

Working with Vulnerable Populations

A Workshop for Church and Community Volunteers

By

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Who is Robert Wright?

- Social Work Private Practitioner
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Some Propositions

- Church and community volunteers are “mandated reporters” with increased responsibility to report
- There is increased expectation that churches and agencies have structures in place to make their programmes “Safer”
- The current “Me Too” context highlights need for “Safety for All” thinking
- Volunteers need to look out for each other to keep themselves and those they serve safe

Safety for All!

- Churches and Agencies begin to think about being “Safer”
- Develop abuse and response policy
 - Identify key personnel and external resources
 - Purpose of programmes
 - Volunteer recruitment
 - Volunteer screening
 - **Volunteer training – content and safety**
- Volunteer supervision: talk about the needs and feelings of participants and volunteers
- Programme evaluation including safety
- Disclosure response policy/protocol
- Care plan for all parties
- Promotion of Safer programme status

ROADMAP to Becoming a Safer Church

Become a safer church by developing an **Abuse Response and Prevention Plan**. The journey starts here!

PREPARE FOR THE JOURNEY



Identify leaders for the journey

Set a timeline

Gather information about your church

Learn how managing risk can make your church safer so that your ministries may flourish

CREATE YOUR POLICY

Create your church's **Abuse Response and Prevention POLICY** to guide you on the journey

Here you'll review all the things your church does (what, why, how, where, when) and who does them

OPERATIONS

- Identify and assess risks of abuse
- Identify measures to address the risks

- VBS
- Youth Group
- Sunday School

GOVERNANCE

- Identify and assess risks of abuse
- Identify measures to address the risks

Here you'll review how your church is structured and managed

- Deacons
- Members
- Pastoral Team

FOUNDATION

- Identify and assess risks of abuse
- Identify measures to address the risks

Here you'll review what grounds your church: your mission, values, constitution, covenants

- Constitution
- Mission Statement
- Covenant

INTANGIBLES

- Identify and assess risks of abuse
- Identify measures to address the risks

Here you'll review your church's atmosphere, culture, and environment

- Hope
- Fear
- Commitment

Your church's **Abuse Response and Prevention PLAN** includes:

1 The **POLICY** you created at the start of the journey

2 The **MEASURES** you identified along the way

PUT YOUR PLAN TOGETHER AND USE IT

WELCOME to a safer church!



Your Questions Before We Begin

Mandated Reporters

- Every person who has information, whether or not it is confidential or privileged, indicating that a child is in need of protective services shall forthwith report that information to an agency (applies to everybody)
- Notwithstanding any other Act, every person who performs professional or **official** duties with respect to a child, including: Health care professionals, teachers, social workers, counsellors, **clergy**, peace officers, day care providers, youth recreation workers, . . . shall forthwith report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to an agency.
- This section is read to apply to volunteers of similar agencies

Volunteer Recruitment

- Churches and agencies need to be selective when recruiting volunteer
- It takes more than willingness to be a volunteer
- Volunteers must be purposely recruited to meet the objectives of programmes

Volunteer Screening

- Police Checks*
 - Standard – will determine if there is a criminal record
 - Vulnerable sector – will also determine if there were a record suspension for sexual offences
- Child Abuse Registry Screening
- Credible Community/Work References

*A criminal record should not automatically preclude an individual from volunteering – but a policy should be put in place to assess record and risk. For due diligence purposes, a person with a violent or sexual offense should be excluded from working with vulnerable persons.

Who Are Vulnerable Populations

- Children as defined by child welfare legislation
- Adults who “lack the ability to care and fend adequately for themselves” as defined by adult protection legislation
- Adult persons who, though competent, may be needy or vulnerable due to developmental delay, mental illness, or physical, mental or emotional distress
- Youth and adults who need help establishing healthy boundaries who work closely with volunteers

What About the Me Too Movement?

- The Me Too movement shines a light on the predatory abuse patterns of powerful people
- Victims may be competent adults
- Even relationships perceived to be “consensual” may be inappropriate at best, and law-breaking-abusive at worst

Limits of Mandated Reporting

- Though the idea of mandated reporting applies in law only to children, it sets the expectation that these professionals and agency volunteers are attentive to the needs of all the vulnerable persons they serve
- Church and Agency policies should describe the requirement to report and respond to all concerns about abuse

Child Welfare “Eras”

- The advent of childhood and the requirement to protect – c. 1930’s – 1950’s
 - Industrialization, post-depression/postwar society, formal child welfare charities, enforced “community standards”.
- The advent of professional child welfare – c. 1980’s
 - More professionalism, clearly defined “risks”, introduction of “principles” in the form of preambles
- Expansion of protection – seen in recent changes
 - Ex. Expansion of definition of child from <16 to <19

Child in Need of Services

- Children are in “Need of protection” when they have suffered or are at “substantial risk” of:
 - Physical harm
 - Sexual harm
 - Medical neglect
 - Emotional abuse
 - Neglect of mental, emotional, developmental needs
 - Exposure to intimate partner violence
 - Neglect
 - Abandonment
 - Engaging in serious violence or criminal behaviour

Adults in Need of Protection

- Adults are in “Need of protection” when they, in the premises where they reside:
 - are a victim of physical abuse, sexual abuse, mental cruelty or a combination thereof, is incapable of protecting himself therefrom by reason of physical disability or mental infirmity, and refuses, delays or is unable to make provision for his protection therefrom,
 - Or is not receiving adequate care and attention, is incapable of caring adequately for himself by reason of physical disability or mental infirmity, and refuses, delays or is unable to make provision for his adequate care and attention;

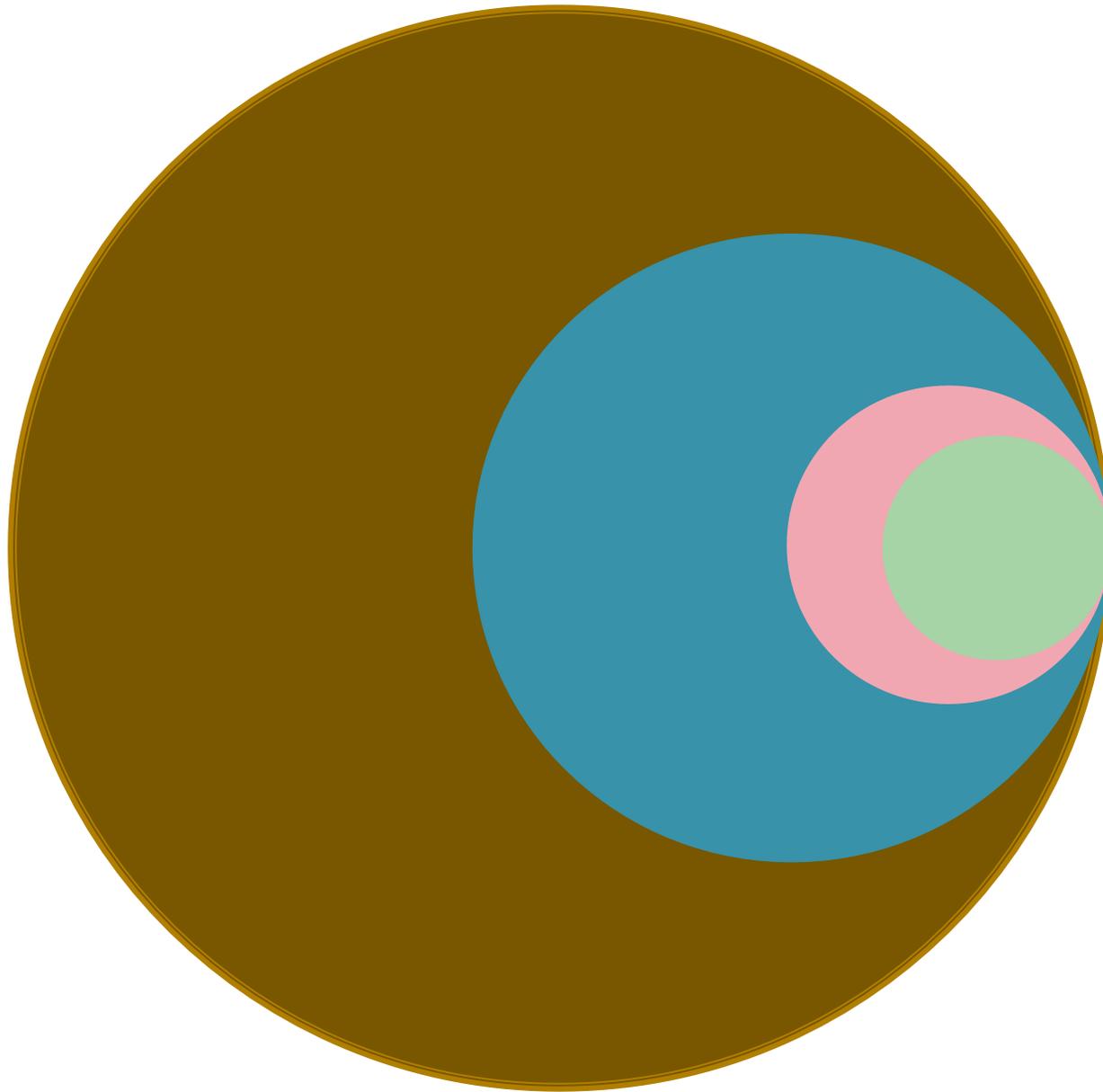
Trauma and Emotional Vulnerability

- Age (the very young and the very old), medical conditions, developmental delay, or abuse can make an individual vulnerable to abuse
- Such individuals may experience an emotional neediness that makes them vulnerable
- Lack of clear understanding of appropriate boundaries between caregivers and those they care for can make caregivers vulnerable to crossing boundaries

Some Indicators of Abuse

- Sudden changes in behavior or performance
- Unattended physical, medical problems or injury
- Learning problems or injuries that cannot be explained
- Hypervigilance
- Lack of supervision or care
- Overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn
- Comes early, stays late, and does not want to go home
- Reluctance to be around or fearful to leave the side of a particular person
- Overly attached to and defensive of a particular person
- Discloses maltreatment

**Stats About
Sexual Assault
cases:**



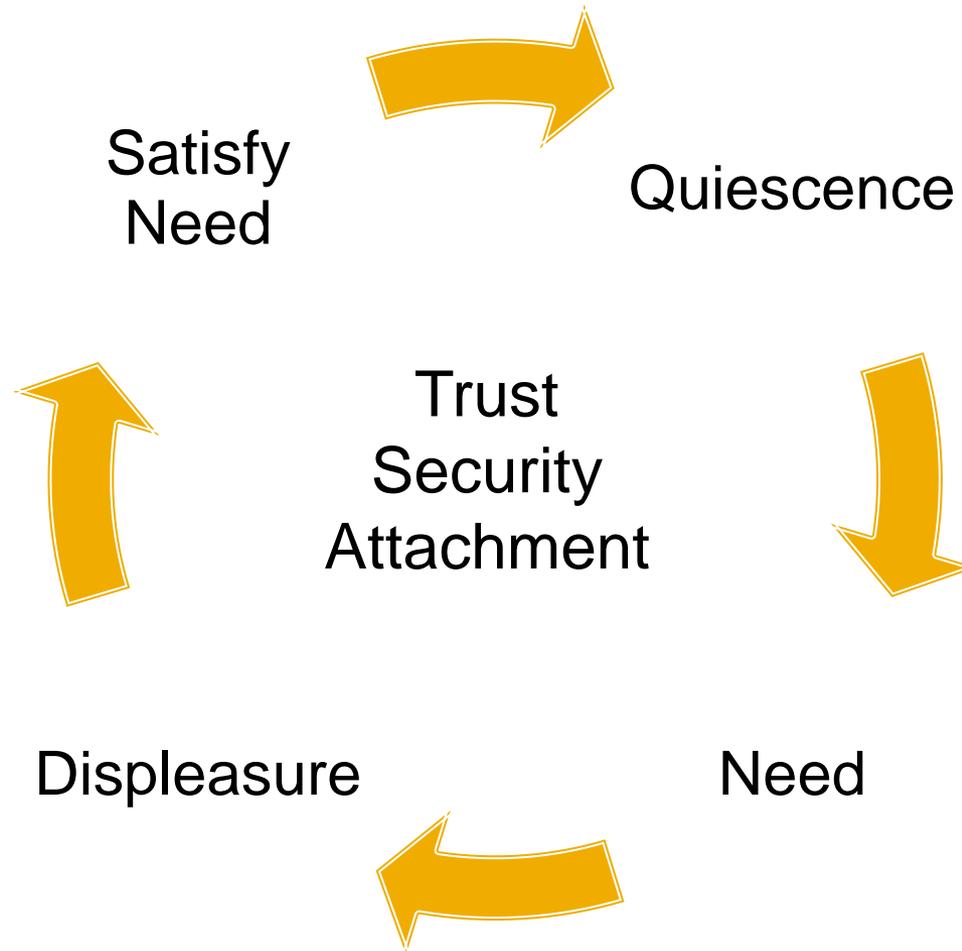
All Cases

**Reported to
Authorities ~33%**

Prosecuted ~8%

Convicted ~4%

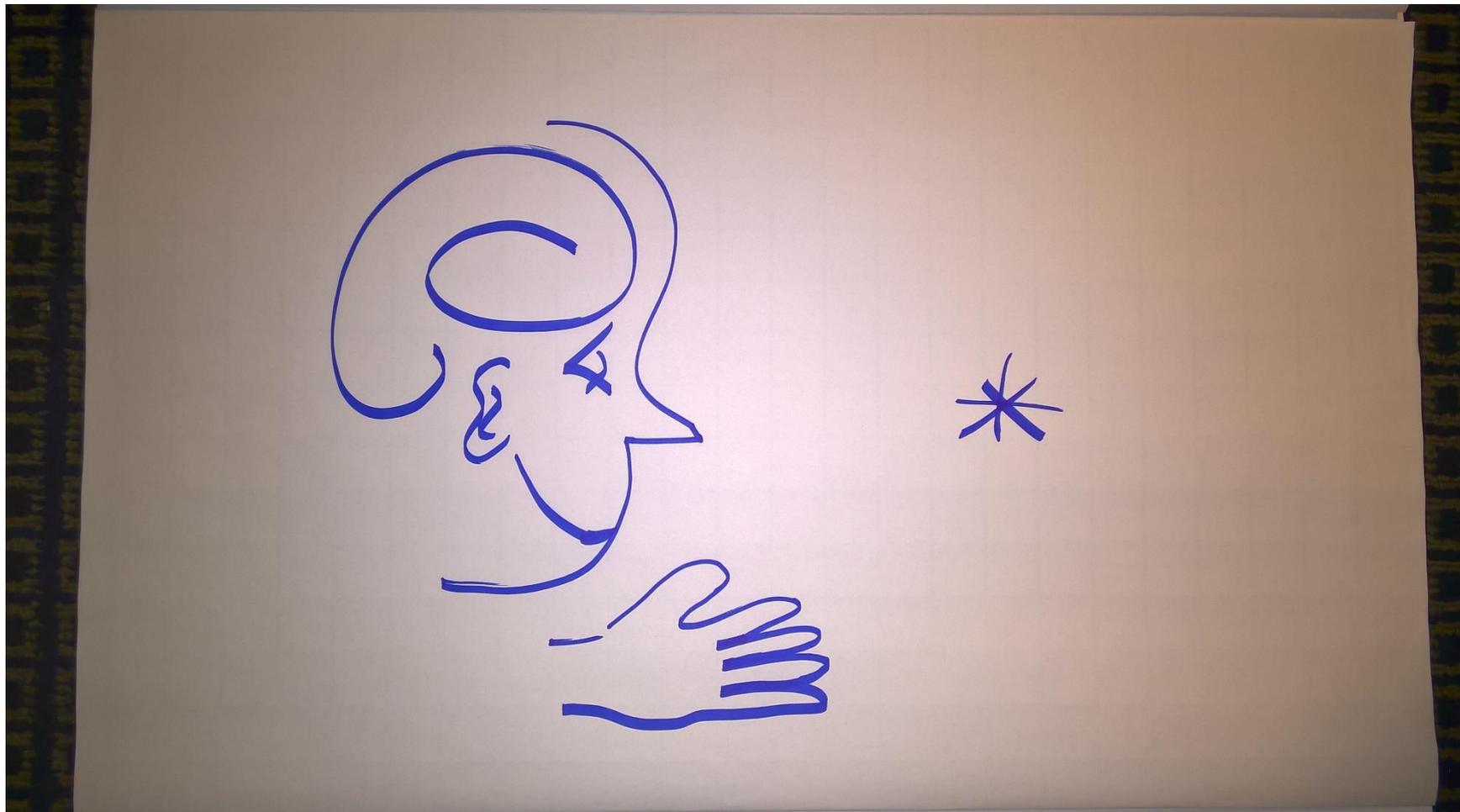
Attachment and Emotional Needs



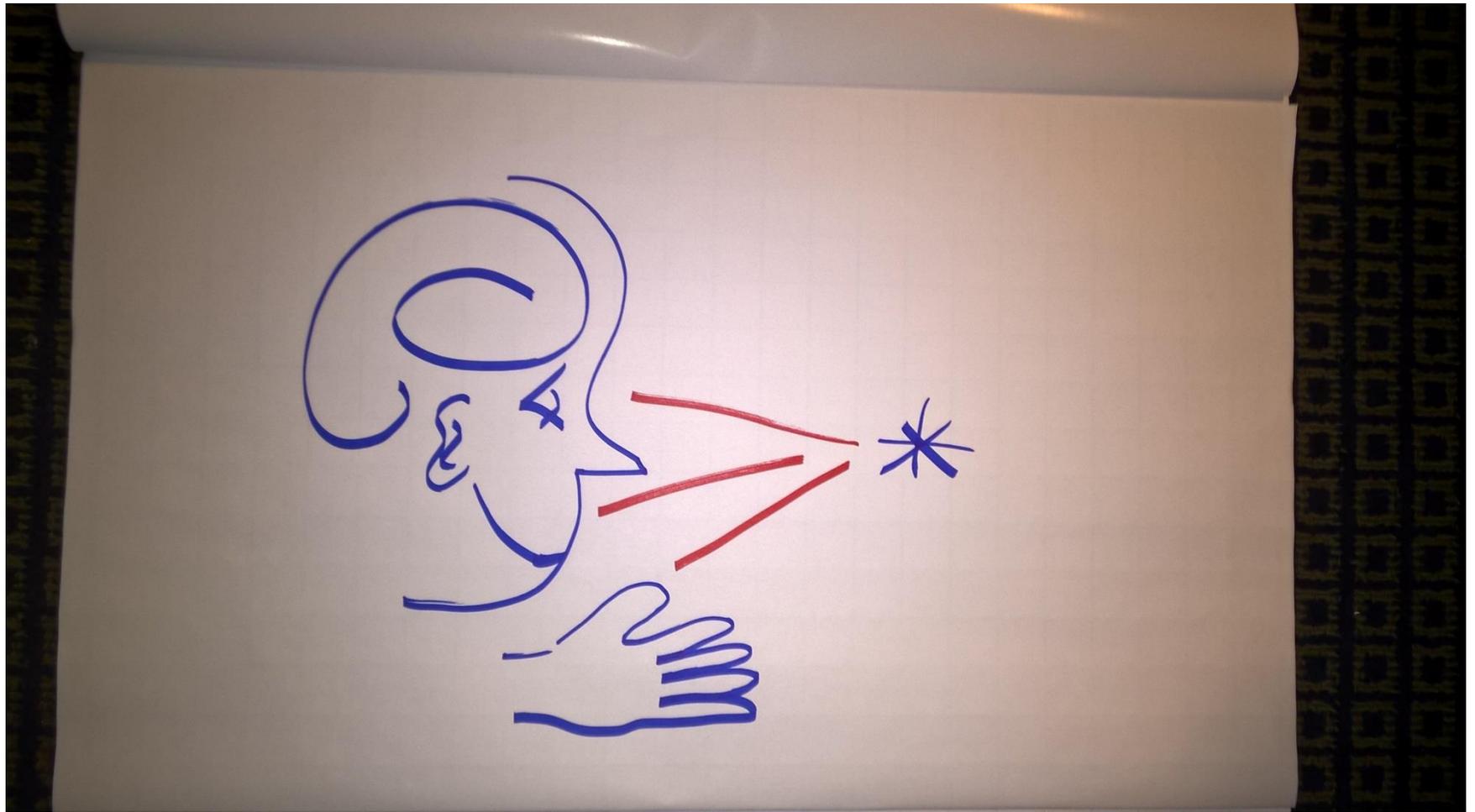
When Attachment Needs Are Not Met

- Individuals can be extremely emotionally needy
- Some have experienced developmental trauma that impairs their later emotional and social development and functioning
- Traumas that occur later in life can also interfere with our development and make us emotionally needy

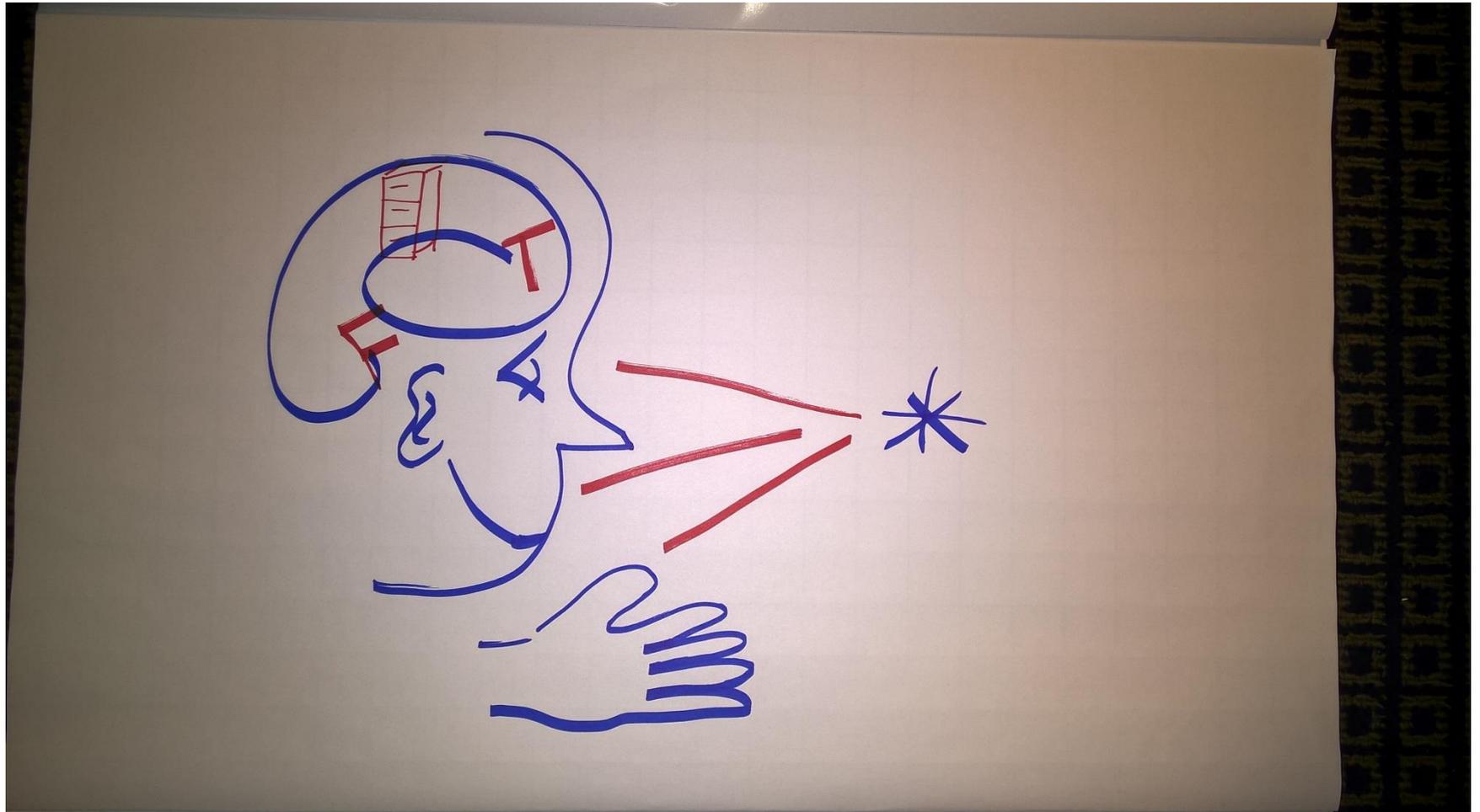
A Simple Model of Trauma



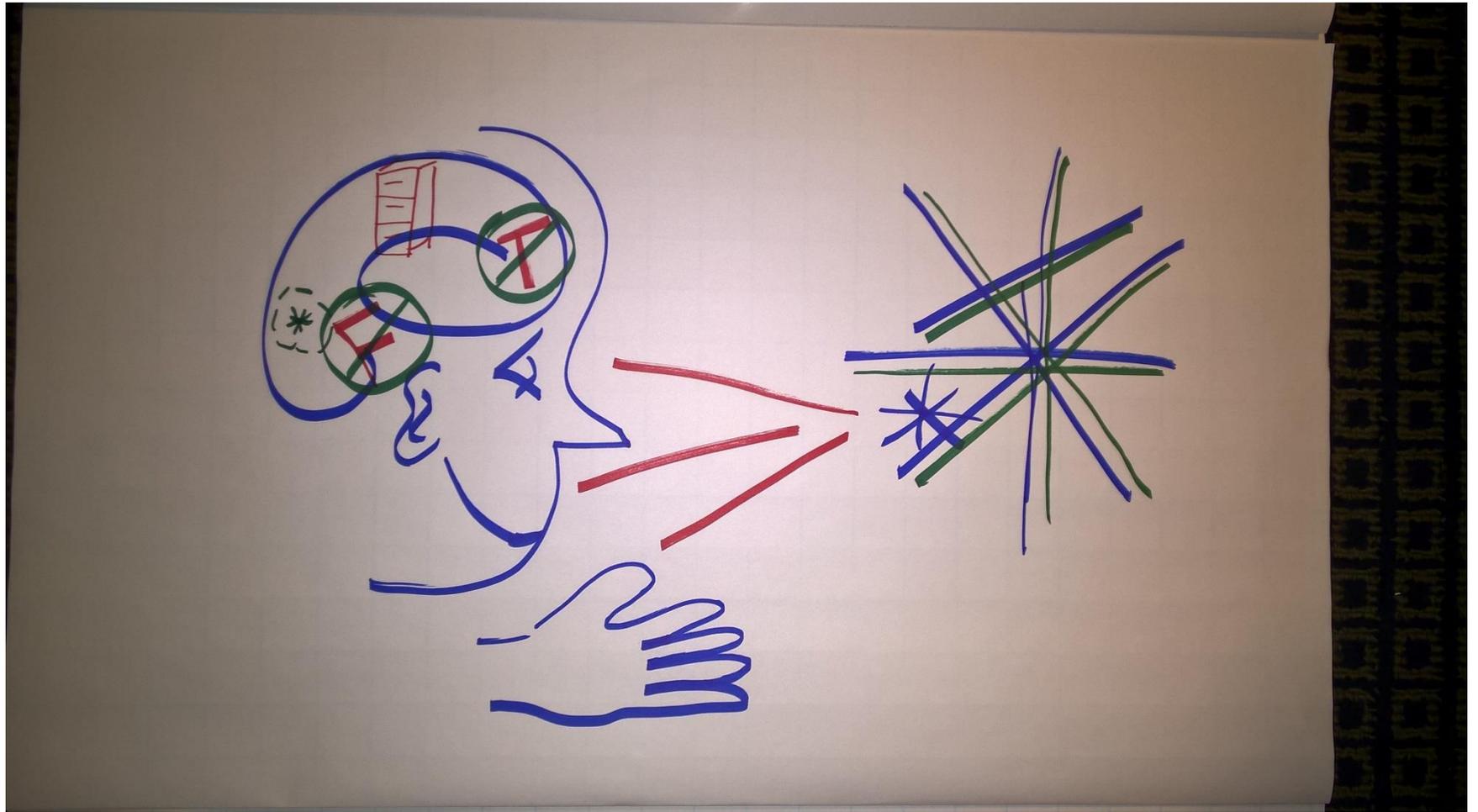
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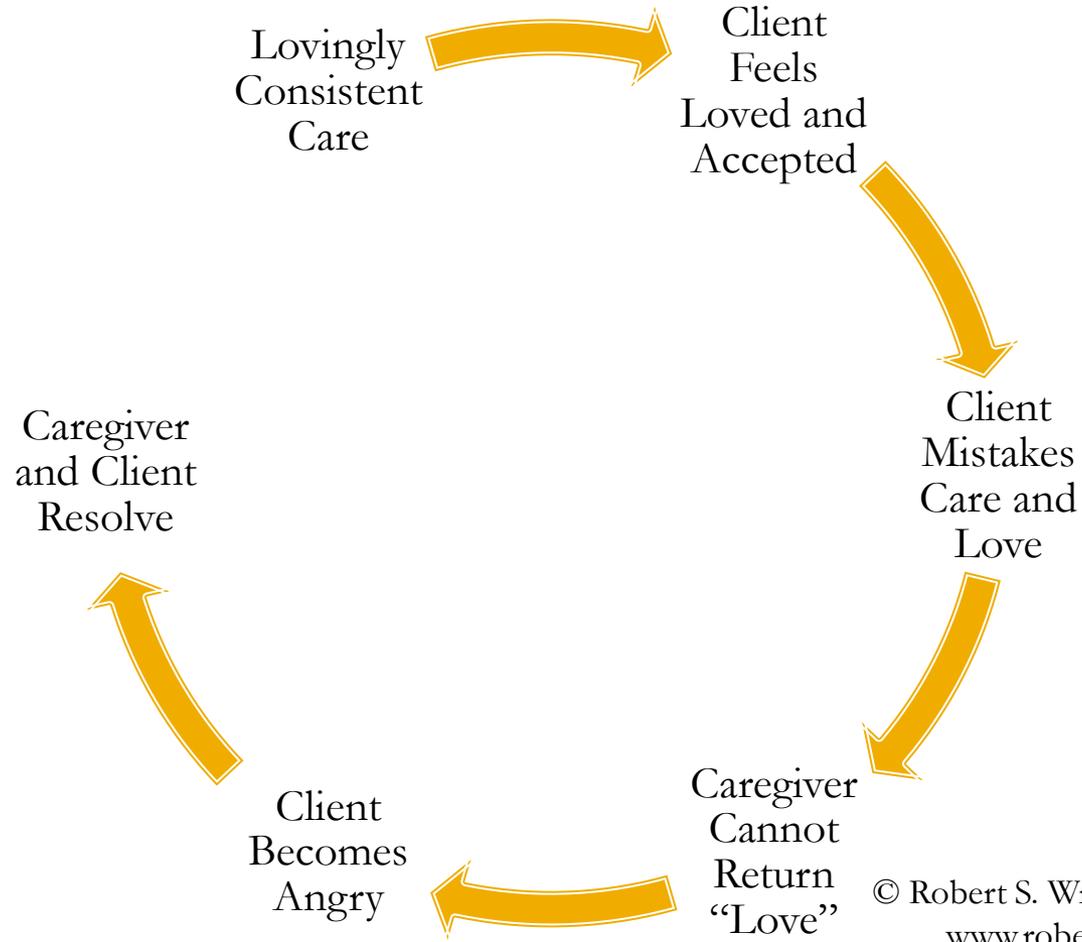
A Simple Model of Trauma



A Simple Model of Trauma



Transference and Counter-transference: The Caregivers Dilemma Resolved



Transference and Counter-transference: The Caregivers Dilemma unresolved



Volunteer Supervision

- Again, due diligence requires evidence that a church or agency is regularly monitoring the health of its programmes, volunteers and participants
- Annual volunteer meetings like this, quarterly training or check in session, leaders regularly checking in with volunteers, even a monthly check in during board meetings can demonstrate the awareness of safety

Programme Evaluation

- An annual or biennial programme evaluation should be conducted to provide feedback on programmes and leaders
- Provides opportunity for safety considerations
 - “do you feel you/your child(ren) are safe during programme”
 - “Is the leader mature and appropriate in dealing with you/your children”
- Such a policy shows “due diligence”

Disclosure Response Policy

- Should be legal, intelligent and compassionate
 - A discloser is not an allegation – no need to panic
 - Comply with mandated reporting, ask if unsure
 - Refer to your policy
 - Consult with internal and external leadership
 - Inform parties that protocol was implemented when appropriate to do so – ensure safety of all, including suicide risk
 - Review programmes for safety and make adjustments as necessary
 - Refer parties to additional services if necessary
 - Discuss and decide whether to inform community at large