

# Non Violent Resistance and Serious Trauma:

working within the larger system and trauma focus for  
intervention in multi-stressed families

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# Multi-stressed Families and Violence

## Context :

- Histories of child abuse, domestic violence, economic deprivation, social marginalisation and minority status. physical illness , disability and psychological difficulties, self-medication with drugs or alcohol and social isolation present greater challenges for therapists and families.



# 3 Challenges for Multi-stressed Families and their Therapists

1. Multi-stressed families have problematic relationships within the wider family and community.
2. Multi-stressed families have long-term involvement with professional networks and statutory agencies.
1. Members of multi-stressed families are heavily traumatised.



# Challenge no.1:

Multi-stressed families have problematic relationships within the wider family and community

- Isolation of parents
- Prescriptive/critical or controlling/dangerous communication by other adults, from whom parents seek support..



## Challenge no.2:

Multi-stressed families have long-term involvement with professional networks and statutory agencies.

- Prescriptive and blaming communication by powerful professionals.
- Fragmentation of the professional network.



## Challenge no.3:

Members of multi-stressed families are heavily traumatised

- Parents' post-traumatic stress, helplessness depression, and self-medication with drugs or alcohol.
- Child aggression re-traumatizes parent.
- Child's insecure attachment and developmental trauma: aggression in the wake of highly activated survival system.



# Shift from a victim narrative to a heroic narrative through nonviolence

## Victim Narrative:

language of  
obedience

focus on control of  
other

demonization of self  
or other

blaming interaction

static language

experience of  
helplessness

## Heroic Narrative:

language of  
resistance

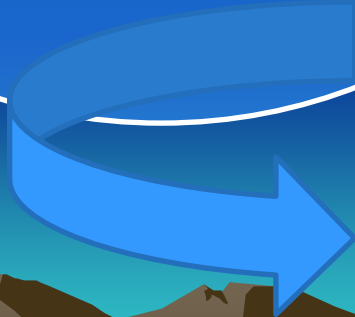
focus on self-  
regulation

person is more than  
his/her problem

rhetoric of alliance-  
building

process language

experience of  
personal agency



# Facing Challenge no.1:

Improving relationships between family and social environment.

- The *exception principle*: including safe and supportive others in positive action
- The *utilisation principle*: help critical, prescriptive other adults become safe and supportive, by centring the parent's support needs in therapeutic conversation – in the planning of positive action.
- The *resistance principle*: protection from dominance and coercion by using nonviolent methods to resist incursion into the family.





## Facing Challenge no.2:

Develop alliances between professionals, and between parents and professionals

- Routine *therapeutic network meetings* with parents, helpers and professionals
  - centring the understanding of the child's unmet needs
- *Supporters' meetings* involving professionals: plan positive action that professionals will be involved in, alongside other supporters – with the utilisation principle
  - centring the parent's need for support



## Facing Challenge no.3:

use NVR as trauma and attachment-focussed therapy

- Exceptions to the problem and normalising setbacks.
- Use the announcement and sit-ins as desensitisation situations. Use supporters as interpersonal resource for parents emotional self-regulation.
- Child-focus: reconciliation gestures for parental re-sensitisation to child needs, more secure attachment and overcoming developmental trauma



# Focus on the child

- **Unmet needs in traumatised, aggressive children:**
  - Feeling safe and protected: attachment, developmental trauma and PTS
  - Developmental support: ASD, ADHD, learning difficulties, life
  - Having a sense of belonging
  - A coherent and benign narrative of self and family



# Child-focussed NVR

- **Using reconciliation gestures to re-activate the caring dialogue:**
  - Reconciliation gestures are unconditional acts of positive regard, care and love. Persist, especially when the child rejects them.
  - Re-kindle the parent's attunement to the child and sensitivity to their unmet needs by planning need-focussed reconciliation gestures.



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Madsen, W.C. (2007). *Collaborative therapy with multi-stressed families (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*. New York: Guildford Publications

Omer, H. (2004) *Nonviolent resistance. A new approach to violent and self-destructive children*. Cambridge University Press.



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