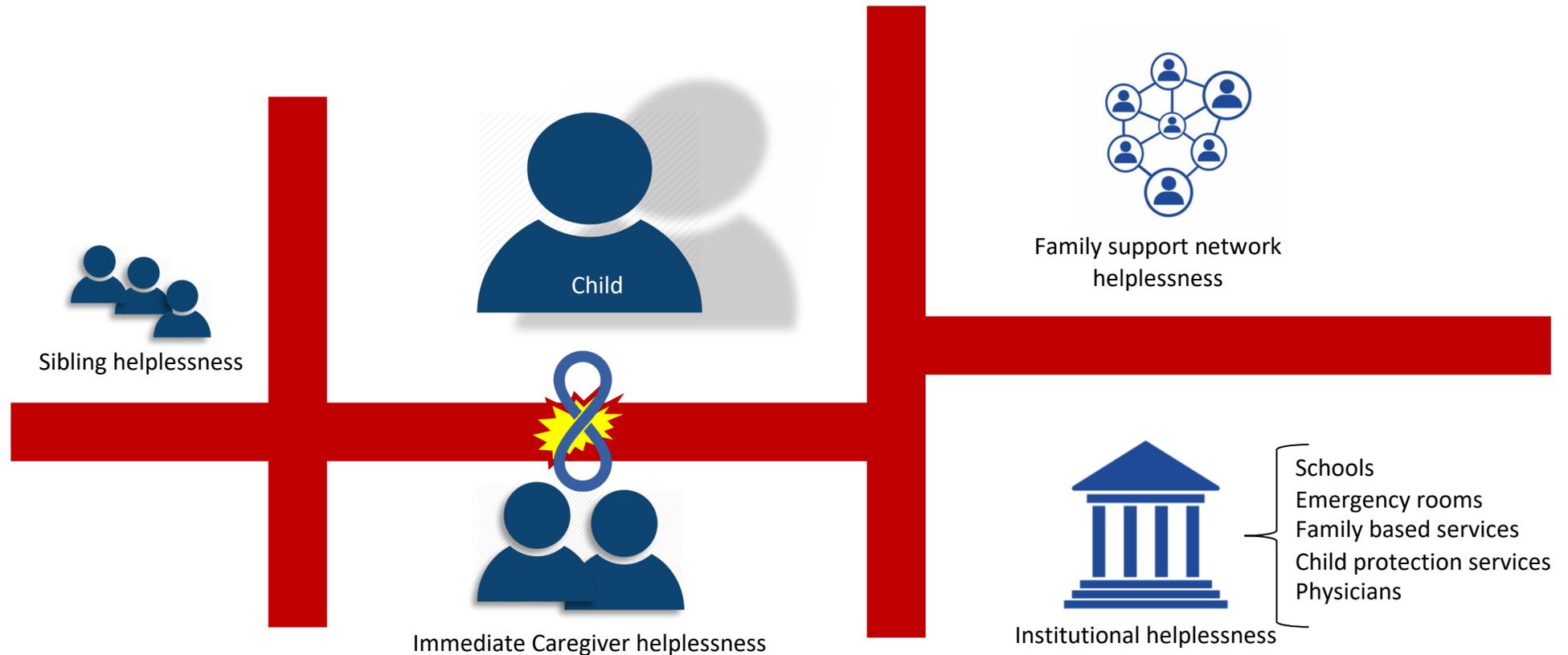
The parents are blamed.

From systemic learned-helplessness to communal presence: the lessons from Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) Interventions

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Systemic learned-helplesness

The child is stigmatised.

The behavior is pathologized.

The parents are blamed.

From systemic learned-helplessness to communal presence: the lessons from Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) Interventions

``Systemic Learned Helplessness``

Child

Sibling helplessness

Family support network helplessness

Immediate Caregiver helplessness

Institutional helplessness

Schools
Emergency rooms
Family based services
Child protection services
Physicians

From systemic learned-helplessness to communal presence: the lessons from Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) Interventions

Naming the problem: two approaches

Child-to-Parent Violence-and-Abuse

(CPVA)

Aggression toward Family / Caregivers in Childhood & Adolescence

(AFCCA)

2007 -

2022

The AFCCA Vision

"Aggression toward Family / Caregivers in Childhood & Adolescence "

(AFCCA)

![Center for NVR therapy & practice]

National Consortium on Aggression toward Family / Caregivers in Childhood & Adolescence (AFCCA)

Building Understanding to Improve Outcomes for Families
The Consortium sought to bring together a national conversation on AFCCA, with membership including individuals from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick.
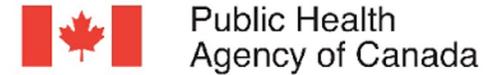
Voice of Families	Voice of Academics	Voice of Practice	Voice of Social Systems	Voice of Policy

With the voices of **100+** parents, caregivers, young adults, first voice advocates with lived experience

Aggression toward Family/Caregivers in Childhood & Adolescence (AFCCA)

Aggression toward Family / Caregivers in Childhood & Adolescence (AFCCA) describes a pattern of behaviour in childhood or adolescence, characterized by aggressive behaviour by a child or adolescent toward family members or other caregivers. This causes significant harm (physical and/or psychological) to the child / adolescent, the person(s) the behaviour is directed toward, and other witnessing family members.

AFCCA is most often directed to parents, primary caregivers, and siblings in the home, but can also be directed toward other caregivers in other settings. The behaviour commonly becomes entrenched and escalates over time.

Language Matters

"…A name and/or language that enables families to succinctly ask for help while conveying the severity of their situation, while also enabling social systems and practitioners to recognize the situation and identify optimal supports for the individual and family…"

☐ **It should honour lived experience;**

☐ **It should not stigmatize or pathologize;**

☐ **It should be meaningful to the systems / professionals necessary for support.**

Aggression toward Family/Caregivers in Childhood & Adolescence

What is happening

Who is it directed towards

Developmental stage

Young adults with lived AFCCA experiences want you to know:

They want to be seen, heard, and respected in conversations about AFCCA.

There is a deep need for genuine connection and community.

Behaviour is a form of communication.

AFCCA may be a "normal" pattern of behaviour that can be expected.

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Parents & caregivers with lived AFCCA experiences want you to know:

There is immense shame, blame, and stigma experienced by all family members.

Families are living with an unexpectedly high level and frequency of dangerous behaviour in their home.

Parents/caregivers want to remain at the center of care for their child/adolescent.

AFCCA is experienced by both adoptive and biological families.

Families are having to fight to remain together.

Extensive roadblocks and barriers are preventing access to the help so desperately needed.

The impacts are felt by the entire family unit, and extend to communities and society

Impacts to the child/adolescent:

- Escalating mental health issues
- Diminishing self-esteem and self-worth
- Damaged family relationships
- Barriers to belonging / community
- Dysregulation in other social / community settings
- Criminalization of the child / adolescent
- Depiction as a violent perpetrator
- Entry / re-entry into the child protection system
- Placement instability for children in care, or post-adoption
- Risk of entrenched behaviour into adulthood

Impacts to parents, caregivers and siblings:

- Physical and/or psychological injury / risk
- Escalating mental health issues
- Secondary trauma from exposure to violence in the home
- Damaged family relationships (family unit)
- Isolation of/from family members, suffering shame/blame
- Increased risk of separation/ divorce
- Investigation by child protection services
- Placement instability for other siblings in the home
- Loss of employment (at-home care requirements)
- Financial strain on families

Society

Child/ Adolescent

Community

Siblings

Parents & Caregivers

With content from the National Consortium on Aggression toward Family / Caregivers in Childhood & Adolescence (AFCCA)

Families have a broad view of desired successful outcomes:

> "Can you teach us to walk in the storm, instead of working to avoid it?"
>
> —B.*; Family advocate, parent with lived experience

92% improved self-regulation for child/adolescent

88% reduction in violent, aggressive, or dangerous behaviourers

78% improved parent/child relationships

72% creating healthier methods of communication

70% improved sibling relationships

70% enhanced safety for other caregivers in the home

68% enhanced safety for other children in the home

66% reduced risk of family disruption / separation

62% enhanced safety for the child/ adolescent themselves

58% increased parent / caregiver understanding and capacity

56% improved attachment with primary parent / caregiver

Full data and descriptions are available from www.afcca-apfea.ca

With content from the National Consortium on Aggression toward Family / Caregivers in Childhood & Adolescence (AFCCA)
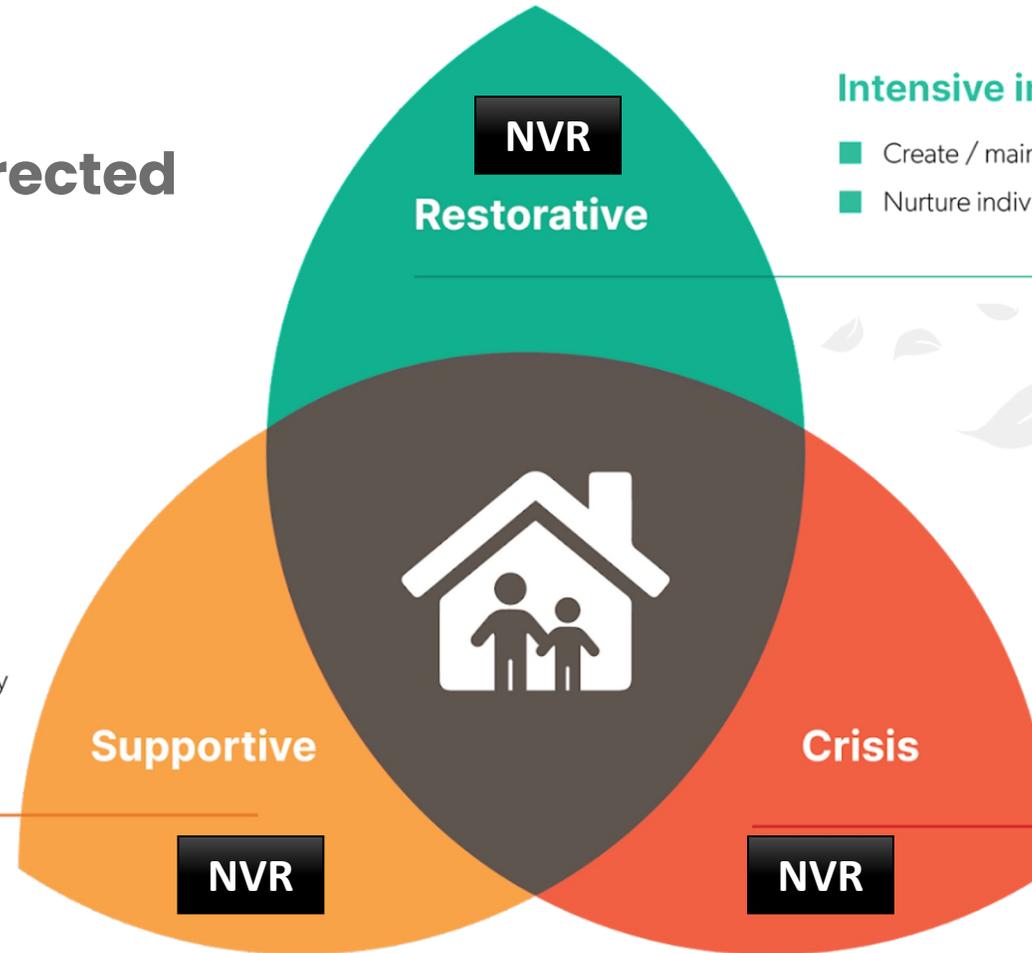
To learn more:

www.afcca-apfea.ca

AFCCA & other forms of domestic violence?

NonViolent Resistance (NVR)

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Tampa Bay Times

Neglecting or protecting?

By CHRISTOPHER GOFFARD

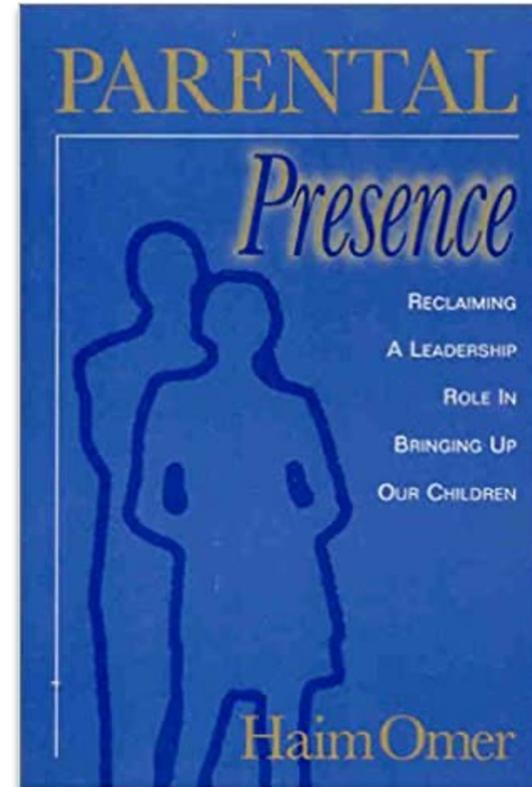Published May 7, 2000 | Updated Sep. 27, 2005

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2000

PARENTAL Presence

RECLAIMING A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN BRINGING UP OUR CHILDREN

Haim Omer

1999

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"Parental collapse" – The *opposite* of presence
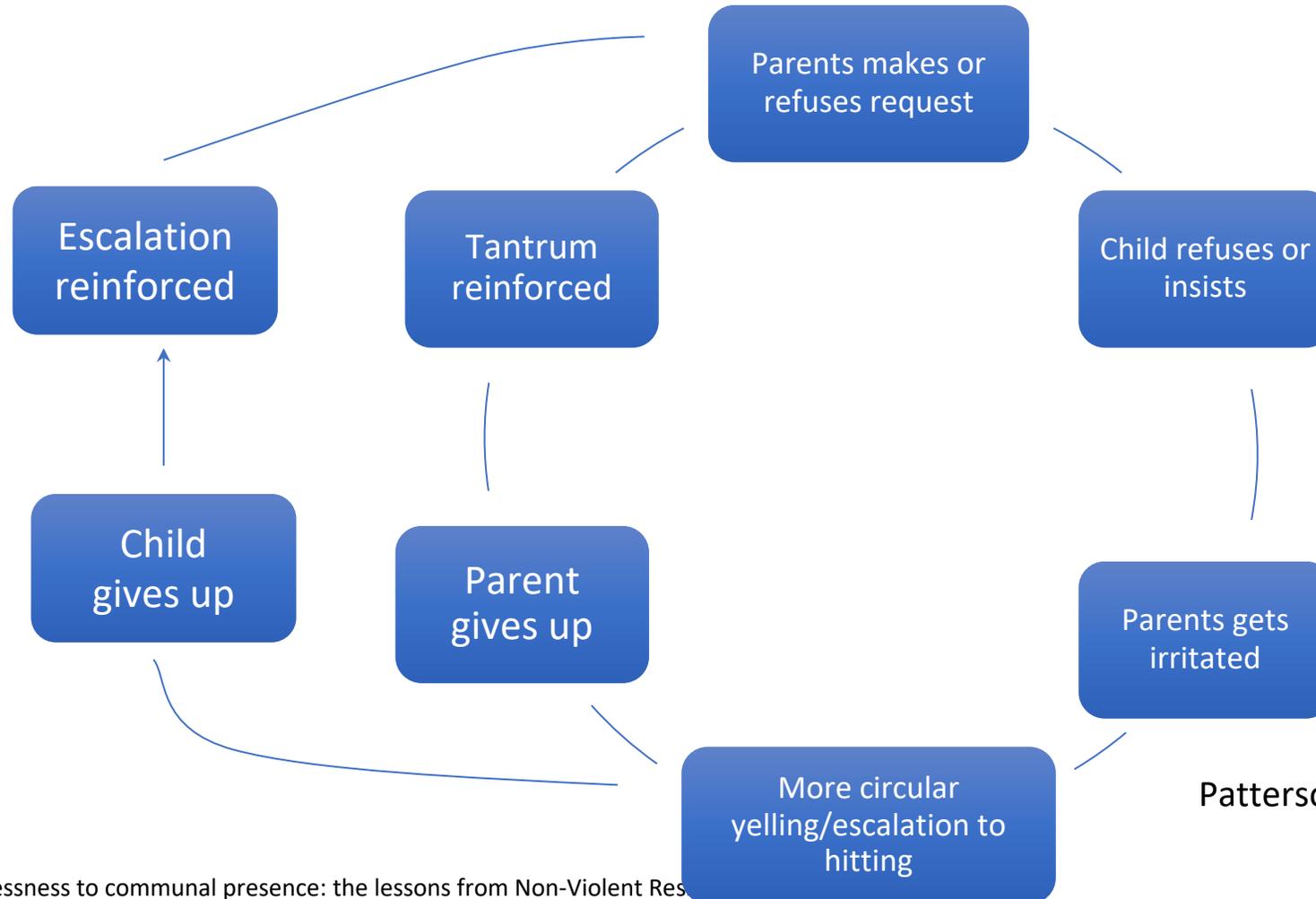
Haim Omer's initial problem definition

"When a parent "collapses", becomes paralyzed, or loses his or her personal voice. It is when giving in becomes the norm"

AKA **Caregiver Erasure***.*

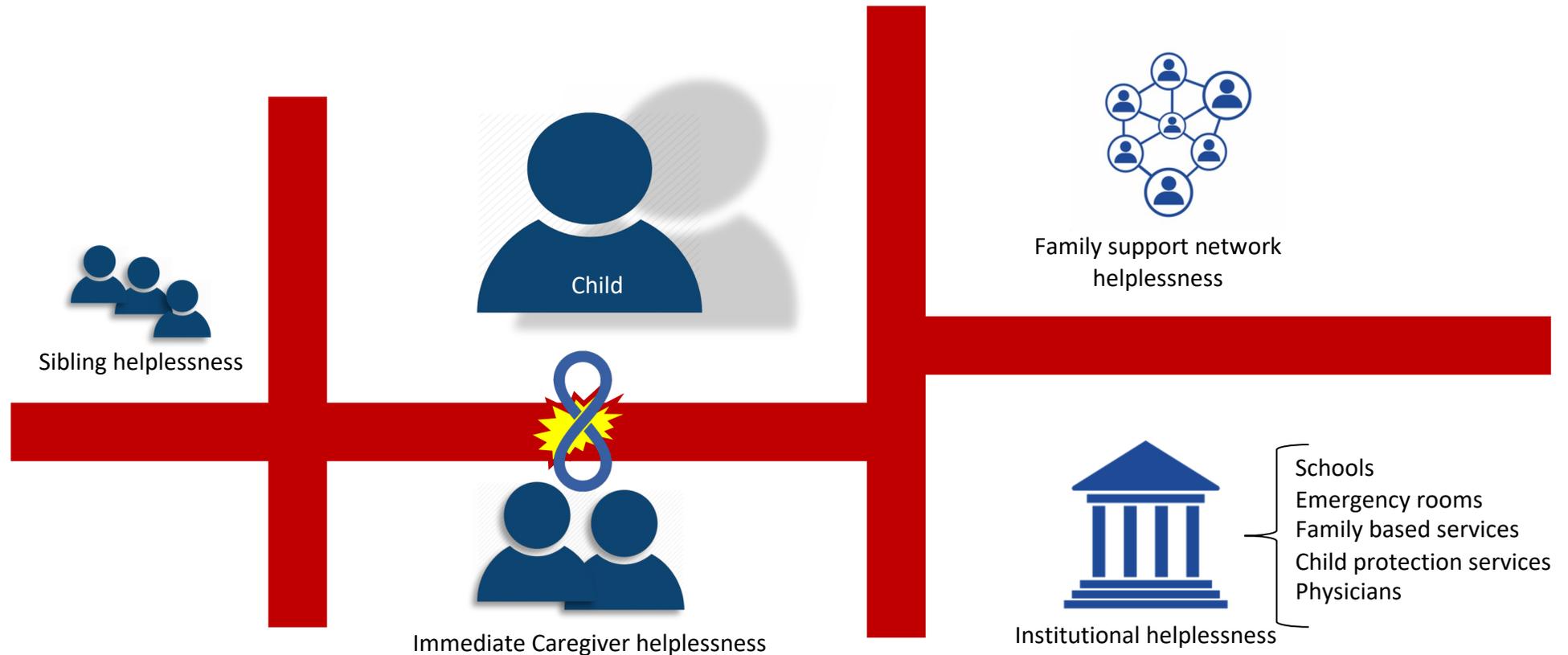*More than a set of behaviors, it is a state of mind*

How parents collapse?
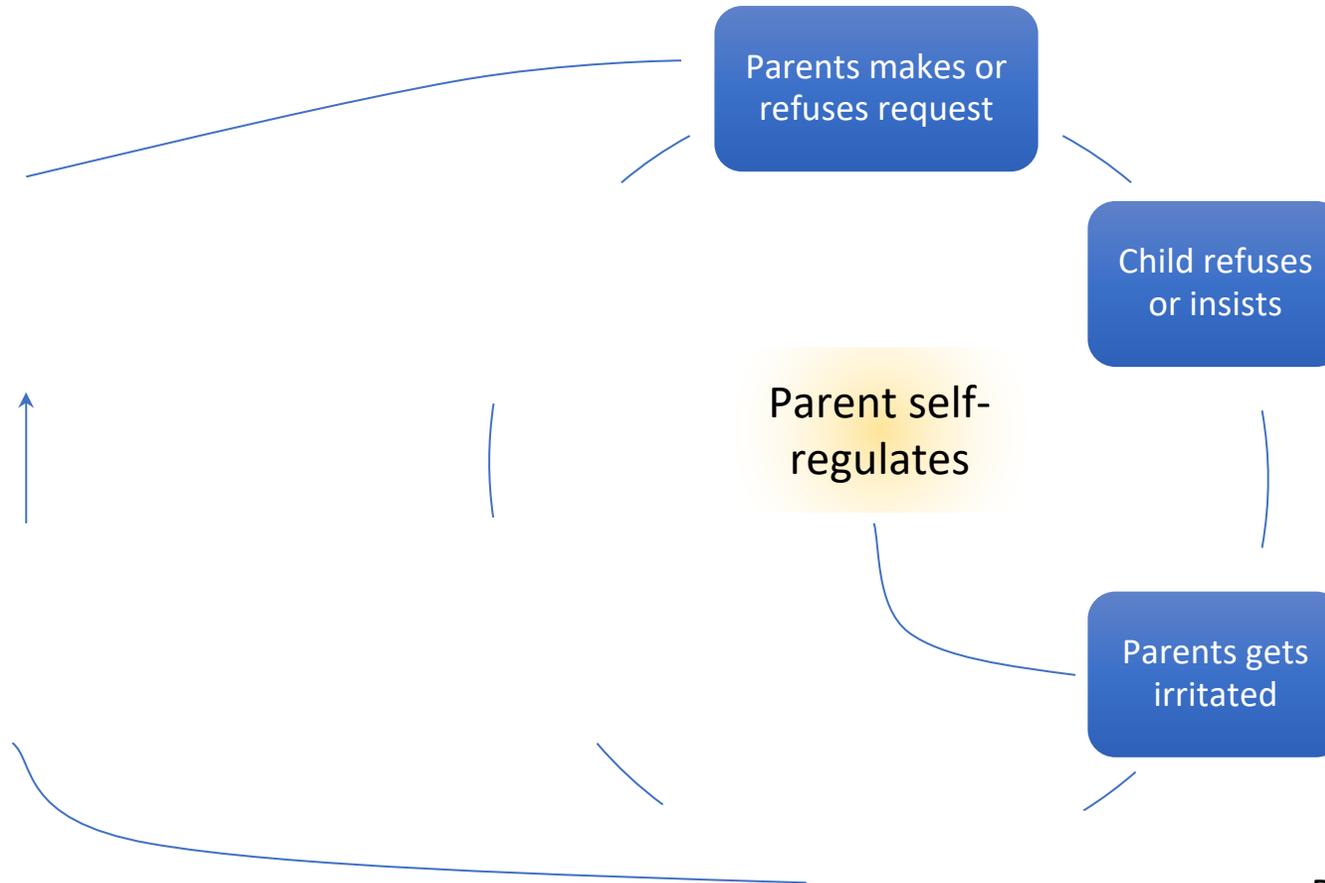
The interpersonal cycle of coercion

Parents makes or refuses request

Child refuses or insists

Parents gets irritated

More circular yelling/escalation to hitting

Parent gives up

Child gives up

Tantrum reinforced

Escalation reinforced

Patterson, Dishion, & Bank (1984).

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32

When parents collapse, systems of care collapse

Child

Family support network helplessness

Sibling helplessness

Immediate Caregiver helplessness

Institutional helplessness

Schools
Emergency rooms
Family based services
Child protection services
Physicians

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The opposite of collapse

Parents makes or refuses request

Child refuses or insists

Parent self-regulates

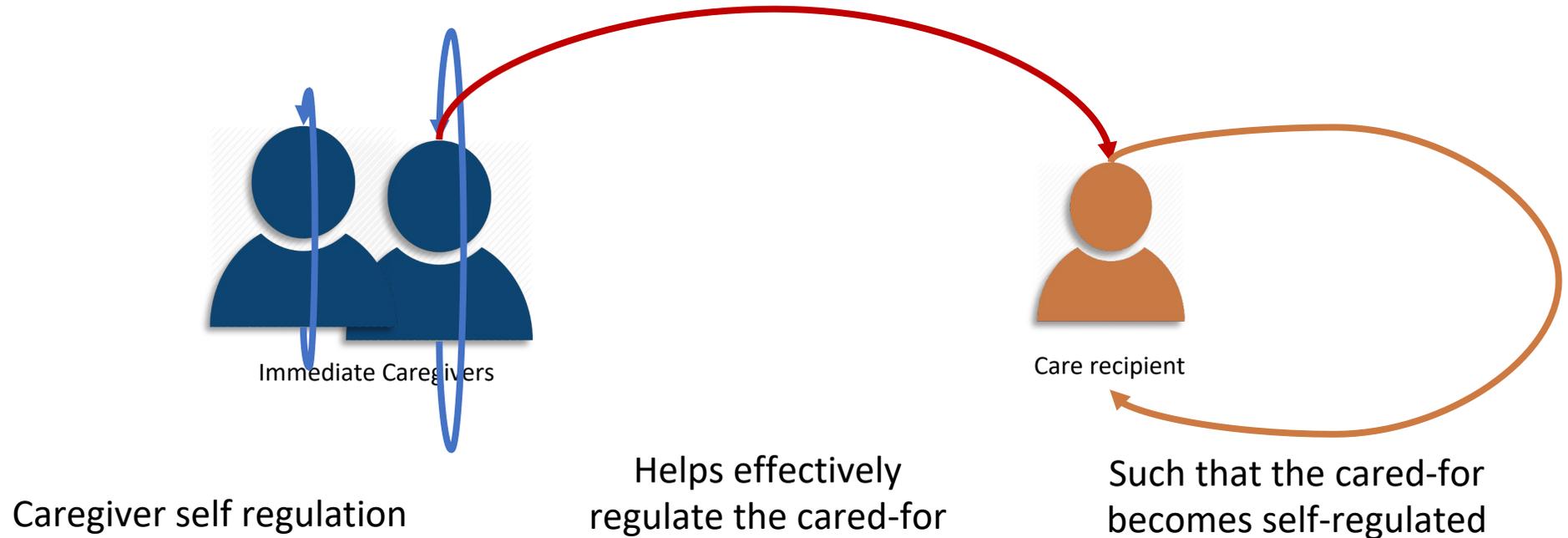Parents gets irritated

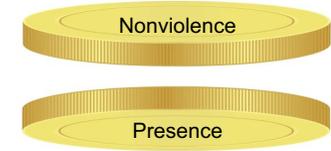Patterson, Dishion, & Bank (1984).

Presence: self regulation *is* the boundary

‘Presence’ is the ability to self regulate as a caregiver in a way which enables me to set effective rules for those I care for, such that they might ultimately become self-regulated.

“Presence is the readiness of parents to **set themselves as** <mark>boundaries</mark> to the child’s behavior, and the concurrent experience of this parental readiness by the child.”
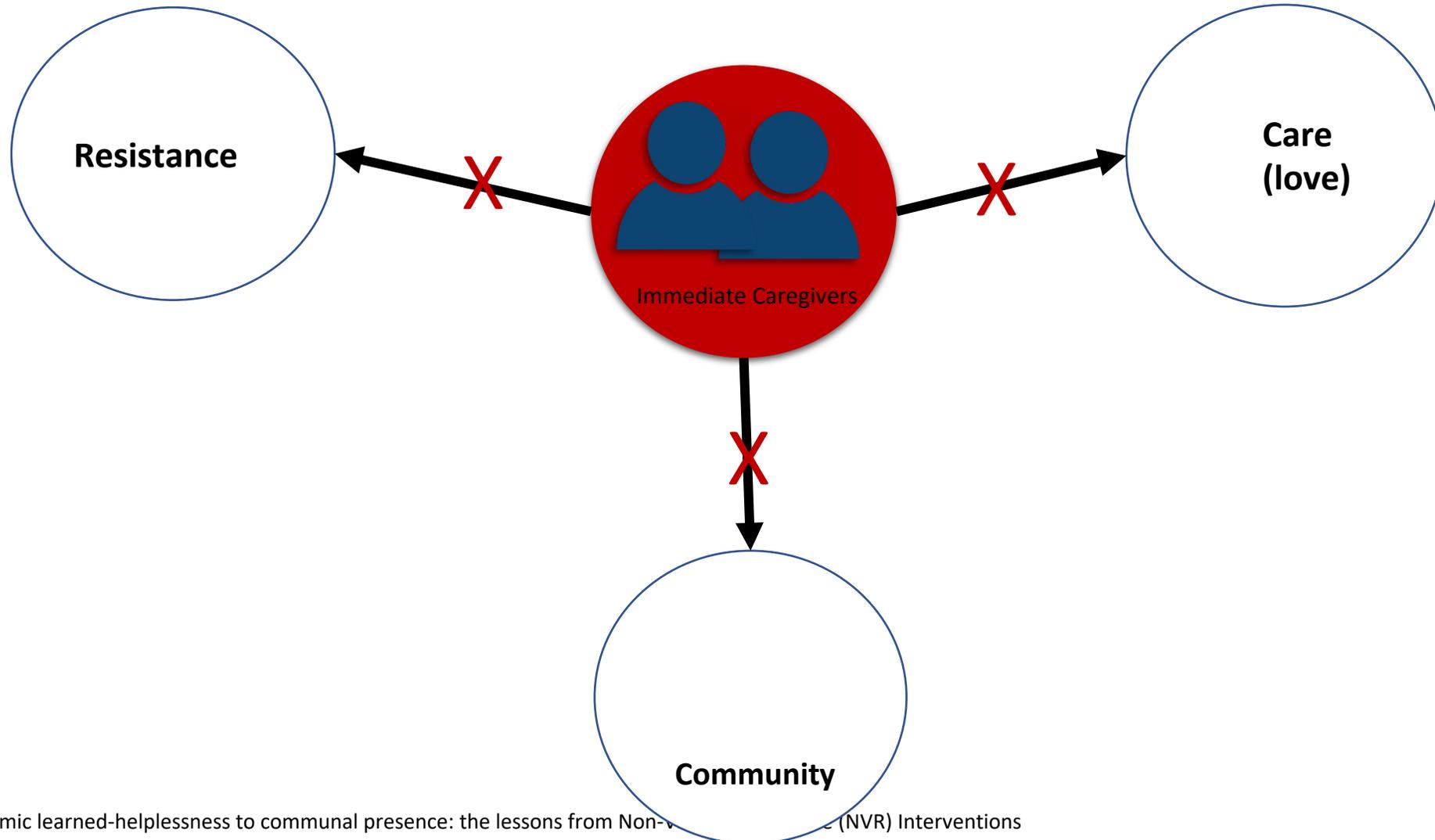
(Omer, 2003).

Presence as a relational process

Nonviolence

Presence

Immediate Caregivers

Care recipient

Caregiver self regulation

Helps effectively regulate the cared-for

Such that the cared-for becomes self-regulated

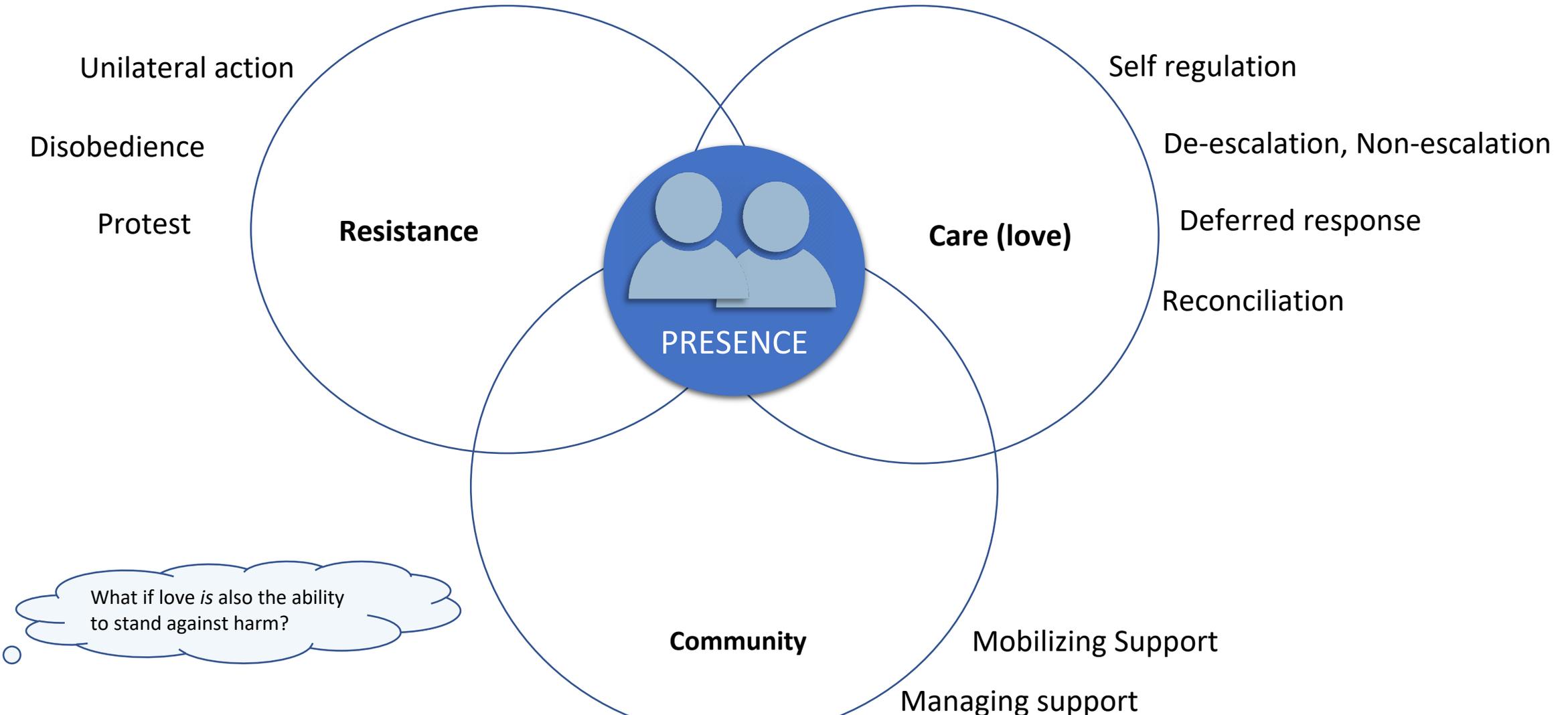# Caring presence must be NonViolently resistant

Nonviolence

"NonViolence is a movement to stand against harm

while preserving the dignity of all parties,
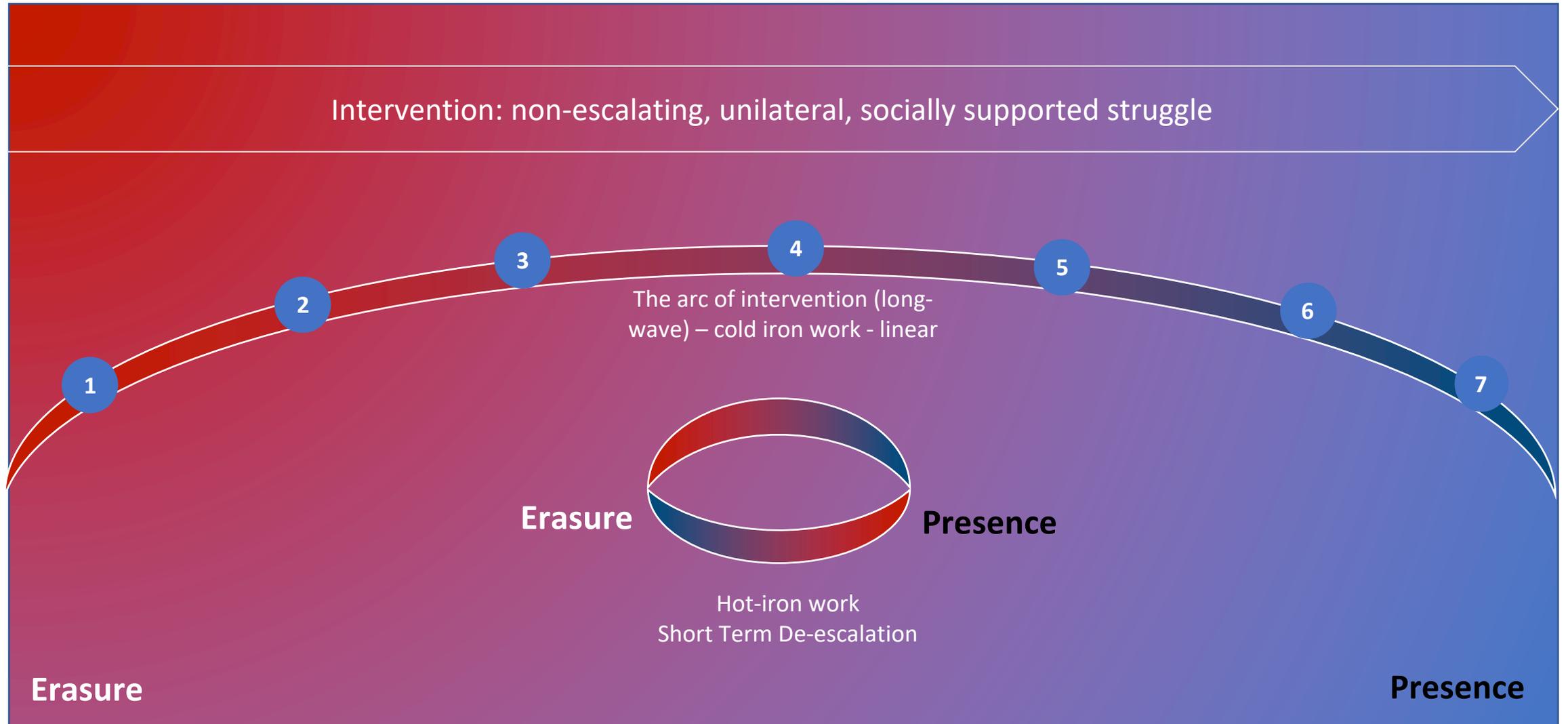
so that healing can take place".

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The benchmarks of Erasure

Resistance

Care (love)

Immediate Caregivers

Community

Presence: standing against harm, caringly, together

Unilateral action

Disobedience

Protest

Resistance

PRESENCE

Care (love)

Self regulation

De-escalation, Non-escalation

Deferred response

Reconciliation

What if love *is* also the ability to stand against harm?

Community
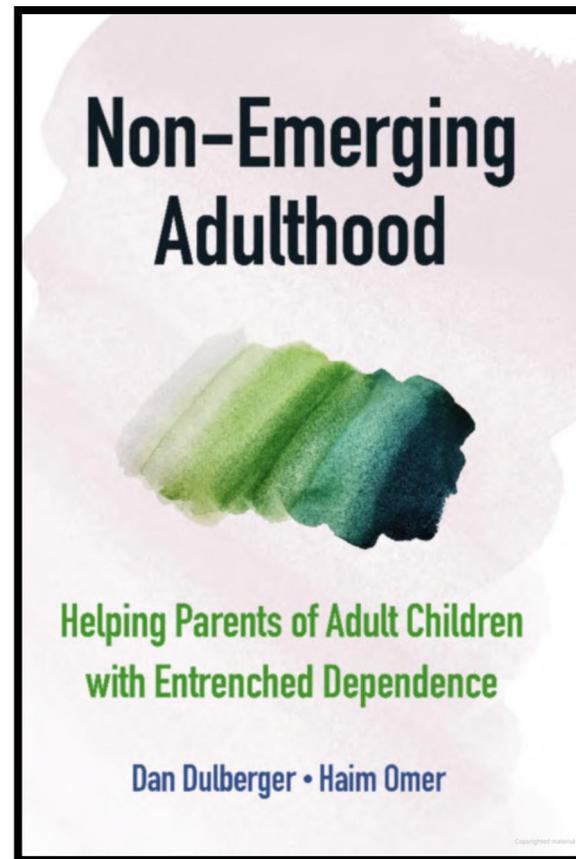
Mobilizing Support

Managing support

From systemic learned-helplessness to communal presence:

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Dan Dulberger RMFT-SM,
Center for NVR Therapy and Practice,
Calgary, AB, Canada

Part 2: NVR and Entrenched Dependence

NVR for families of non-emerging adult children

"The father's curse – the ungrateful son"

Jean Baptiste Greuze   – 1777

"The father's curse – the son punished"
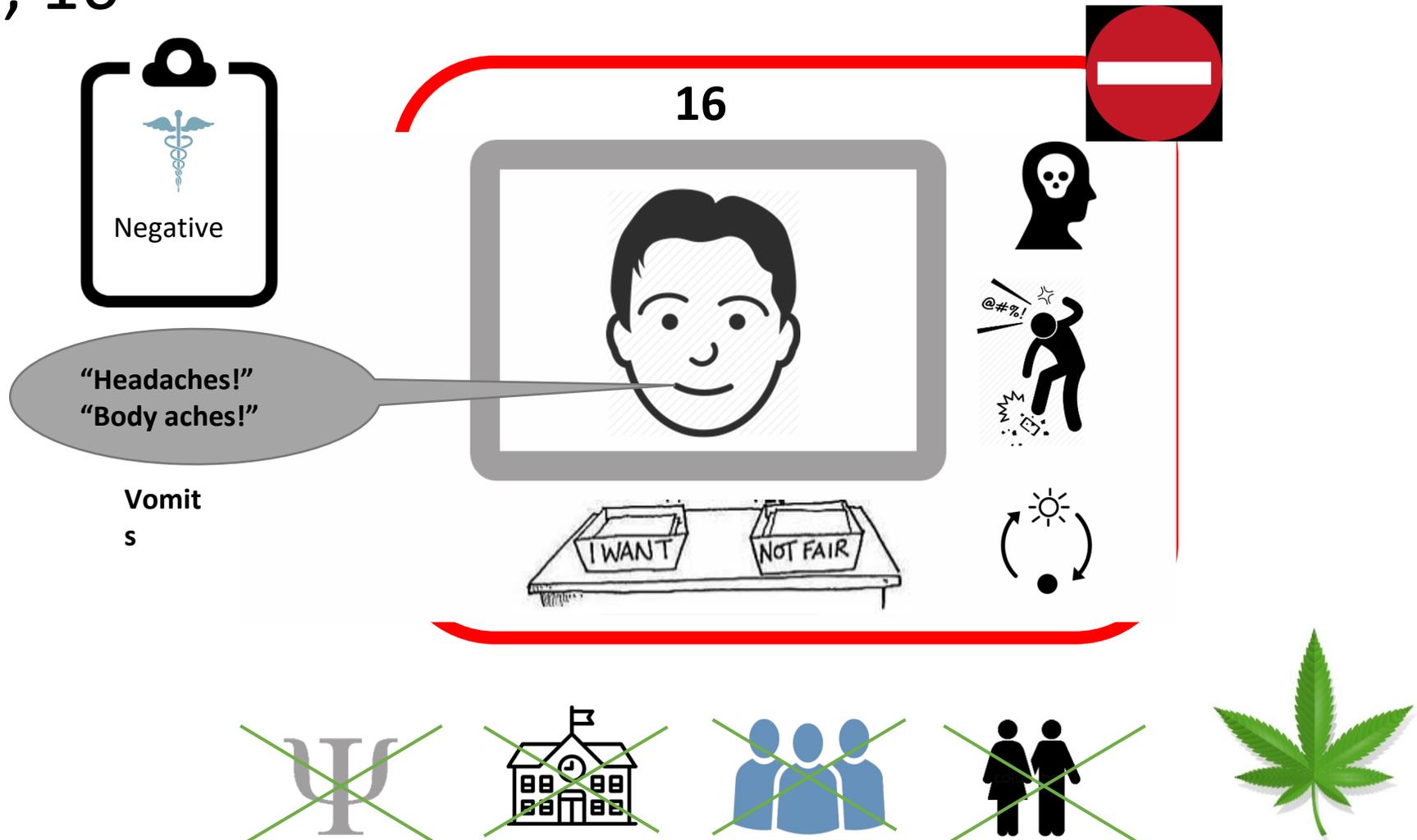
Jean Baptiste Greuze – 1777

"The Father Punished – 2023"

"The Father Punished – 2023"

Story of David

David, 16

Negative

"Headaches!"
"Body aches!"

Vomits

16

I WANT   NOT FAIR

Martin, 27

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Richard, 37

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David(s), Martin(s), Richard(s)…

16

27

37

This is a growing population.
How do we know?
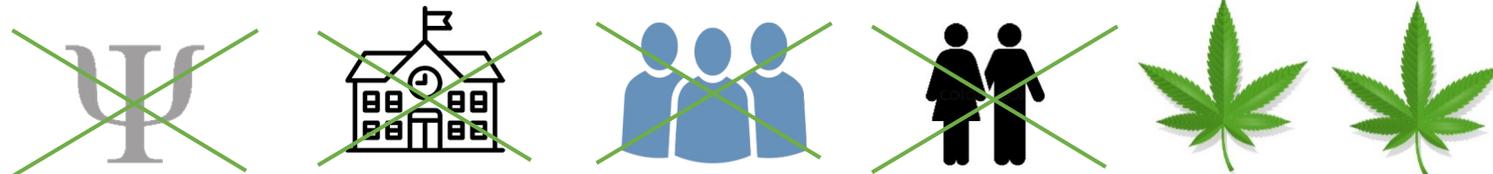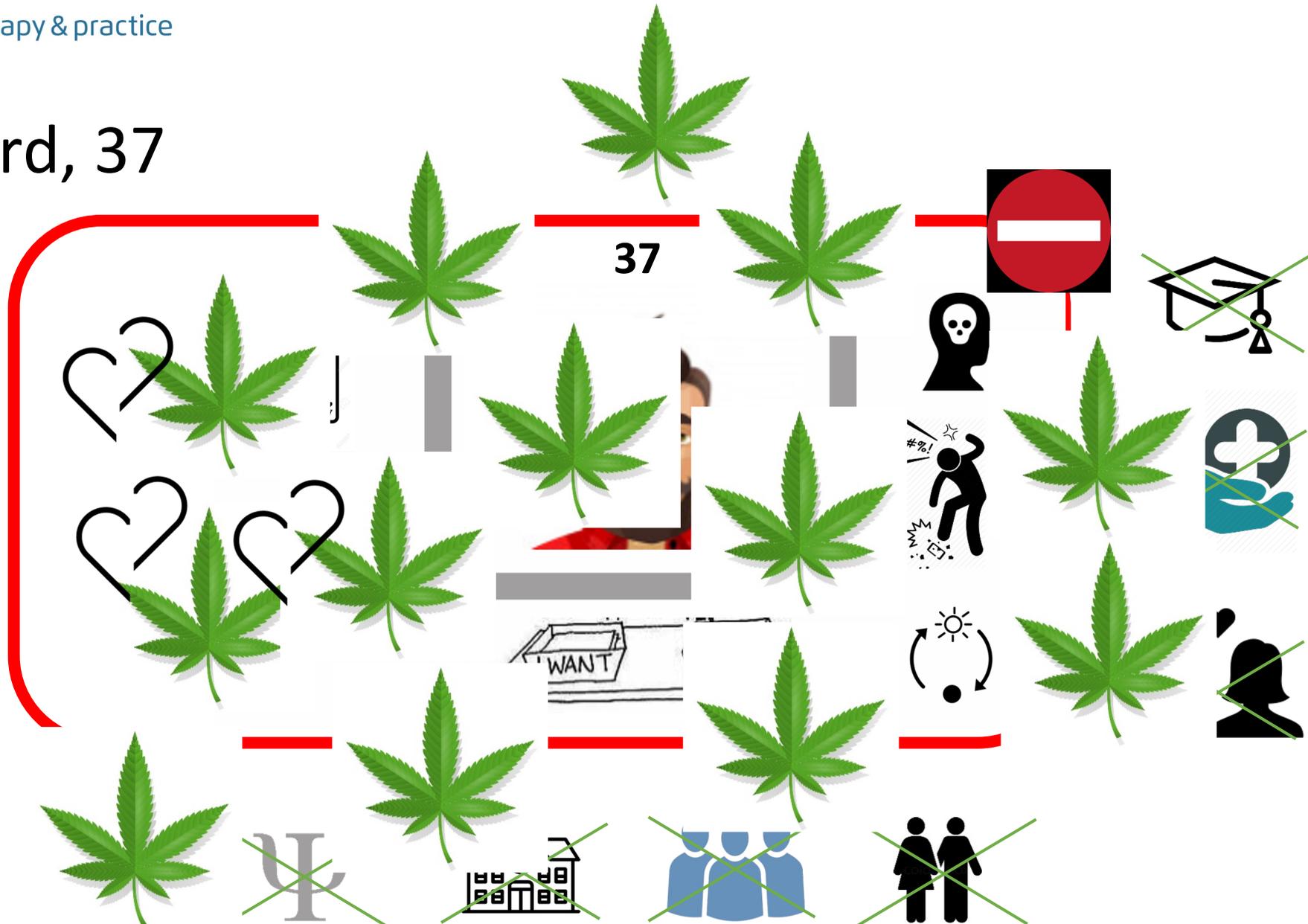
The six blind persons and the elephant
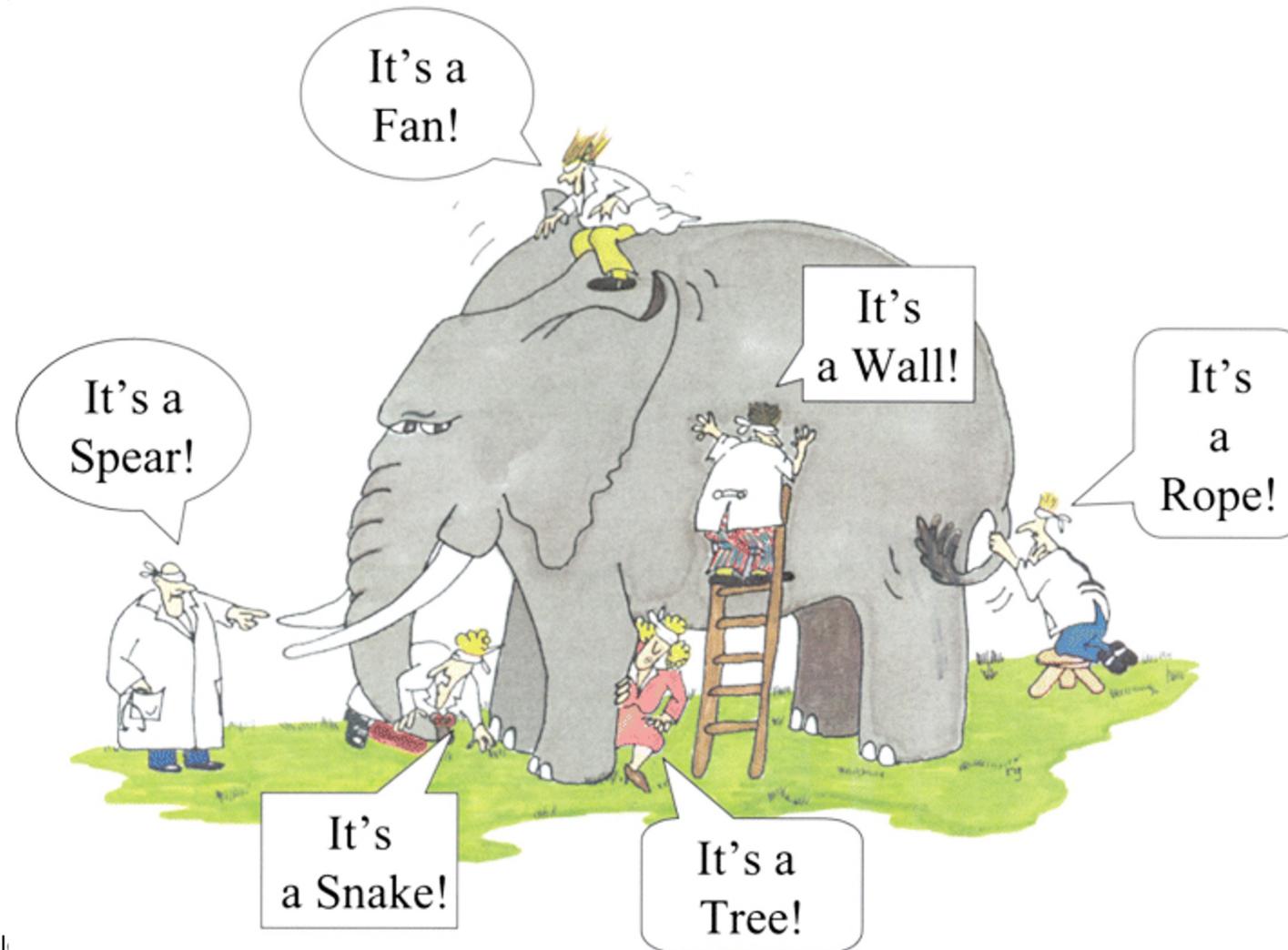
The elephant in the non-emerging adult's room
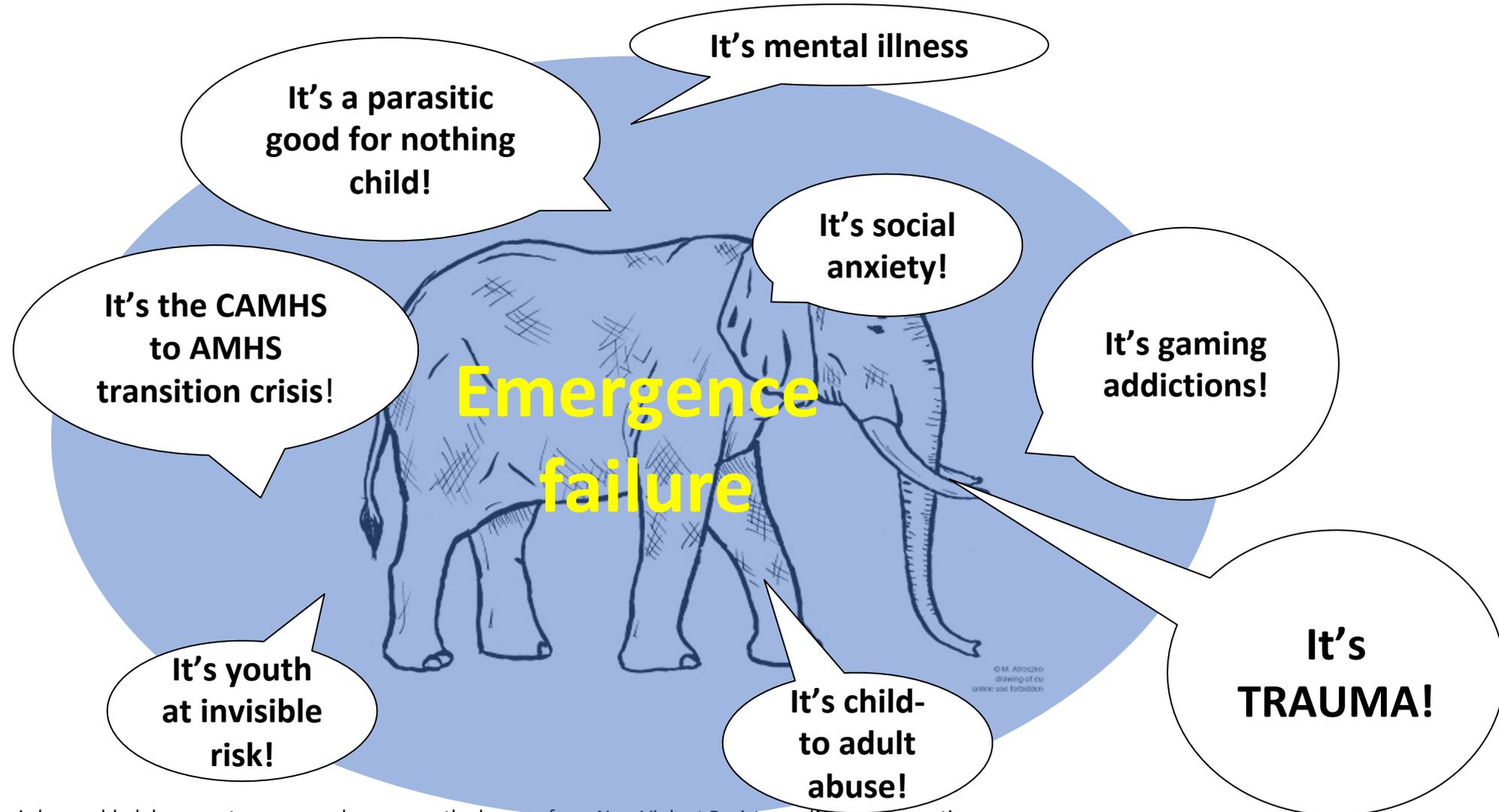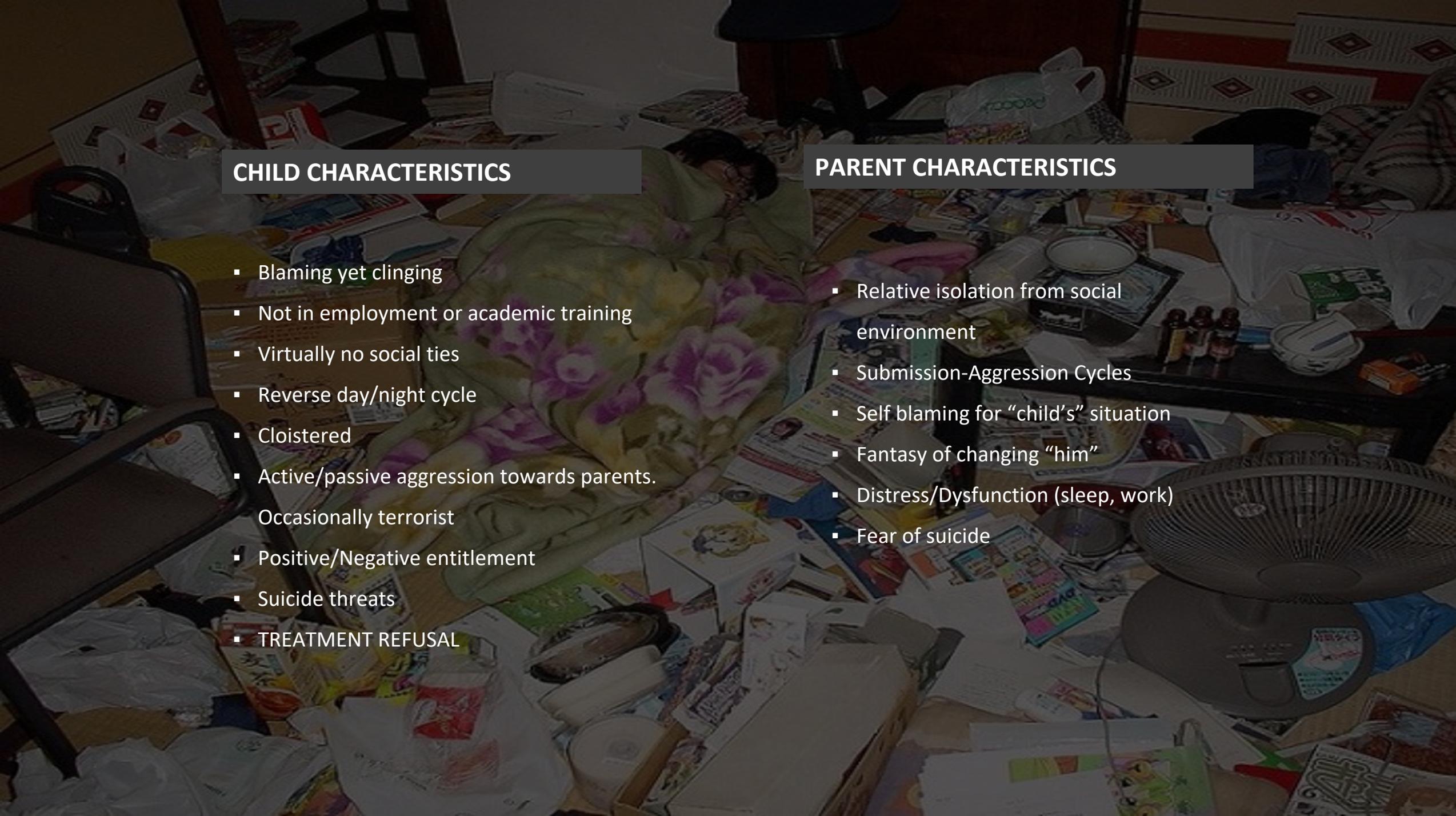
From systemic learned-helplessness to communal presence: the lessons from Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) interventions

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

- Blaming yet clinging
- Not in employment or academic training
- Virtually no social ties
- Reverse day/night cycle
- Cloistered
- Active/passive aggression towards parents. Occasionally terrorist
- Positive/Negative entitlement
- Suicide threats
- TREATMENT REFUSAL

PARENT CHARACTERISTICS

- Relative isolation from social environment
- Submission-Aggression Cycles
- Self blaming for "child's" situation
- Fantasy of changing "him"
- Distress/Dysfunction (sleep, work)
- Fear of suicide

Accommodation
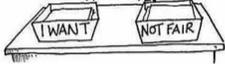
Dependent behavior
Explicit or implicit demands for money, goods or services
Demand for continuous reassurance
Aggression and victimization
Blaming
Use of parent as a go-between and moderator for communicating with the external world
Maintaining a paradoxical, "present yet alienated" attitude towards the parents: "I am here all the time but I will reduce contact to a minimum"

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The dependence-accommodation pattern

Dependent component   **Accommodative thought**

dependent thought   **accommodative thought**
"I'm unable to cook. Her job"   "he's unable to cook, my job"

IP

dependent behavior   **accommodative behavior**
Demands/rejects food   Prepares food to be rejected

dependent emotion   **accommodative emotion**
Blame, aggression   Guilt, submission

Family members

Symptoms
- chronic underweight
- social withdrawal
- violence

dependence-accommodation patterns converge into a *dependence accommodation system*

Dependence

Accommodation

Adult-child psychiatric symptoms
Self harm, aggression and violence

Parental wellness
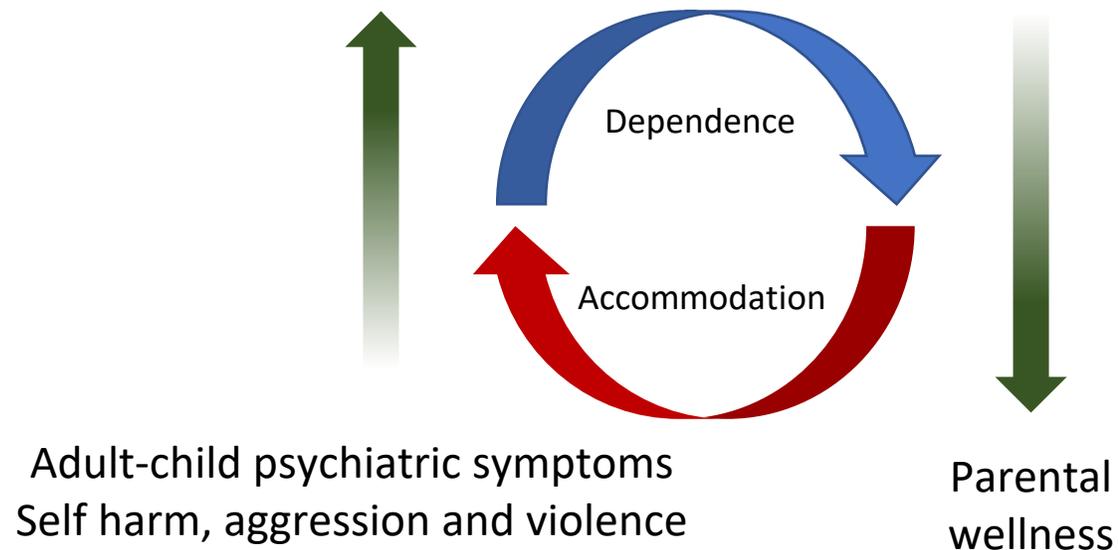
Entrenched (entitled) Dependence:

"chronic, systemic condition, **exhibiting a** *dependent-accommodative relationship pattern* **which involves** *dysfunction* **and/or** *distress* **on part of at least one system member."*

Accommodation

OCD
Borderline
ADHD
Learning Disabilities
...

IP — **Vicious Circle** *of Dysfunction & Distress* — Family member
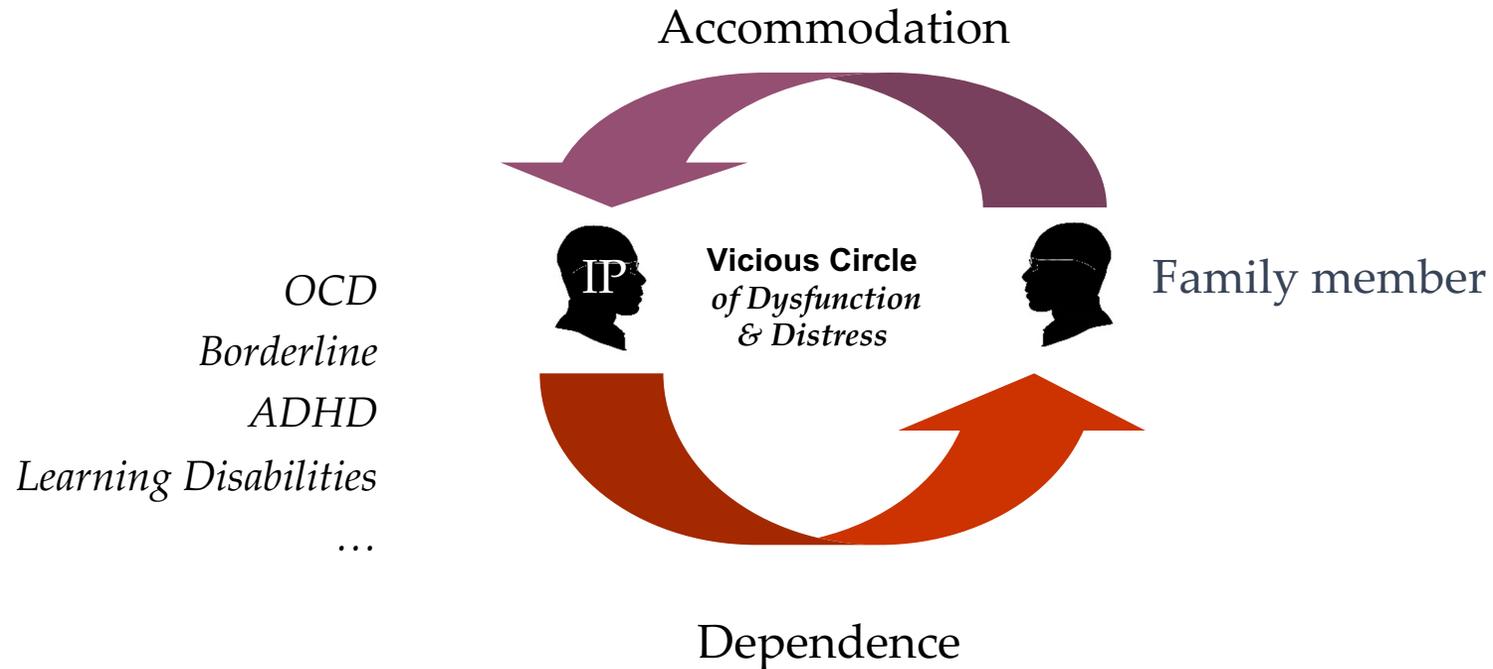
Dependence

Distinct from DPD
Distinct from simply living @ home W parents
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The dependence trap

Fear — Guilt
Parent side Triangle of accommodation
Pity

helplessness
Child Side Triangle of Dependence
Blame — Threat

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Helplesness

Fear

Guilt

Blame

Threat

Pity

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Entrenched -Dependent children are INVISIBLE

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"Degenerative shelter"

"Den of withdrawal"

"the degenerative shell of accommodation"

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From the
inside

From the outside:

From system

Deconstruct the shelter, not the child

- "Degenerative shell"
- Parents think they are outside the den - looking in.
- In fact they are the central part of it
- The greatest challenge is motivating them to stop being that part

De-constructing the degenerative shell
=

"De-accommodation"

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Shell layers

Services Layer

PIP Layer
Pathologizing Interpersonal Patterns

Social Layer
- Social beliefs
- Shame & Secrecy

Domicile layer

Existential layer

Taboos & Imperatives layers
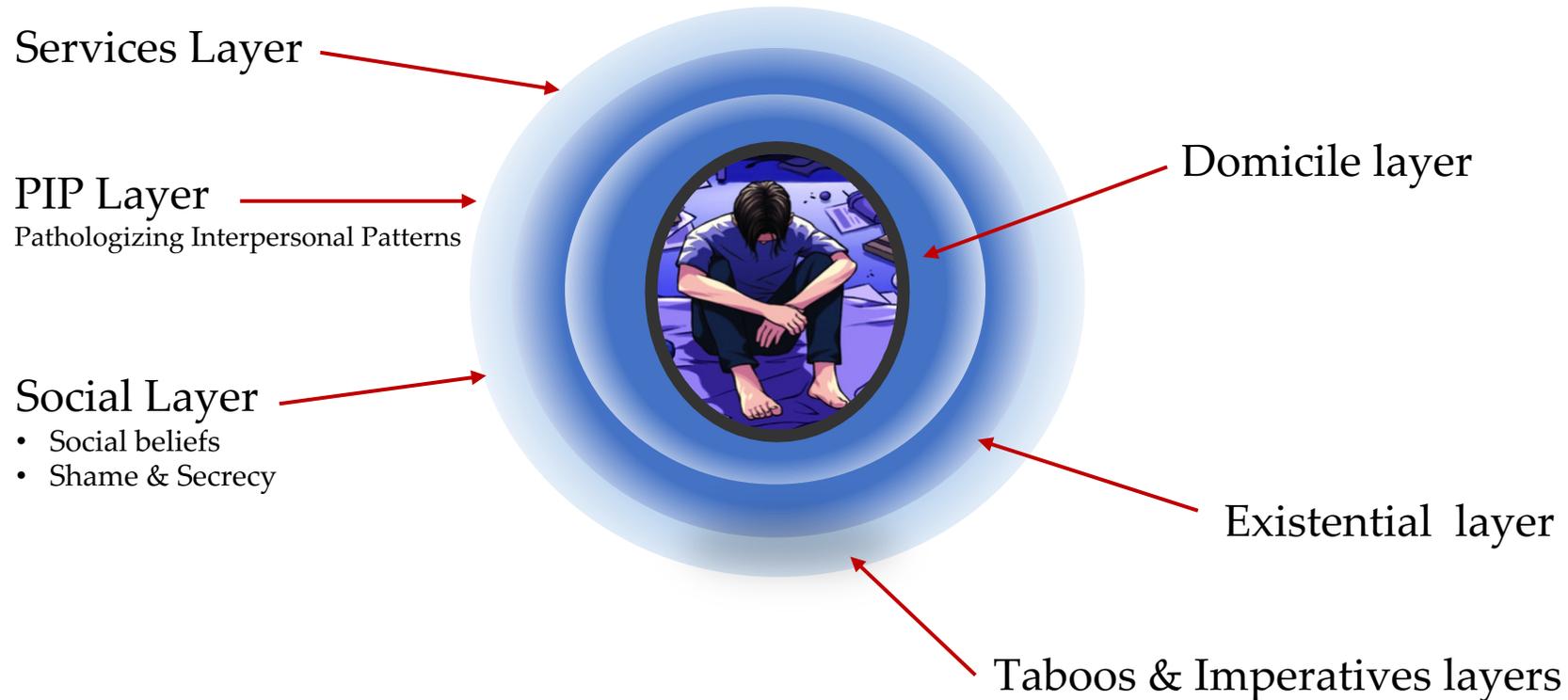
What would a program take to do this?

- Unilteral action

- Non escalatory

- Collaborative

- Constructive

- Interdisciplinary

Preparing the ground for de-accommodation

- Assessment of adult child's strengths and vulnerabilities

- Suicide and aggression risk evaluation

- Construction of optimal treatment plan – even if the child is not interested

- Gathering a network of support

- Helping parents transition from helplessness to first act of the caring struggle

NVR in 7 intervention steps

Mobilizing support:
From private to public intension

Announcement:
From intension to first act

Authoring
From plan to intension

Nonviolent struggle
From first act to
ongoing struggle

Crossing the Chasm
From hope to a plan

Erasure

Hot-iron work
Short term
De-escalation

Presence

Presence
From struggle to presence, reconciliation
and caring dialog

Erasure

Opening
From despair to trust and hope

Presence

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