

The Scapegoat & the Golden Child:

Healing the Wounds of
Family Blame &
Favouritism

with Katy Bodman
and friends



Parents!

Mel Robbins with Dr Lindsey C. Gibson (*Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents*)

8.5 million followers – 91% people who responded said their parents were emotionally immature in the following ways:

- emotionally unavailable
- would punish feelings
- have outbursts/intense reactions
- criticise
- be unsupportive
- prioritise their own needs



Parents!

“(the parent has) a **childish, ravenous hunger** for being the most important person in the relationship at that moment. They didn’t get their needs met when they were little...and now they’re going to collect on their own children.”

Dr Lindsey C. Gibson



Some definitions:

- **Scapegoat:** a family member, often a child, who is blamed for the family's problems, regardless of whether they are actually at fault
- **Golden Child:** a child in a family who is favoured or idealised, often to an unhealthy degree, by one or both parents

The roles often coexist, especially in families with narcissistic process:

A parent's unresolved trauma or emotional immaturity may lead them to seek control, validation, or emotional regulation through their children - rather than meeting the children's emotional needs.



**VOTE
NOW**

In your family were you:

- **A Scapegoat/Misfit ?**
- **A Golden Child?**
- **No, but we had other painful roles**
- **No, we were pretty healthy!**

A person centred approach to today

- Potentiality not Deficiency
- We're not broken - we have grown in the best way we have been able to under the conditions
- Our actualising tendency is alive and well!

“The actualising tendency can, of course, be thwarted or warped, but it cannot be destroyed without destroying the organism (person).”



Carl Rogers:

“In my early professional years, I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth?”





**Offering
clients
engagement
at relational
depth**



Touchstones: being familiar with our own experiences of what it means to be human – the joy, the pain and the mess



**Counsellor - develops self awareness
& own touchstones
increasing capacity to offer:**

empathy



**Valuing
Accepting
Caring**

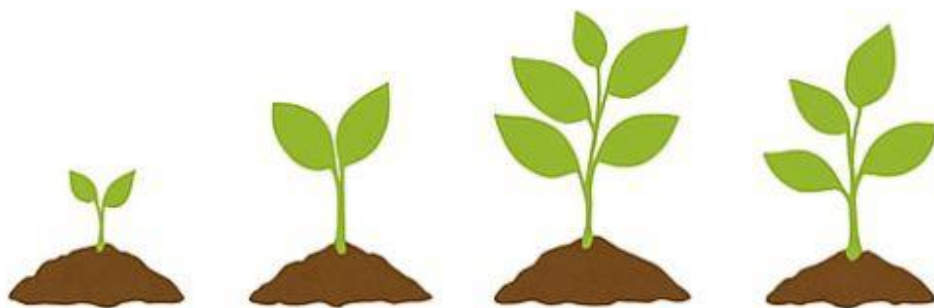
- Client doesn't have to earn it

congruence



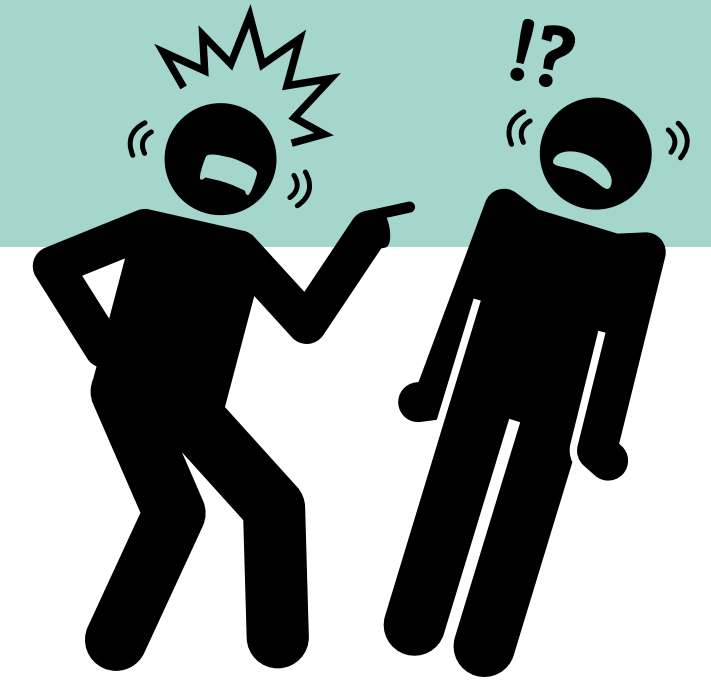
**I am with you
I would like to understand
Human to Human
Being real me with you**

positive regard



**Client - 'freed for normal growth'
(not 'fixed!')**

Scapegoating : a human problem



Reminding ourselves:

Scapegoating is a **relational** and psychological process where an individual – often a child, adolescent or someone with less power – is unfairly blamed or criticised for the larger group's problems or stress

Term comes from an ancient Jewish ritual whereby a goat was symbolically burdened with the community's 'sins' and sent into the wilderness to carry them away

Scapegoating : a human problem

- Historian and philosopher René Girard saw scapegoating as a deep pattern in human life. He believed it helped shape culture, religion, and society, and saw it as one of **the most harmful forces** in our history

www.ravenfoundation.org is an excellent resource on Girard's work and nonviolence



Scapegoating : a human problem

- Can be recognised throughout history & present day:
 - Ancient religious sacrifice
 - Witch trials
 - Genocide
 - Family systems, educational settings
 - Workplaces, religious and friendship groups
 - Cancel culture and social media pile-ons



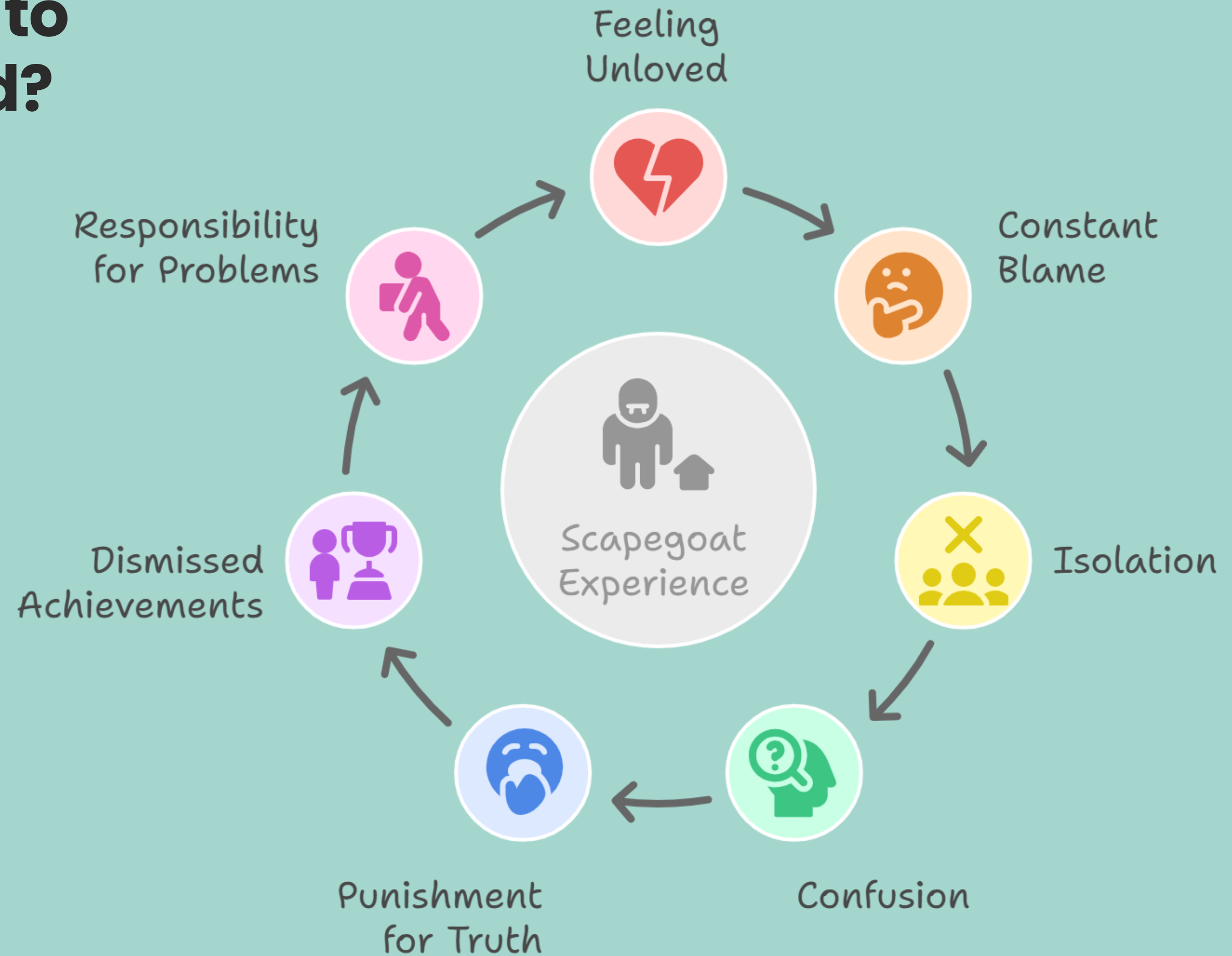
*“thrown under the
bus”*

Girard's Scapegoat mechanism

In families the scapegoated person carries the projected shame, anger, or pain of the system (Rebecca C. Mandeville)



How does it feel to be scapegoated?



How does it feel to be scapegoated?

Why am I too much?

Why do I upset everyone by just being me?

My opinions are apparently wrong - I am wrong

I am too fiery/feisty/bossy

I am disrespectful – but why can't I say what I don't like

They are only interested in me when I'm doing something wrong

I feel hollow, but nobody notices

I also know there is something wrong with this family and it's not me...but I still feel unloved as well as too much - and also like a nothing



The Legacy:

- Lack of self belief
- Feeling lost
- Fearing abandonment
- Retroflection – turning it in on myself: self harm, self hatred, suicidal feelings
- Hypervigilant
- 'Calm' but empty

Scapegoating – how does it feel?

Silently, I bear the blame they give,
Choosing exile over another fight.
All their whispers shape the life I live,
Painted wrong in everyone's sight.
Even truth begins to fade from view -
Guilt pressed in like a second skin.
Over time, I've come to believe it too:
Am I the curse they see within?
Their peace is built on my undoing.



The Scapegoat

**Did it happen to you, a sibling, a client?
Share in chat with Morag, please...**

Impact of Family Scapegoating Abuse (FSA)

Rebecca C. Mandeville's research (2024)

- FSA is deeply damaging but can be easily missed
- Chronic shame, emotional dysregulation, identity confusion, anxiety, and dissociation (can create complex trauma)
- Increased risk for lifelong mental and physical health challenges



Links to Rebecca C. Mandeville's work:

www.scapegoatrecovery.com

[youtube.com/@beyondfamilyscapegoatingabuse](https://www.youtube.com/@beyondfamilyscapegoatingabuse)

2024 study: <https://oapub.org/hlt/index.php/EJPHS/article/view/202/202>

Risk factors

(references at end of slides)

Born into a Role

Assigned role due to birth or timing

The 'Different' One

Highlights what the family fears or doesn't understand



Sensitive or Empathic Child

Absorbs family's unspoken pain

The Emotionally Honest One

Names dysfunction, asks hard questions

The One Who Disrupts the System

Rebels against family rules/assigned role

Risk factors

(references at end of slides)

Has different
beliefs

Is highly
sensitive

Challenges
the system

Asks hard
questions



Scapegoat

The Misfit (Black sheep)

**Did it happen to you, a sibling, a client?
Share in chat with Morag, please...**

The Golden Child

A golden child is the one who's seen as "the good one," "the achiever," or "the one who can do no wrong".

It makes the family or parent **look good, healthy, functional**. The glow of the golden child highlights how bad the scapegoat is... *'why can't you be more like your brother/sister....?')*

**Did it happen to you, a sibling, a client?
Share in chat with Morag, please...**



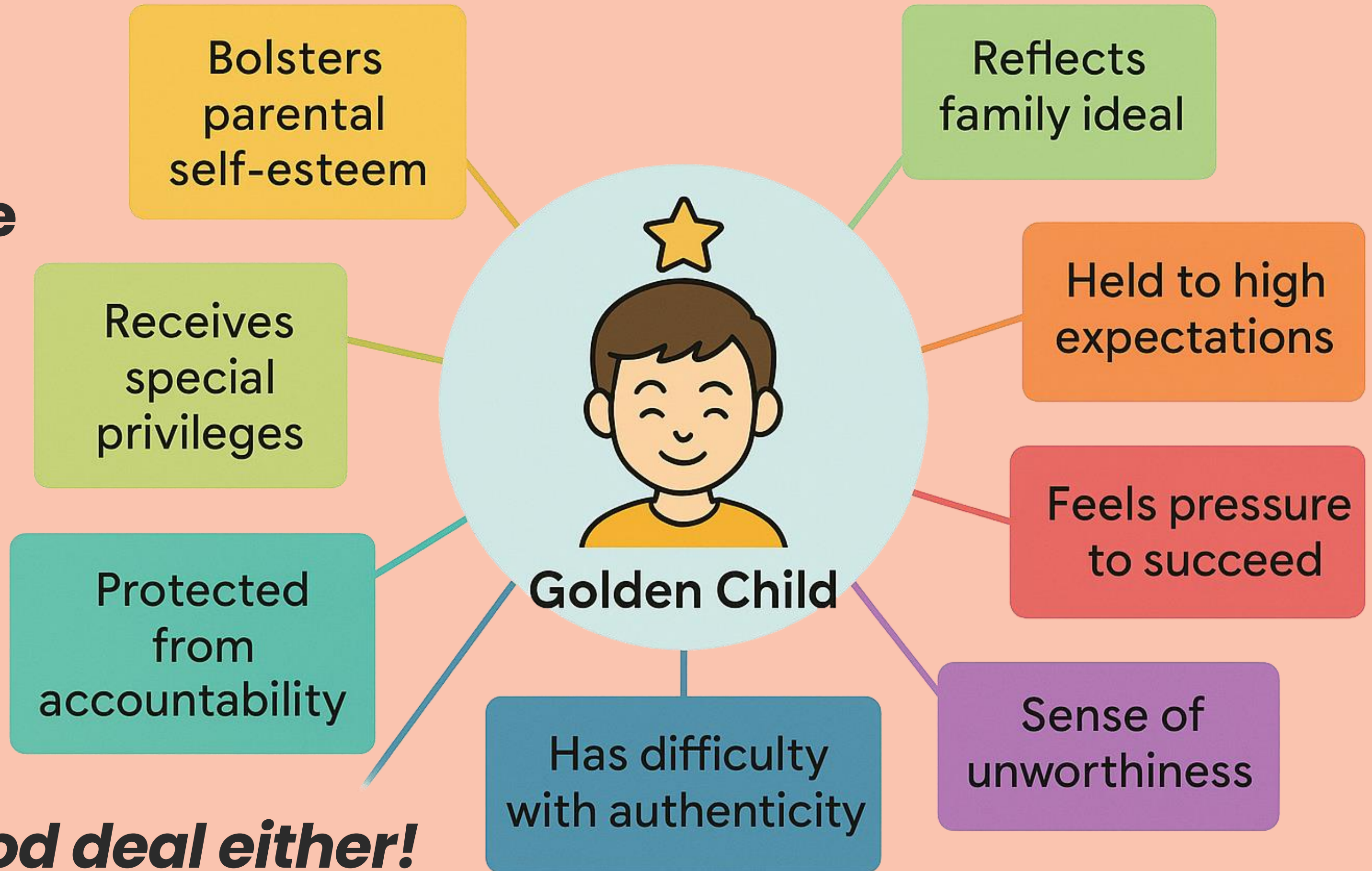
The Golden Child – the origins

Family systems theorists identified early “hero” roles in the 1970s (Virginia Satir and Murray Bowen)

Stephanie Donaldson–Pressman & Robert M. Pressman (1994) described the golden children in *The Narcissistic Family: Diagnosis and Treatment*. They said it doesn't necessarily mean Narcissistic Personality Disorder, but traits/process



The Golden Child's Experience



Not a good deal either!

The Golden Child

- Difficulty with identity and self-worth
- Pressure to succeed and fear of failure (imposter syndrome)
- Guilt over being favoured
- Emotional repression or lack of authentic self-expression
- Overpraise has been linked to narcissism – inflated but fragile ego
- Shame

Suitor, J. J., Sechrist, J., & Pillemer, K. (2007)

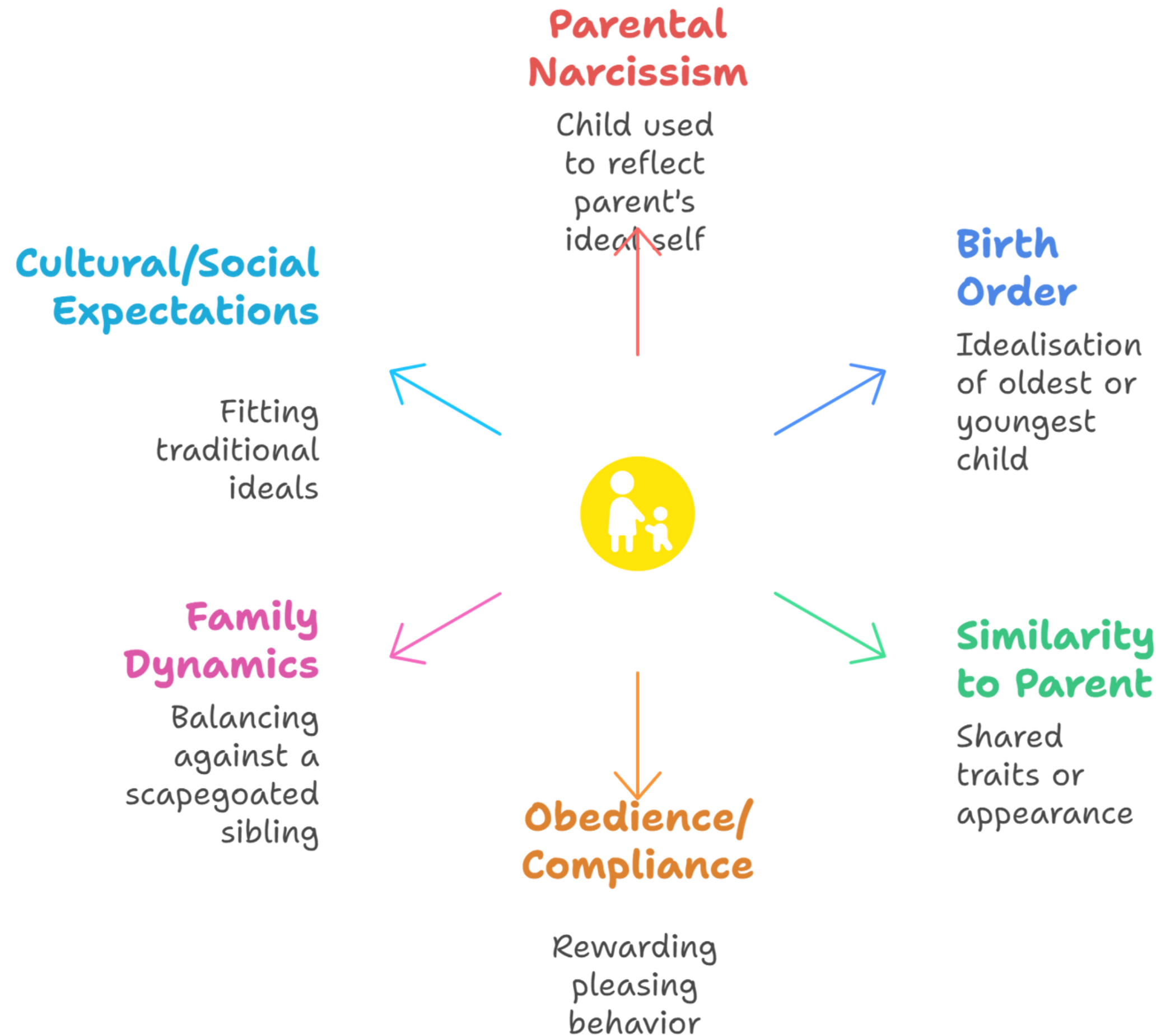
Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., Frosch, C. A., & McHale, J. L. (2007).



Golden Child

Risk factors

(references at end of slides)



**Golden shine, but not my light,
Others dimmed to make me bright.
Labelled “best” before I knew
Dreams I’d trade to just be true.
Every hug felt like a claim,
Not for me—but for their name.**



The Golden Child

**Crowned in silence, I complied.
Hope looked different from this side.
I watched my sibling bear the storm,
Love for me their chosen form.
Don't they see we're both alone?**

The roles often function together:

- Maintains the family illusion: The golden child upholds the “perfect family” image, while the scapegoat carries the blame and dysfunction
- This protects the real issue: These roles distract from deeper family problems like abuse, trauma, marital/relationship issues, or emotional immaturity in the parent(s)



*We are both stuck on this seesaw-
it's a painful game we didn't ask to
play*

- **Neither child is truly seen or accepted for who they are – both are controlled. Neither gets to be their full, authentic self**
- **We can be left resentful towards parents, or constantly hoping for their approval, but sibling relationships can also be damaged or devastated**



FREEDOM

GROWTH

NEW BEGINNINGS / OPPORTUNITIES

- YOU CAN DO THIS
- LIFE IS FOR LIVING
- THIS IS A GOOD THING
- FEEL THE FEAR & DO IT ANYWAY!

EXCITEMENT
ENERGISED

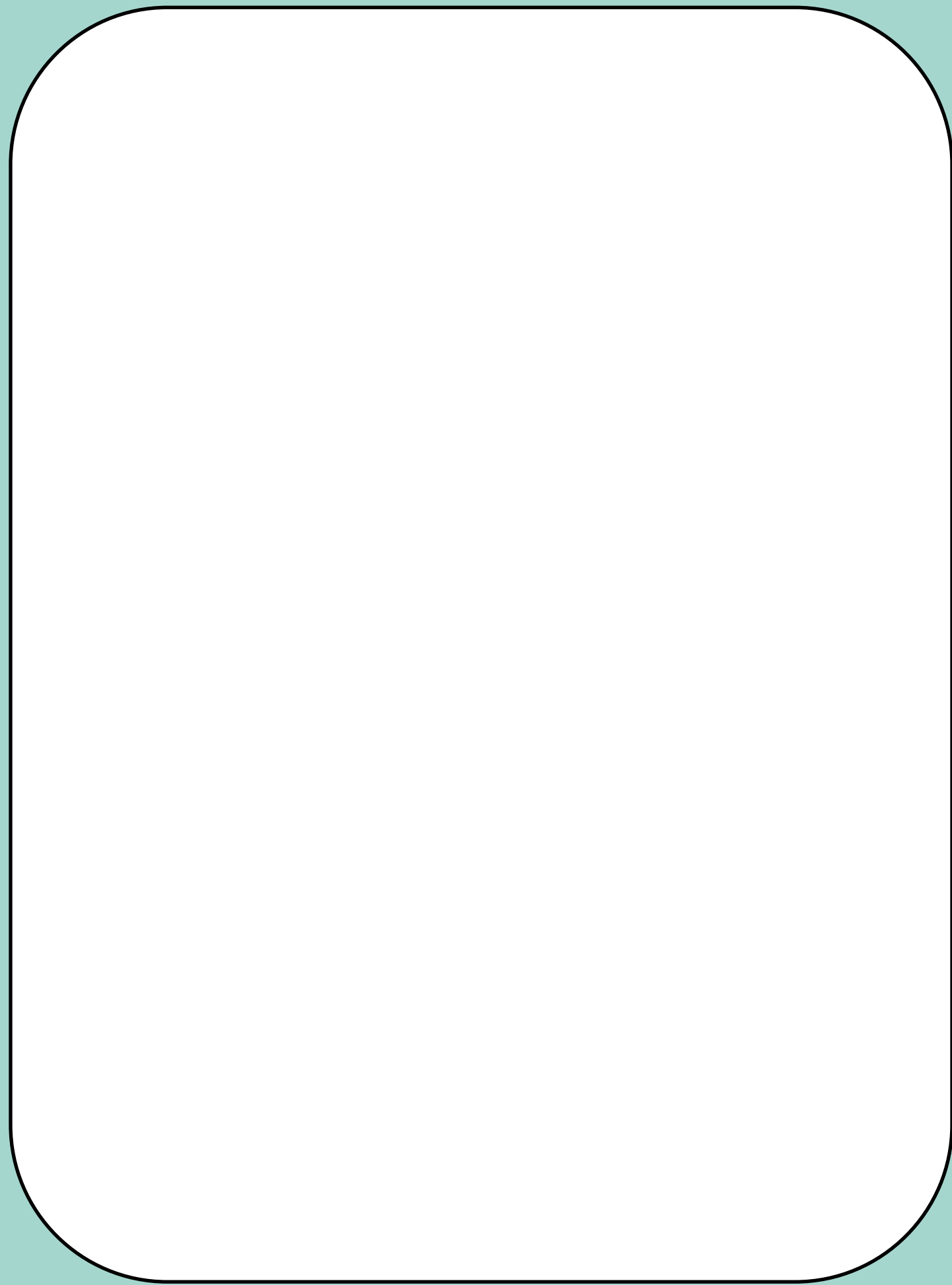
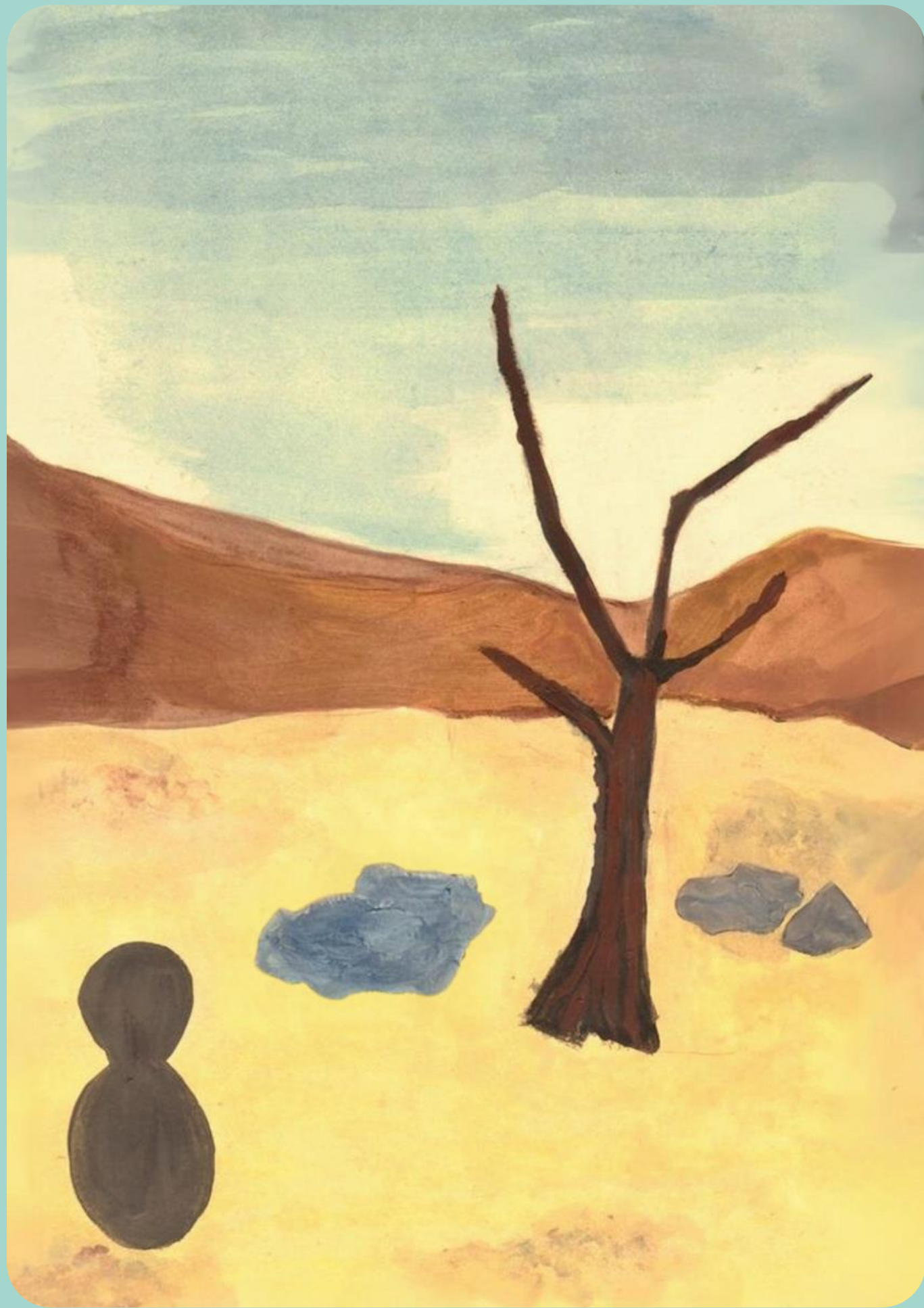


RESTRICTED
TRAPPED
FAMILIAR
COMFORTABLE

SCARED
ANXIOUS
FEARFUL
FEAR OF
FAILURE











Resources

[PACT-RESOURCES.CO.UK](https://pact-resources.co.uk)

ORIGINAL & CREATIVE
COUNSELLING RESOURCES

HARD FEELINGS

HARD FEELINGS

empathy cards for counsellors

hardfeelingscards.co.uk

When the feelings
are too hard...

And I can't
tell you...

HARD FEELINGS

WHEN I
CAN'T
SHOW YOU



NURTURE & RELAX DAY

for counsellors

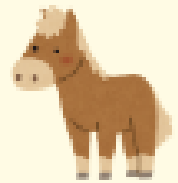
Eastbrookend Country Park, Romford RM7 0SS
Sat July 19 09:30am - 3.30pm



Create & play: have some fun, make some nice things



Gentle guided meditation: relax, be still, decompress



Embodied nature walk with an Equine therapist: may include horses!



Friendship & care: support & a listening ear available

Please book via the link below

£65, including materials, complimentary tea & coffee & HOMEMADE CAKE

CPD CERT
INCLUDED



Yummm!



**Big Bird says
come
& play!**

Training coming up!

JUL
9



9:30 am - 1:00 pm

Mind Matters with Dr Chris: Trauma and its effect on the brain and how to repair it

JUL
15



9:30 am - 1:00 pm

Losing the Will to Live: Working with Suicidal Clients with Pauline Andrew

AUG
30



10:00 am - 3:00 pm

In-person, Norwich: Working Creatively with the Inner Child in Counselling with Pauline Andrew

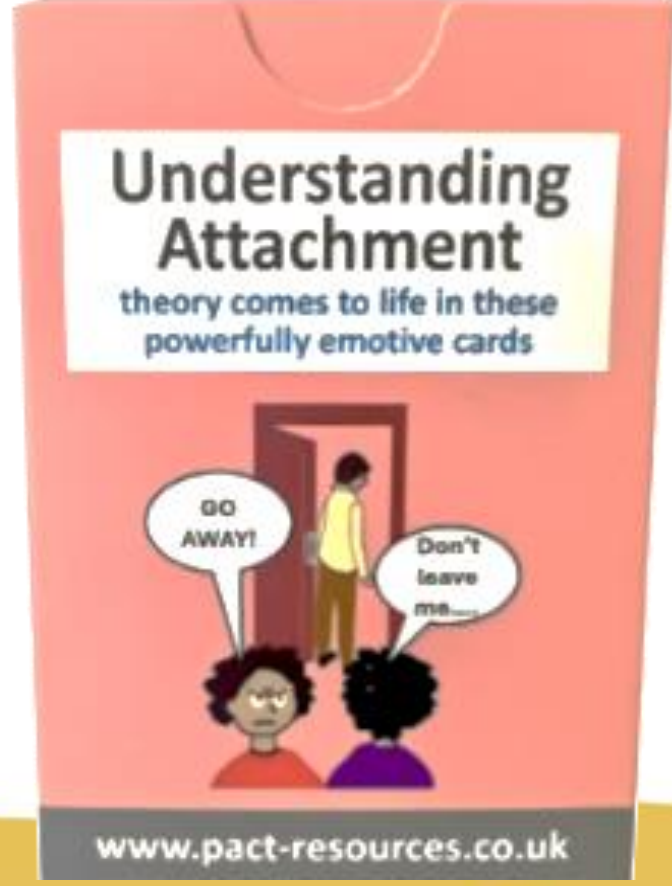
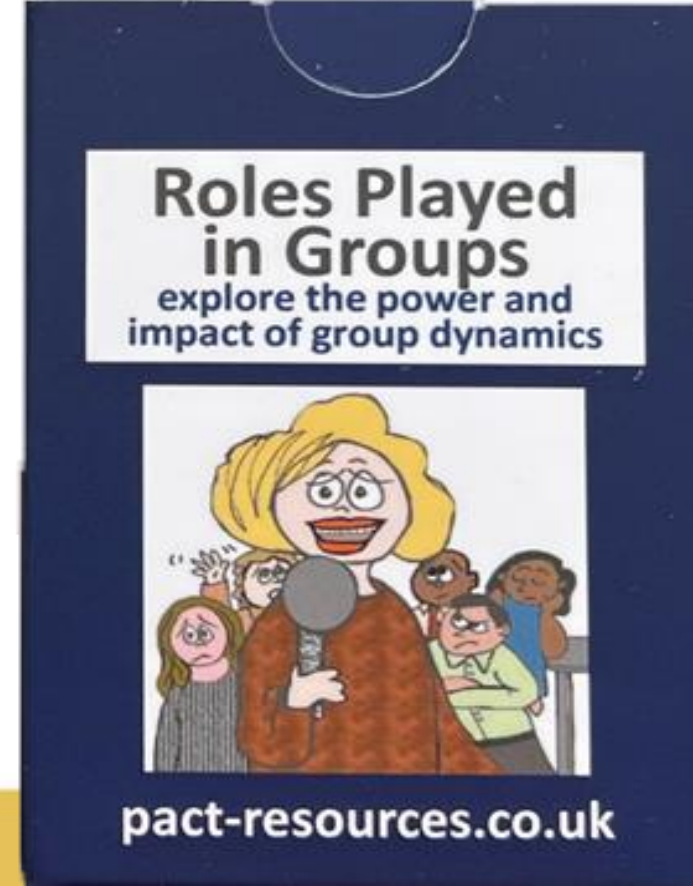
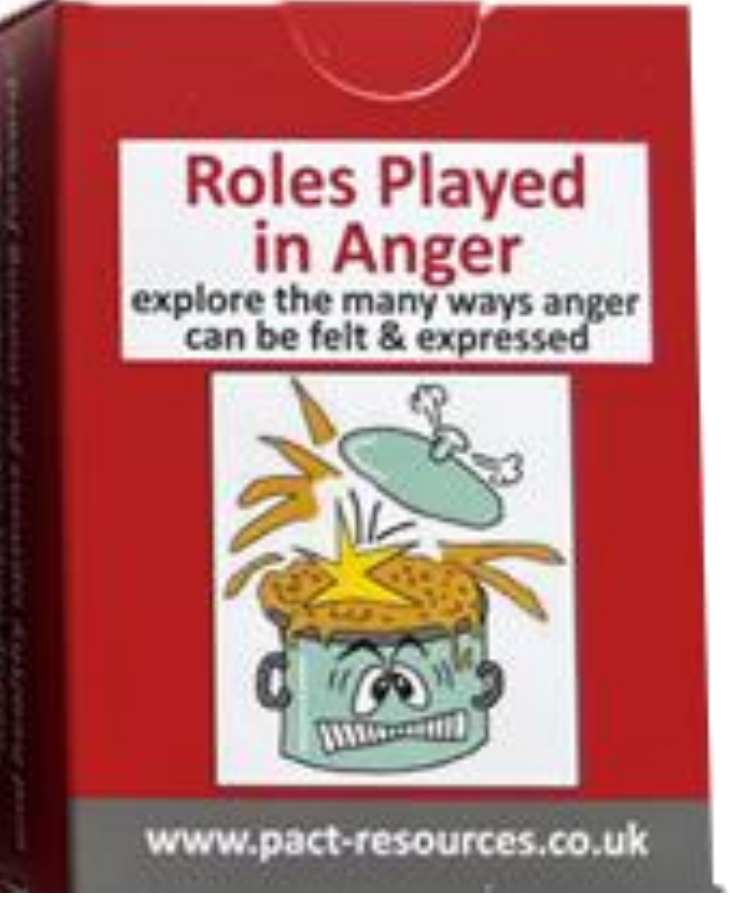
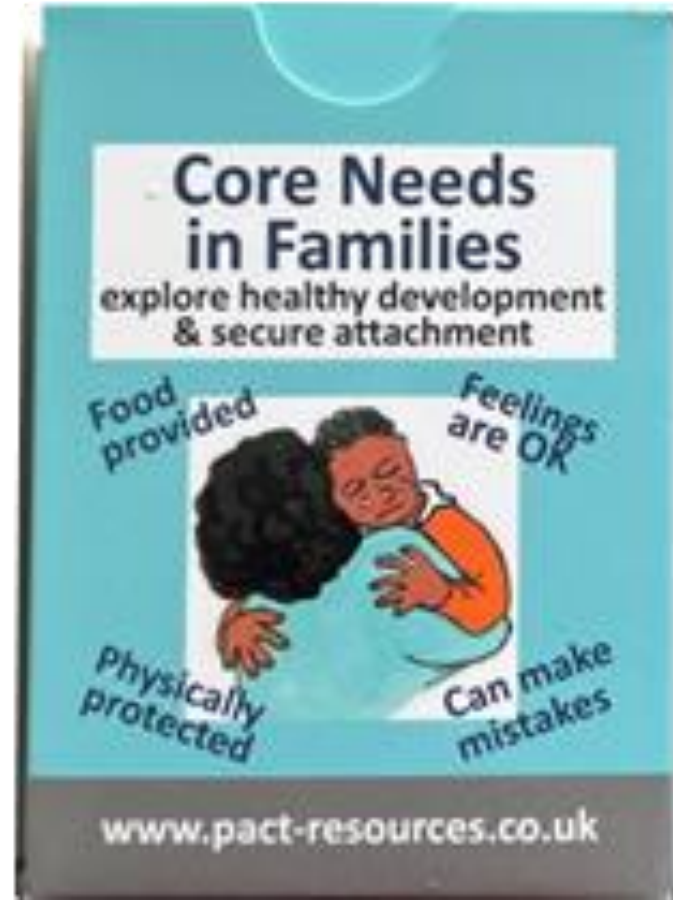
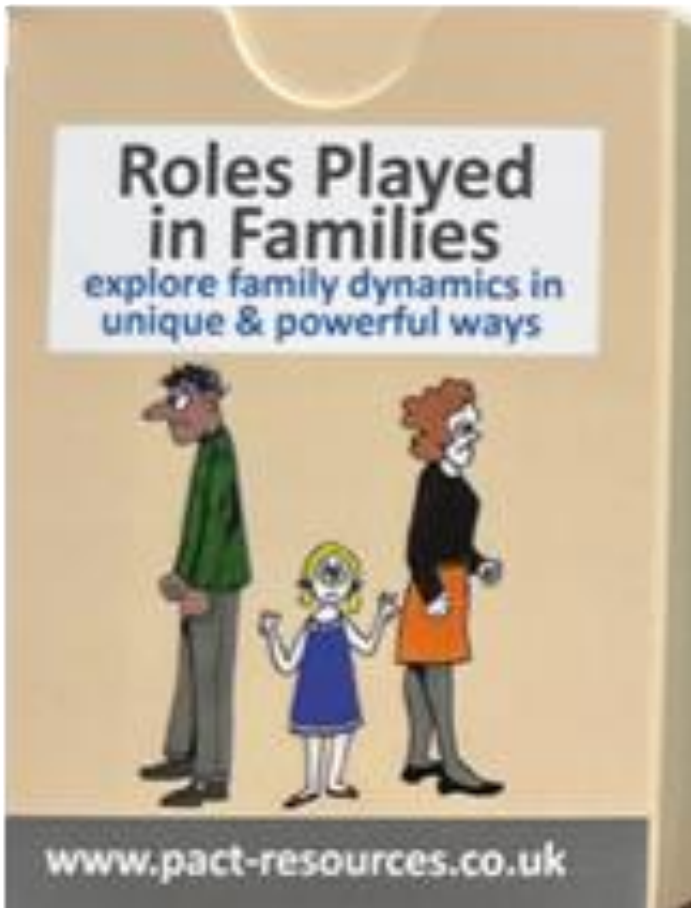
NOV
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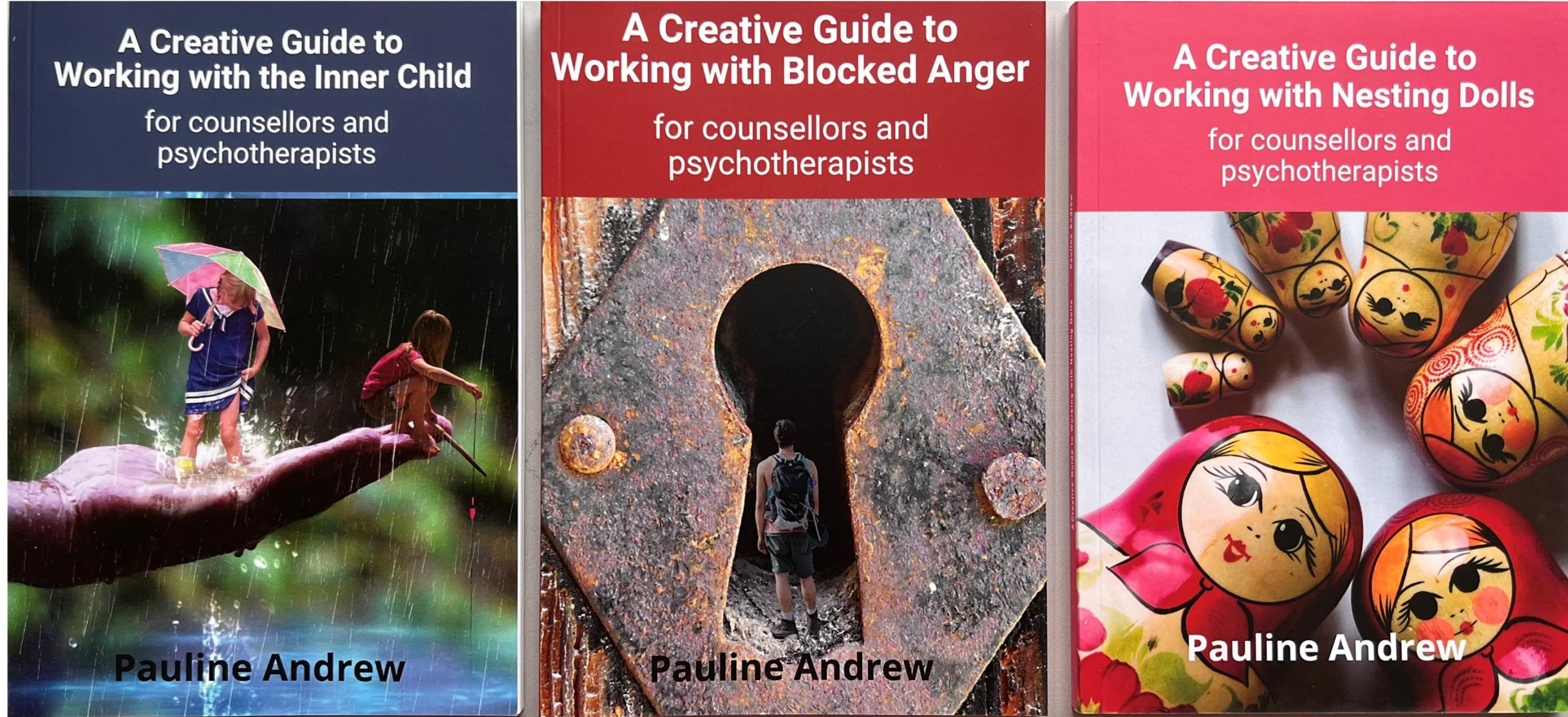
10:00 am - 3:00 pm

In-person, Norwich: Toxic, Tense or just Tough? A Fresh Look at Relationships with Dr Chris & Pauline Andrew

Roles Played in Families
Extra Set A



Books by Pauline Andrew



£11.50 each
3 for £32 (save £2.50)

Also available on Kindle

e-Resources



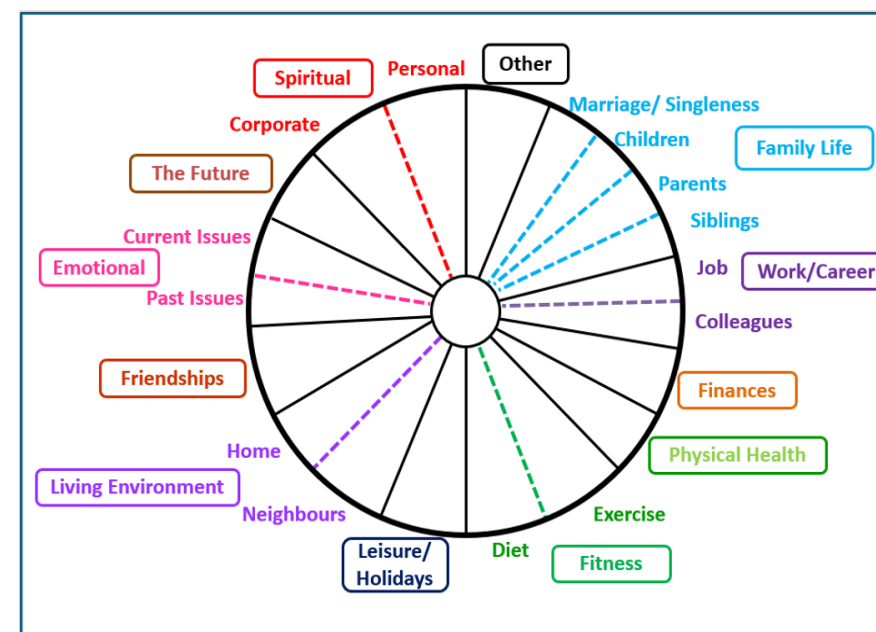
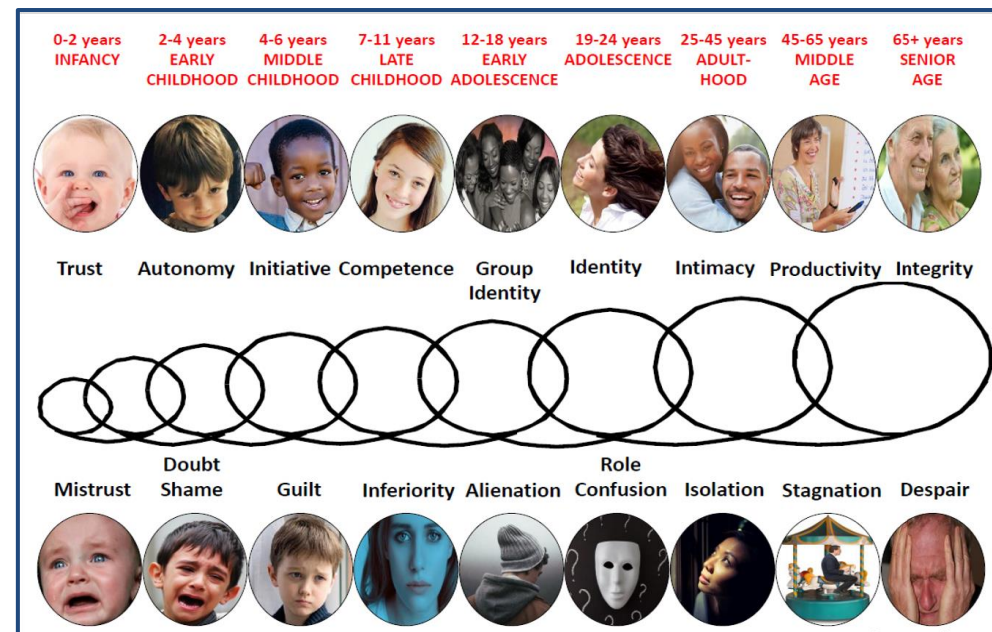
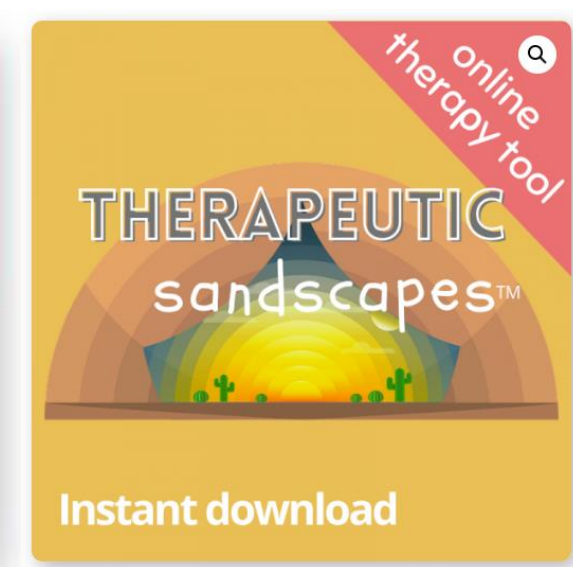
Erikson's Life Stages
£3.50



Wheel of Life
£3.50 – £5.00



Working with Animal
Figures Online Pack



Use PowerPoint for these e-resources – please also investigate our web apps!



**Sand Tray
Web App**



**The Wheel of
Life**



**Erikson's Life
Stages**



**Erikson's for
Adolescents**



**Roles Played in
Families**



**Core Needs in
Families**



**Roles Played in
Anger**



**Roles Played in
Groups**

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**The In-Out
Model**



**Nesting
Dolls**



**Understanding
Attachment**

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YouTube

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- Lots of videos on working creatively
- Please subscribe!



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- Videos on Life, the Brain and Relationships
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- A closed group for counsellors & trainee counsellors
- Please answer the joining questions!



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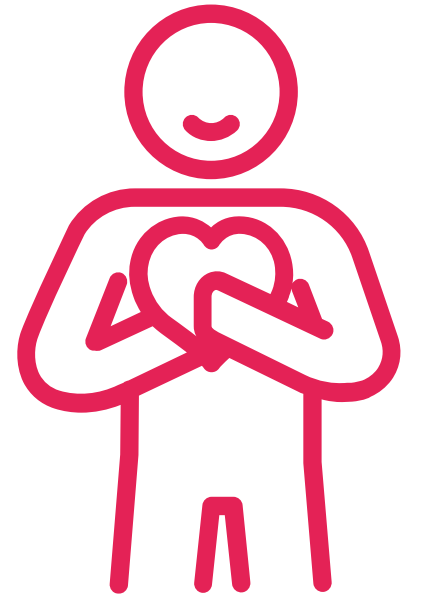
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What sort of person would a client risk meeting at relational depth with?

A therapist who can:

- *respond to the client from their **own depths***
- *take people in **and** reach out to people*
- *receive a **wide range** of others – the client who is incredibly ‘fragile’, another who protects himself by seeking to put down the other, and someone...who has simply, ‘given up’ unless someone can offer him a larger presence that the prison he has built around his self*
- ***A therapist who is not deterred*** *by clients’ various systems of self protection. They honour these, but do not collude with them*



Taken from: Working at Relational Depth in Counselling and Psychotherapy, Mearns & Cooper, 2005