



Deep Release Online
Professional Training for Counsellors

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
- punish feelings
- outbursts/intense reactions
- criticism
- lack of support
- prioritising their own needs



Parents!

“(the parents 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 a narcissistic process – caregivers' unresolved trauma, emotional immaturity, or narcissistic traits = 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.”



Carl Rogers:

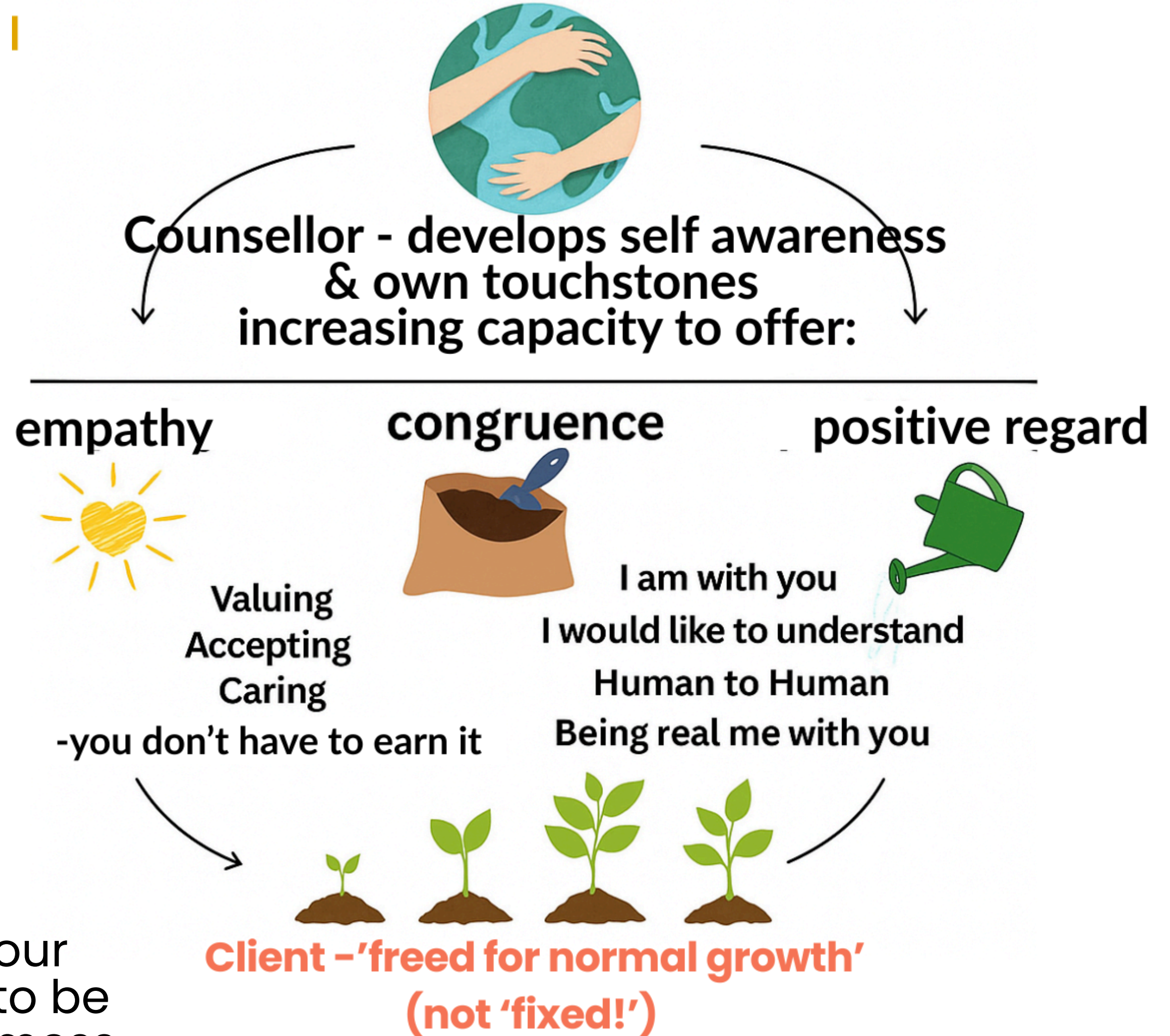
“In my early professional years I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth?”



**Meeting
clients at
relational
depth**



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



Scapegoating : a human problem



Reminding ourselves:

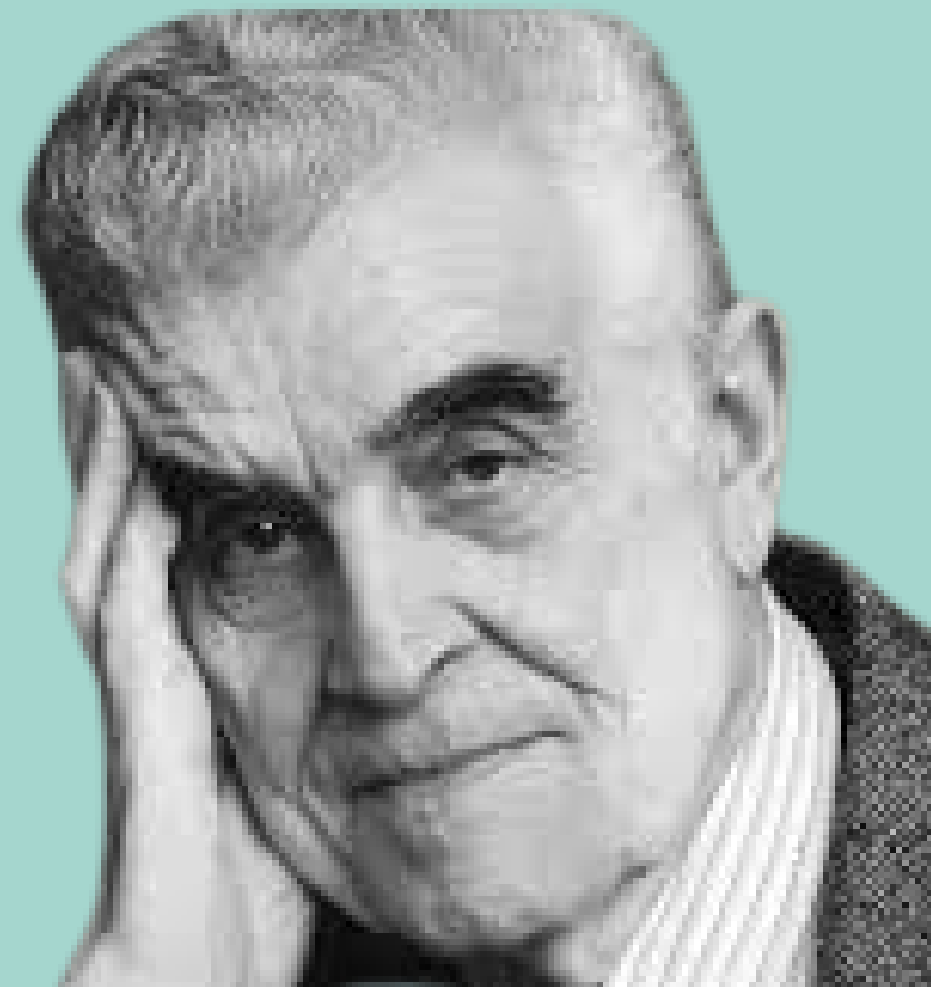
Scapegoating is a **relational** and psychological process where an individual – often a child, adolescent or someone with less power – is unfairly blamed or criticised for the larger group's problems or stress

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”

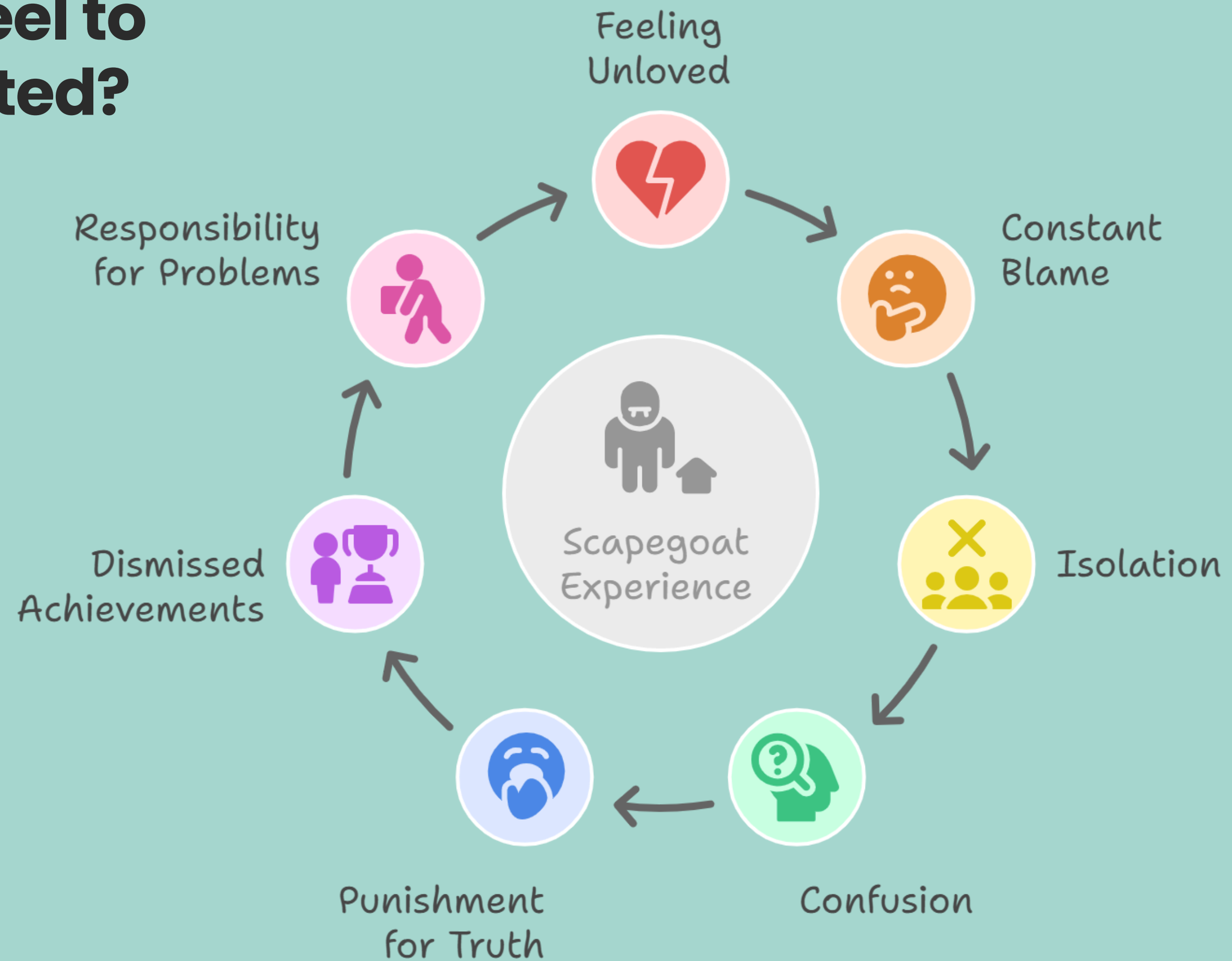
Girard's Scapegoat mechanism

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

The cycle brings 'peace' to the other family members – at great cost and injury to the scapegoat



How does it feel to be scapegoated?



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)

- Pioneering researcher
- Deeply damaging – silent but profound (can easily be missed)
- Chronic shame, emotional dysregulation, identity confusion, anxiety, and dissociation (can create complex trauma)
- Increased risk for lifelong mental and physical health challenges



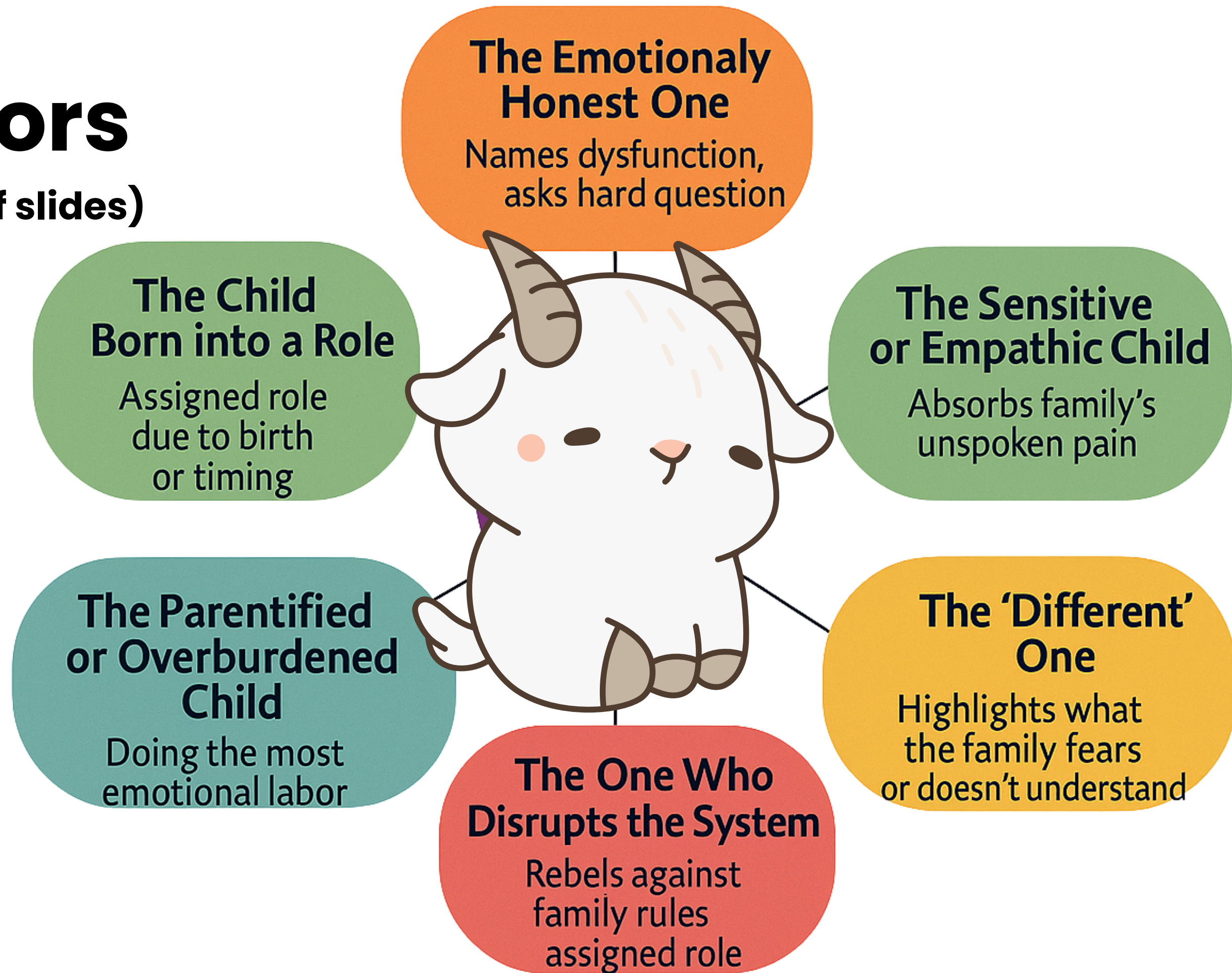
Links to Rebecca C. Mandeville's work:

www.scapegoatrecovery.com youtube.com/@beyondfamilyscapegoatingabuse

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

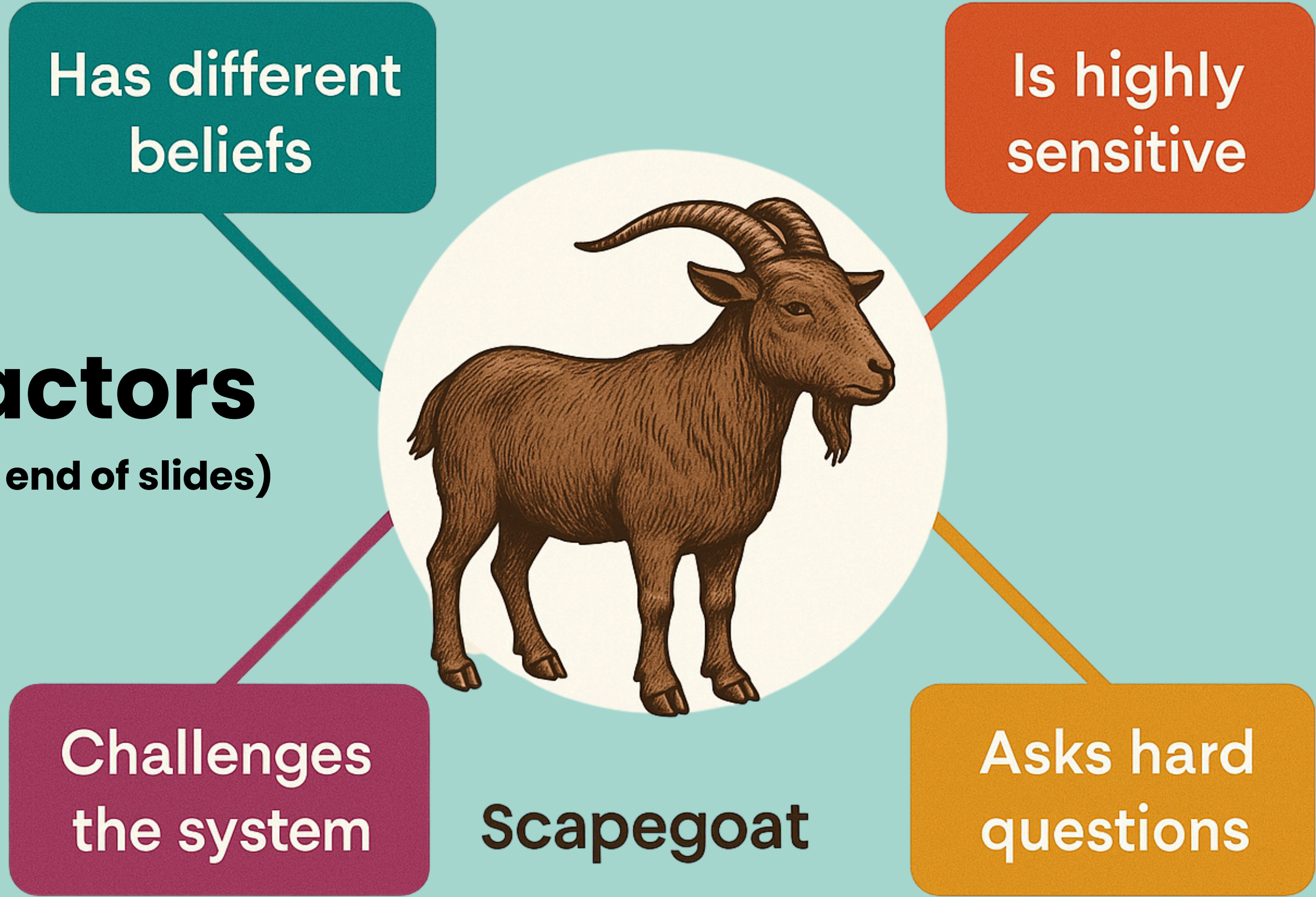
Risk factors

(references at end of slides)



Risk factors

(references at end of slides)



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" – but this praise is often conditional and used to serve the family's image or a parent's unmet needs

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



The Golden Child – the origins

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

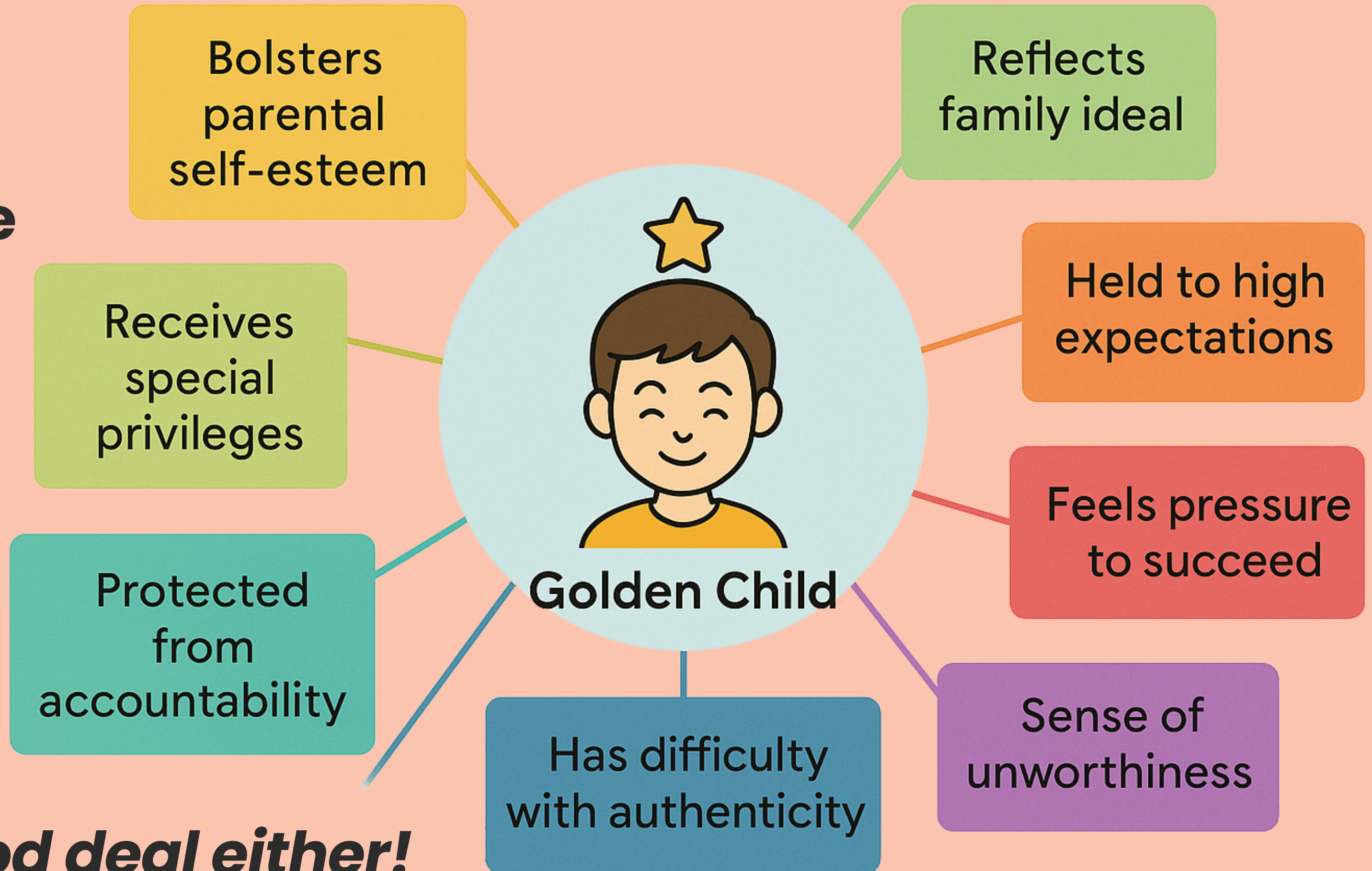
Donaldson–Pressman described golden children in narcissistic families

Brummelman et al. (2015) linked over-praise to perfectionism and narcissism

Suitor et al. (2007) found favouritism leads to pressure and sibling strain



The Golden Child's Experience



Not a good deal either!

The Golden Child

- Difficulty with identity and self-worth (based on performance, not self)
- Pressure to succeed and fear of failure (imposter syndrome)
- Guilt over being favoured
- Emotional repression or lack of authentic self-expression
- Can be linked to narcissism – inflated but fragile ego
- Shame

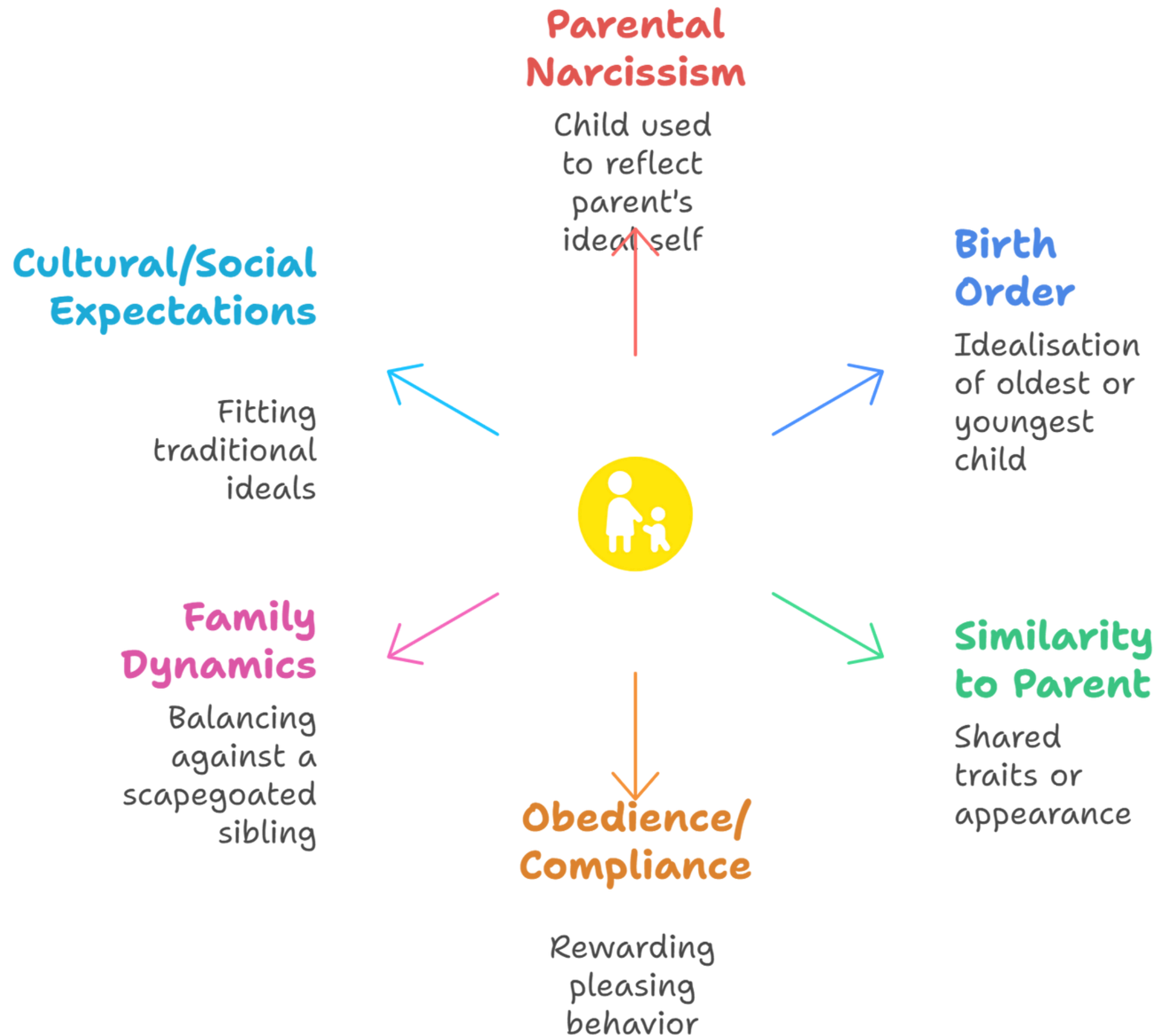
Suitor, J. J., Sechrist, J., & Pillemer, K. (2007)

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



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:

- Maintain the family illusion: The golden child upholds the “perfect family” image, while the scapegoat carries the blame and dysfunction
- Positive traits (success, pride) are projected onto the golden child; negative traits (anger, shame) onto the scapegoat. Each ‘enhances’ the appearance of the other



The roles often function together:

- Reinforce control and loyalty: The golden child is rewarded for compliance; the scapegoat is punished for truth-telling or emotional expression
- Protect the real issue: These roles distract from deeper family problems like abuse, trauma, or emotional immaturity in the parent(s)



See references at end of slides

- **Neither child is truly seen or accepted for who they are – both are controlled. Neither gets to be their full, authentic self**
- **Sibling relationships can be damaged or devastated**



References for Risk Factors for Scapegoating

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