

Seeing the Hidden Harm & Healing the Felt Trauma
Outcomes, Reflections and Learnings from the Flourishing
Families Project

May 2022

“SAFE’s input has been invaluable in allowing the school to shape an effective EHCP review that recognizes the child’s emotional needs as well as her educational needs.”
– Headteacher

Contents

We are SAFE	1
Introduction	2
Felt Trauma Therapy Approach	3
Outline Delivery of Flourishing Families	6
Outcomes and Impact	9
Emerging Themes from Trauma Responsive Therapy	19
We Want to Create Social Impact Not Own It	23
Systems Thinking, Systems Changing	26

We Are SAFE

Our Vision: A world free from the impact of trauma

SAFE Foundation is a charity with a bold vision – we want to see a world free from the impact of trauma. We know we cannot achieve this alone.

Our journey started as a local federated branch of Women's Aid in 1974. Today, we are a nationally focussed charity leading on domestic abuse recovery from our main base in Devon. We've honed our expertise to support people who have experienced domestic abuse and our team delivers a range of pioneering therapeutic interventions and programmes.

In 2021 the organisation rebranded as SAFE Foundation capturing the organisation's renewed vision and mission to build a world free from trauma. We pursue our mission through four pathways – direct work, training, research, and innovation. Our direct work gives us our evidence-base, our training takes our approach out to others, our research ensures we stay current and our work with partners and policymakers builds a movement to innovative approaches and influence change. We believe for change to be effective it takes a whole system to work cohesively. This is true of the families we support and we, the partners, must work together too to create change.

The great Desmond Tutu said:

“There comes a point when we need to stop pulling people out of the river and go upstream to find out why they are falling in.”

At SAFE foundation, we are doing both. This is our call to action, and we invite you to join us.

Our **core pillars** set out the behaviours, beliefs and attitudes that define our culture and underpin our work and decision making:

- Boundaries
- Respect
- Honesty
- Continuity
- Negotiation
- Boldness

SAFE is led by people with lived and living experience of trauma who have a deep understanding of how to help others recover. Whilst our recovery model underpins our work, it is our people that are the agents for change, and we keep the voice of the survivor at the heart of all we do.

We recruit talented and skilled staff whose ethos aligns with SAFE's values. The SAFE team have backgrounds in domestic abuse, education, rehabilitation, criminal justice, voluntary and

statutory sectors and have skills in modalities of psychotherapy, coaching and mentoring, project management and service design. Our leadership team have a broad knowledge of trauma-based work drawing on personal experiences and our Board of Trustees have a wealth of experience in the third sector, business, social welfare, finance and policy.

Our work requires skill, commitment, passion and compassion. It is as challenging as it is rewarding and it takes a whole team of dedicated people to support families to heal from their past experiences and to embrace the opportunity to reclaim their futures, as a family. We exist to make lives better for families today and tomorrow.

Each and every one of our clients and our people contributes to the success of our organisation and to the Flourishing Families Programme. We are who we are because they are who they are.

Introduction

In February 2020, the Safer Devon Partnership, Devon County Council, requested applications for funding to reduce re-victimisation and repeat referrals to commissioned specialist domestic violence and abuse support services. Following a successful submission, SAFE was awarded funding to deliver domestic violence and abuse recovery work for Exeter, Mid and East Devon localities. The application focussed on a whole family approach for the recovery of trauma experienced from domestic violence and abuse. This project was named Project 30 and was established as a pilot with the intention of reviewing effectiveness to aid future expansion of the model. Our initial findings from this project can be viewed in our report, [Recovery Beyond The Legacy of Trauma](#).

The successful delivery of Project 30 led to an extension of our contract and this has enabled a further 47 families to access the programme and receive support.

This project was renamed and is now delivered as Flourishing Families, herein after referred to as FF.

FF is a comprehensive programme which is designed to support the whole family, through direct and indirect working, individually and as a unit. The programme comprises of 1:1 therapy sessions, group therapy programmes, whole-family sessions, care planning/assessment, and multi-agency collaboration.

Throughout the project the family have control of their support. Work is done 'with' them, not 'to' them; support is flexible and collaborative.

“The past is part of your present consciousness – it forms the spectacles through which you experience the present” – Irvin D Yalom

Felt Trauma Therapy Approach – Reimagining the future for individuals, for families, for society

We know society has a problem. Staggeringly high rates of mental illness, domestic abuse, substance misuse, obesity and youth violence. More and more people looking for and needing help and as a result increasing numbers of people seeking ways, any way, that they can numb the pain and keep getting through until they might, if lucky, access the right intervention, at the right time, delivered by the right people. And let us not be fooled into thinking that this is only as a result of the pandemic.

SAFE’s approach to trauma recovery rests with the understanding of what we view as the hidden trauma. We refer to this trauma as Felt Trauma. Felt Trauma is the trauma of feelings, the trauma that is caused by not having our basic emotional needs met from our primary care givers. The messages that are given to children despite the physical actions cause our internal emotional needs to be dismissed and invalidated leaving us unable to validate our own emotions as we grow. This causes our emotional development to arrest, the trauma lays submerged within our developing psyche and a part of us becomes ‘stuck’ at what we refer to as our trauma age.

At SAFE we believe that most, if not all, of these people are struggling with life because hurdles, problems and difficulties are responded to from their trauma age and therefore their child self rather than their adult self. Life is daunting for children to navigate. They have more questions than answers and most of the key decisions are made for them by others who are, in theory at least, fully functioning adults able to do so.

However, these adults may well be, in some circumstances, responding from their own trauma age. If we consider this, we face a reality that children are making decisions for children. Children are raising children. The Felt Trauma becomes merged and enmeshed, difficulties increase, life becomes harder to navigate and we move from need to crisis. Services struggle, solutions fail, and we enter a perpetual cycle of damage that has built for generation upon generation. Indeed, it will continue to build if we do not stop and hold a different conversation – a conversation about Felt Trauma, a conversation that will enable us to view society’s problems through a brave new lens and support those who struggle to understand and heal from their Felt Trauma so they may become their own parent rather than remain the eternal child.

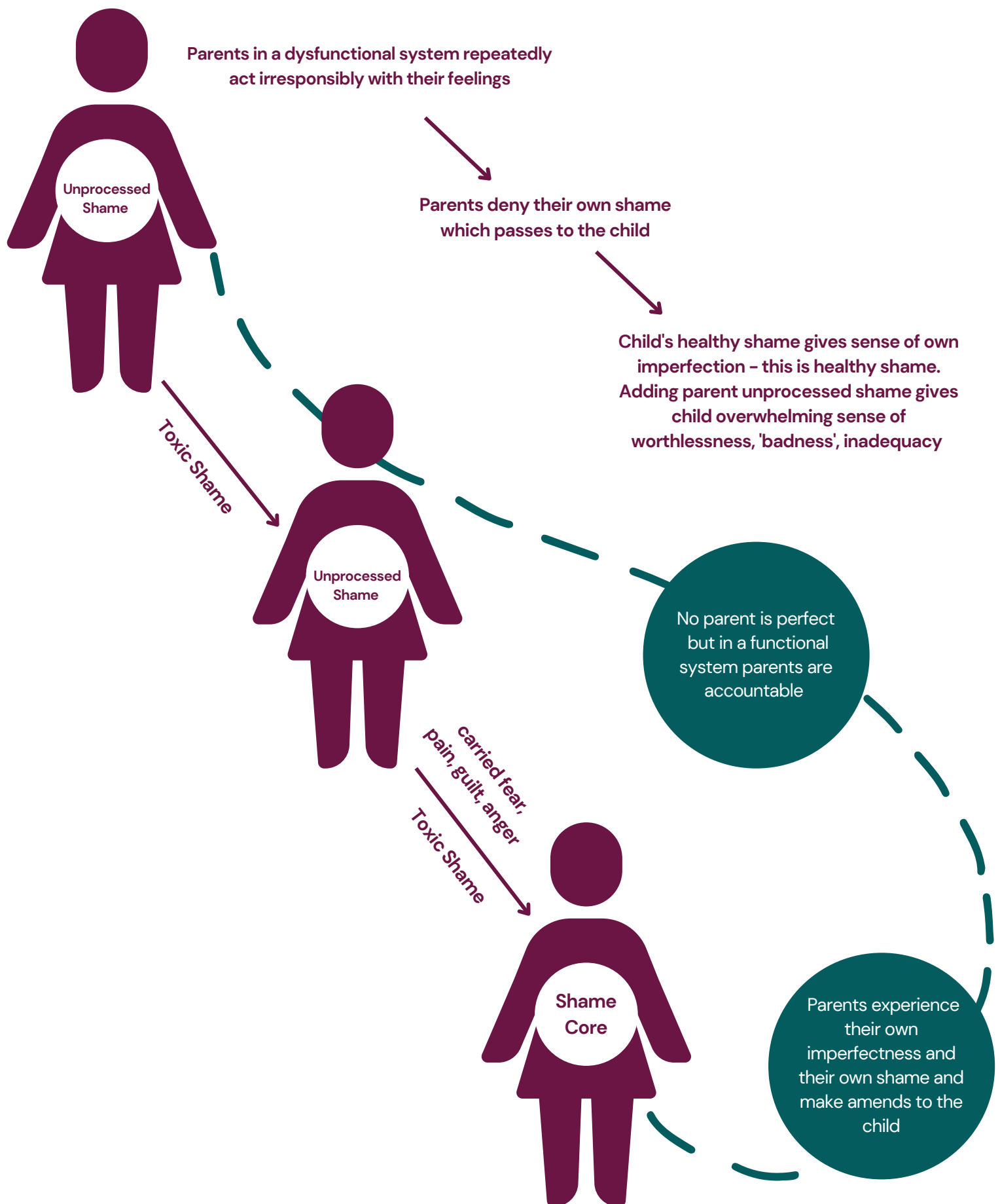
Without intervention our emotional development may never be started again, and we therefore respond to problems and difficulties from the age of our trauma rather than our chronological age. For example, an adult may experience difficulties with setting boundaries within a

relationship because they are responding to the relationship from their trauma age and as such in certain circumstances can act from a point of immaturity and be unable to engage on an adult level; or a parent who is unable to say no to their child through fear of their child rejecting them thereby responding from their own need for approval rather than the safety of their child.

We consider Felt Trauma to be a *dis*-ease of emotional immaturity caused by childhood trauma which renders them unable to do things necessary to experience healthy adult relationships. Felt Trauma arises from care giving that is anything 'less than nurturing'. It is subtle but persistent, it is covert and exists within the very fabric of the family. If Felt Trauma is untreated, it becomes internalised as a set of negative and damaging core beliefs. These core beliefs then dictate how someone sees themselves, how they see others and how they see the world.

Family culture and social norms experienced in childhood that are deemed as being 'less than nurturing', can lead to feelings of shame. Children carry this shame with them, from their initial core-relationship with their parents or carers, to other subsequent relationships with themselves and with others. This shame is toxic and effectively acts as a 'relationship pollutant'.

How Toxic Shame Is Passed Through Generations



It is important however to understand that Felt Trauma does not always cause difficulties in functioning in later life but, dependent upon further emotional experiences and our environment, it may present as anything from general unhappiness, inability to settle and find our place, to entrenched drug abuse and domestic violence, and everything in between.

SAFE treats trauma by responding to the primary symptoms that present as a result of Felt Trauma. The primary symptoms are an inability to esteem ourselves, inability to protect ourselves, inability to own our own reality, inability to self-care and difficulty being moderate in behaviours and thoughts. The primary symptoms, when untreated, lead to the development of secondary issues which include resentment, addiction, mood disorders, physical illness and intimacy issues amongst others.

Many survivors of domestic violence and abuse have experienced Felt Trauma in childhood. It often goes unnoticed for a long time with the damage of Felt Trauma remaining hidden. Damage is done to relationships with both the self and others and there may be a lack of awareness about why healthy relationships are difficult to achieve. Healthy expectations of relationships are lost, boundaries are unclear, attachments are damaged and as such they lose the ability to form their own identity thereby leading to co-dependence. The children raised in the environment of these relationships then experience their own Felt Trauma and so the cycle goes on and on. SAFE also recognises the prevalence of Felt Trauma in perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Outline Delivery of FF

We know that domestic violence is a gendered crime, however, we also know that the family structure is diverse. As an inclusive service, a diverse range of families are accepted onto the FF programme. For the purposes of the report, we refer to all parents and those providing care as 'adults'.

FF is a 12-month trauma responsive support programme. Input is flexible, and may have periods of greater or lesser intensity, depending on individual and family needs. We know recovery is not linear. This length of time enables families to receive intense, consistent, and quality support before moving to a semi-independent state as they embed individual learning as a family unit, empowered for the future, reducing risk of ongoing dependence on SAFE and other agencies.

We remain alongside families as they grow independence, providing autonomy but rapid intervention should additional engagement be required. Parental agency is continually prioritised – they must be committed to change to enable their child to change too. With a recovery focus, families move on after 12 months with strengthened healthy relationships,

beginnings of emotional agility and developing trust in their ability to cope with and care for each other through future adversity.

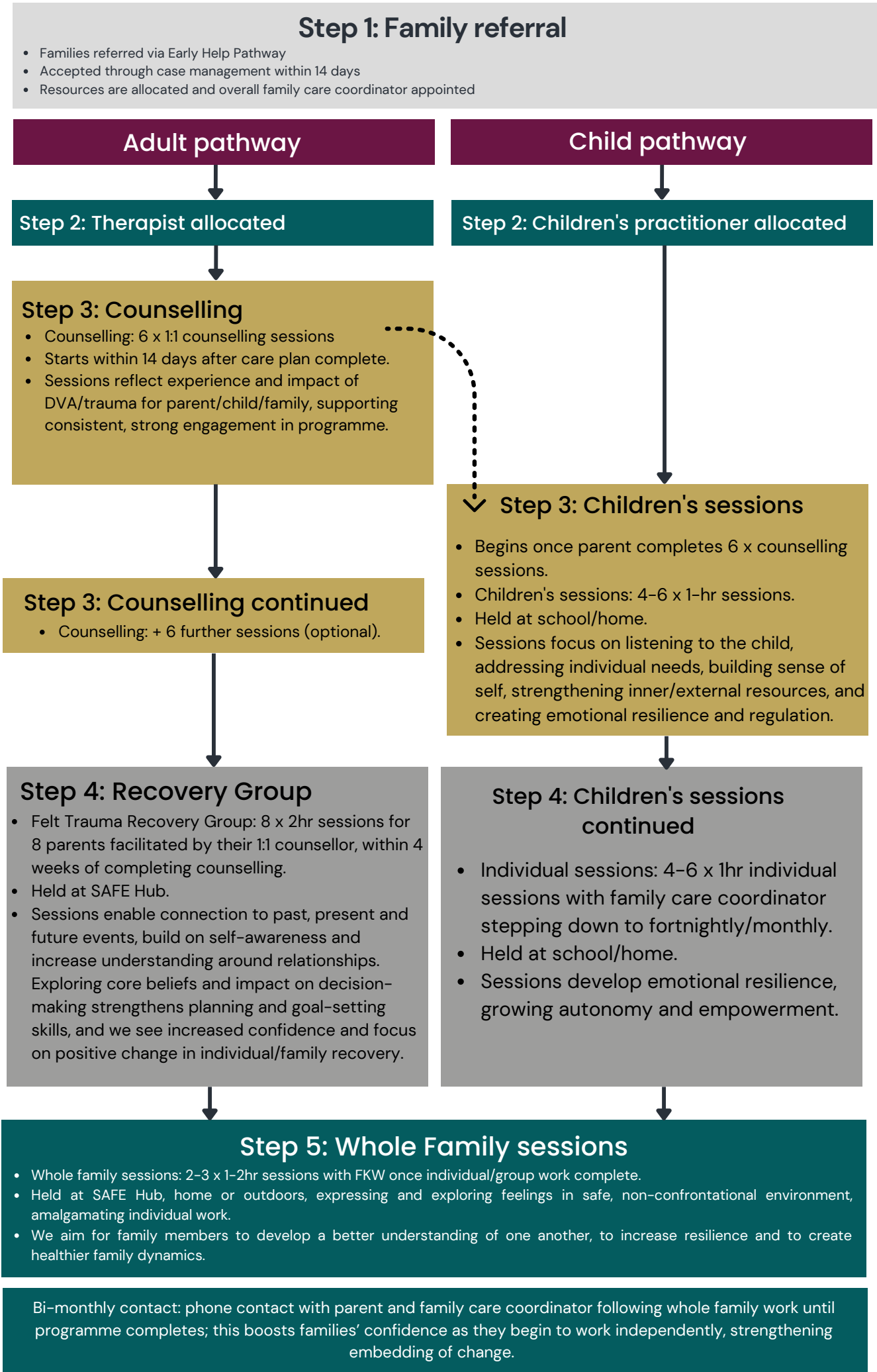
FF stimulates long-term healing and recovery, strengthening families. Individually tailored support promotes autonomy, growing trust and stability, redefining a family's experience of healthy relationships. By reducing the likelihood of children repeating devastating patterns of harm the intergenerational cycle of violence is broken, creating sustainable change, healthy individuals and a thriving society.

FF supports families who have experienced DVA, as well as Felt Trauma and a range of ACEs. The damage is deep-seated and complex; impact is unique but traumatising for all. FF recognises how early trauma influences parenting and care giving and the importance of understanding the adult's emotional needs and origins of experiences as well as the child's current situation. Everyone must experience individualised recovery for a family to heal and grow.

Families are referred to FF through Early Help (EH). We attend regular Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings for family and multi-professionals, ensuring we communicate progress throughout the programme and that everyone is aware of when our support ends so that the next steps for the family can be discussed and implemented seamlessly through EH. We lead transitions for children/families into other services if this is required.

This model provides the opportunity to implement change and families progress in and out of tiers through their recovery journey. The 12 month programme provides time to embed learnings and experience a period of 'light-touch' support, avoiding abrupt endings that can rupture progress.

Through consistently reviewing our delivery and listening to the views of the families we support we have made a key change to the model and all children from the same family have the same specialist practitioner supporting them and the adult has the same therapist throughout the support. These workers deliver all aspects of the programme to the family. This has allowed for a strengthening of the therapeutic relationship, ensured consistent and accurate information sharing, both internally and externally, and embed the trust that is necessary for deep healing to occur. Weekly case management provides a space for reflection and review so we can ensure the needs of each family are kept at the forefront of our minds. Monthly therapeutic supervision provides practitioners with a space to explore their own feelings and to support each other to navigate the challenges that are presented through this work. This internal support is vital for safety and growth and ensures we invest as heavily in practitioner wellbeing as we do in the families.



Children's support is tiered as they move through the delivery steps; children may move between tiers during the programme but step-down with their family at the end.

Tier 1: Weekly – short-term intensive work around emotional literacy and resilience

Tier 2: Fortnightly – preparing to step up to T1 and growing skills, stepping down from T1 and embedding learning, or stepping up from T3 (if struggling and needing short-term increase in support)

Tier 3: Monthly – boosting earlier learning and strategies, providing top-up support

Tier 4: Monthly/fortnightly – whole-family group work

Tier 5: Quarterly – family check-in, getting ready to end support.

Adults complete individual counselling before attending group (additional short-term counselling is available after group if beneficial), then move into Tier 4 and 5 with their children.

Outcomes and Impact

Our innovative model delivers support in the aftermath of DVA to children and the adult at the same time. Every individual has their specific emotional needs supported, before we facilitate them sharing experiences together, growing understanding and coping skills to affirm and strengthen the family unit. Adult group sessions bring comfort in commonality, and our evidence shows that sharing experiences reduces shame.

The child also experiences a centralising of their voice; by having their own worker for individual sessions shaped around their needs, their autonomy is strengthened, and we see greater agency for change. Our interventions, including storytelling, build skills that they transfer into home and school, including confident use of body language and eye contact, assured self-expression, and effective communication; they grow peace-making skills of negotiation, discussion and tact.

A holistic, whole-family approach is evidently more positive for families, reducing isolation and the secrecy of DVA. It gives the message that every member can grow and heal, empowering families to take responsibility, be accountable, and support and plan together in order to break the cycle of harm, be safe and thrive, to benefit this and future generations.

We have high confidence that FF leads to positive change for families as it is built on current research and evidenced approaches. At the heart of our ethos is group therapy, which reduces trauma symptoms (Schwartz, 2017). Being part of a group, or family of choice, brings many advantages from bonding and intimacy to hope and healing. Our blended offering is supported by evidence from early clinical trials showing the positive impact of Herman's 3-phased approach i.e. emotional regulation, trauma processing and life skill development (Herman, 1997) and their relative effectiveness (Karatzias et al, 2019).

FF has seen successful implementation and growth, with results showing that children, adults and families have the resources and stability with which to progress, are empowered to face their challenges and move towards positive outcomes. Data from FF is giving us a more detailed picture of issues relating to trauma and its impact on families. To date, findings are in line with national concerns around the short - and long-term impact of DVA. Our confidence increases with each evaluation and family's feedback as we build evidence of impact.

Figure 1 – Responses from Child / Young Person March 22

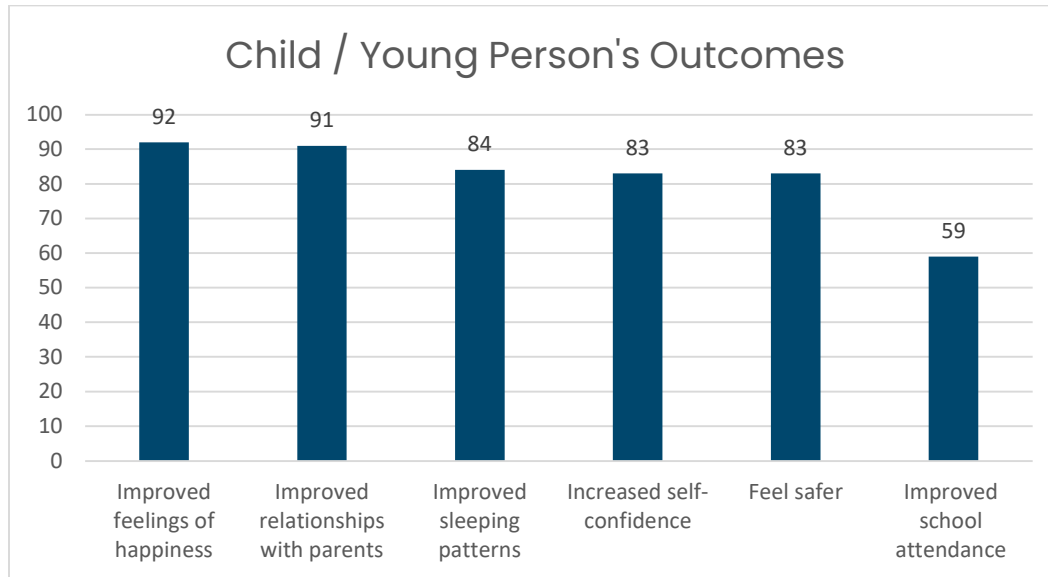


Figure 2 – Responses from Adult / Primary Carer March 22

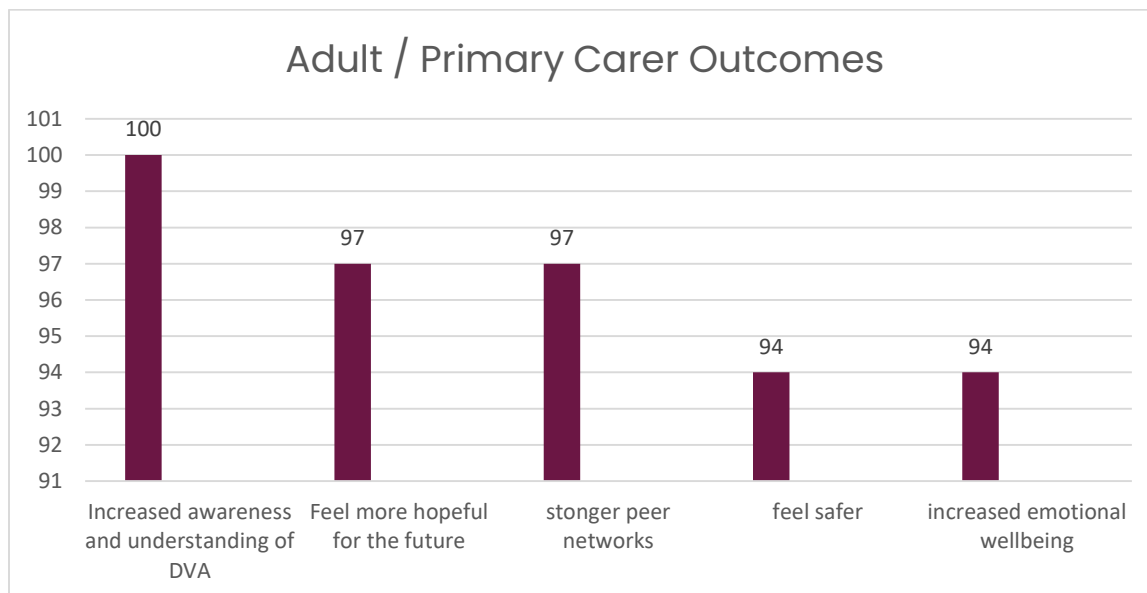


Figure 3 – Responses from Family March 22

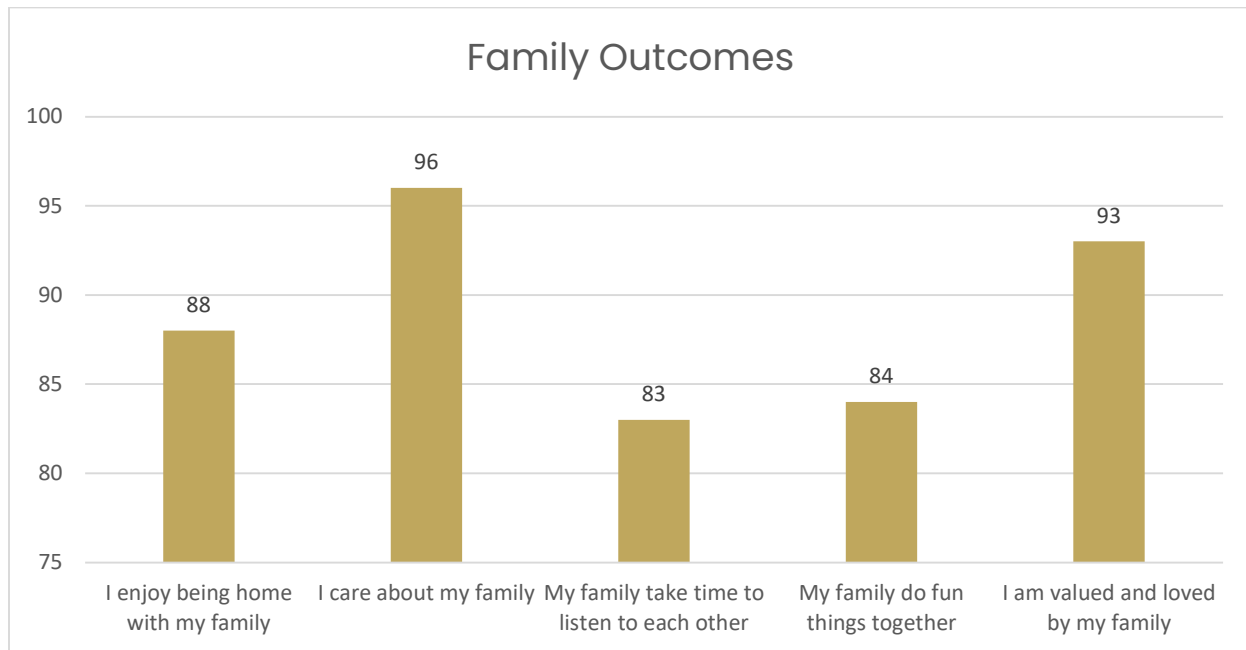


Figure 4 – Feedback from Education

We have begun to collect data from schools to demonstrate the impact of our work outside of the family home. These initial findings are shown below and we will continue to gather this data. As we continue to work within the changing landscape of COVID 19 we have needed to remain flexible in our approach and understand that the high rates of covid infection across the South West continues to put pressure on schools and other agencies as they seek to maintain their day to day services as best they can.



We have identified the presenting factors listed below during assessment sessions and early stages. As the work evolves, we have captured the reasons clients have told us why they may have remained in their relationship, and the third box shows how the unresolved Felt Trauma is being seen in the present and everyday interactions for our clients.

What are our clients presenting with?	
Anxiety	Minimising abuse
Depression	Poor self-image
Low sense of self / self-worth	Self-deprecating language
Fear	Isolation
Guilt	Dependency

Why don't clients leave the relationship?	
Trauma bond	Unsure if relationship is abusive
Feel they won't survive alone	Fear of change for self and children
Familiarity	Nowhere to go
Perpetrator can be charming and nice	Don't deserve better
Not good enough for anyone else	Family script

Felt Trauma's Lasting Impact – what sits underneath the presenting symptoms	
Little or no modelling to draw on	No relationship with feelings or needs
Extreme triggerable fear	All or nothing thinking
Co-dependence	Tendency to 'snap'
Adaptive roles	Unable to trust
Loyalty when it is undeserved	Unresolved desire for loving parent

Relationship with self

Clients arrive for group having completed their one-to-one sessions. One-to-one sessions provide the stabilisation work giving clients the beginnings of their internal 'map' – the map that helps them to find their way out of an activation.

We know there is comfort in commonality however many clients fear group despite a strong desire to connect – we are hard-wired to connect, but trauma creates a fear of connection. Our second session is often the hardest for our clients, a shift either happens by themselves or by listening to others. After this session, we find clients are more willing to be vulnerable and a meaningful connection to others starts to happen.

Trauma has its roots in shame and shame says we don't talk about it. Being able to share who we are with others in a safe environment is key to shame-reduction work. Group work is vital for this to happen. Two of the most comforting words clients find in our groups are the words 'me too', realising they are not alone brings hope, realising it was not their fault brings action and the process of re-parenting starts.

Once clients have increased awareness of themselves and the narrative they have been living by, they are more able to understand the toxic nature of their relationships and friendships and start to internalise a system of self-containment – boundaries.

The group becomes their Family of Choice, reflecting who they are. Feelings they used to perceive as negative and unwanted are recognised for what they are, they are named and tamed, and become resolved rather than reacted to. Clients learn to tolerate uncomfortable feelings without engaging in self-defeating behaviours and they find internal comfort quicker meaning less time is spent feeling out of control. They learn they are not responsible for what happened to them but are responsible for what they do now.

Relationship with others

Some of our older clients have had one or two long-term relationships and resistance to explore them is felt by clinicians. Often the shame is deep-rooted, and it may take more one-to-one sessions to prepare a client for group. Older clients often report their ex-partner is 'charming' with everyone else but abusive with them. Deep frustration and resentment that no one saw this is often a barrier to starting the work.

Younger clients present having had a series of unhealthy relationships – relationships have become more transient, but abuse is also more transient. Research tells us that younger couples experience higher rates of situational couple violence however if couples are not supported to resolve issues and conflict, this type of violence often leads to intimate partner violence and the relationship becomes extremely dangerous for the victim and children.

Recognising that what they have experienced is abusive can take time, and often denial acts to protect from the feeling of reality. Not all clients will move through the programme at the same pace, and the process of moving out of denial happens at different times for different clients.

Relationship with children

Flourishing Families helps clients to understand their trauma age and recognise when activated they may be responding from the young part of themselves. Children will feel psychologically unsafe when the adult is activated and responding from their trauma age. This causes the intergenerational trauma to be passed down – the child feels unsafe with the emotionally immature adult in charge, the child internalised the message 'I am unsafe'. The

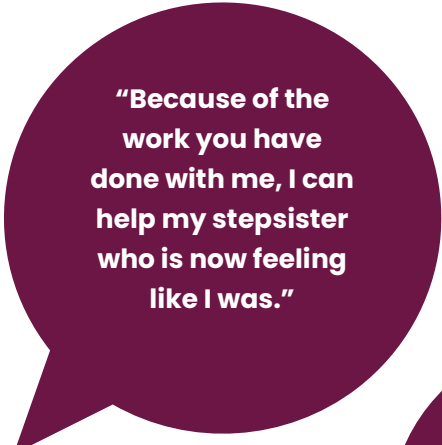
emotionally immature adult cannot soothe or contain their own emotion so will be unable to do this for their child, and so it continues.

The programme helps adults with the name and tame, soothe and contain process. This takes practice and is like learning a new skill – once mastered, we can do it for our children thereby breaking the cycle of intergenerational harm.


Through the Flourishing Families programme we are helping our clients create a new narrative, the clients task is to then live in that new narrative.

Flourishing Families feedback quotes:


Children



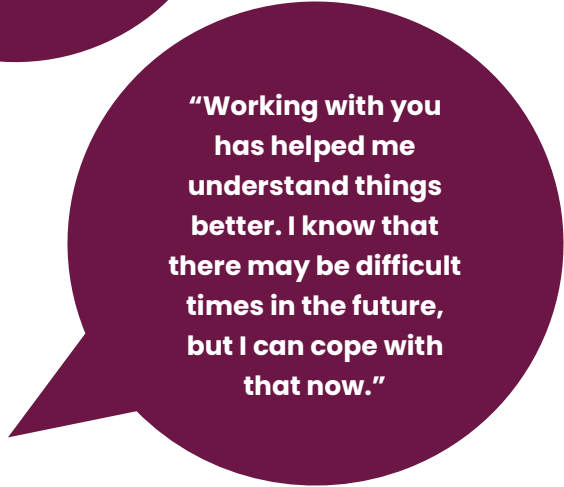
"Because of the work you have done with me, I can help my stepsister who is now feeling like I was."



"Talking to you has made me realise I can be open with other people and that it's good to be open."



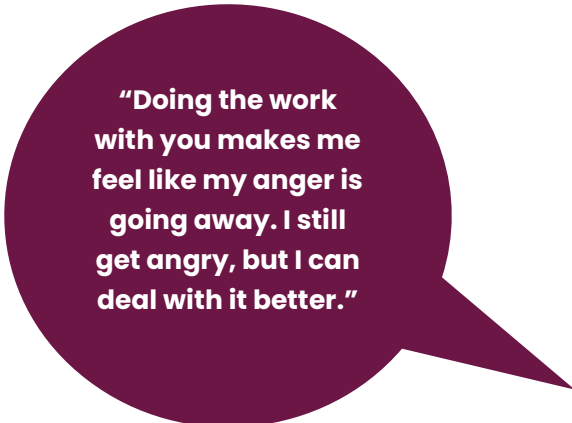
"I am a lot nicer at home because you are helping me."



"Working with you has helped me understand things better. I know that there may be difficult times in the future, but I can cope with that now."



"Now I know how to communicate with people better. I don't want to share things with anyone else right now, but it will be easier to ask for help now when I need it."



"Doing the work with you makes me feel like my anger is going away. I still get angry, but I can deal with it better."

Adults

"I have seen a difference in my daughter since she has started work with SAFE. She is so much happier and getting on with life."

"The most important thing I have taken from this is that now I know that my children love me."

"I am seeing my son's anxiety becoming less consuming here at home so you must be doing some great work with him."

"I know life is going to throw lots of things at me, but I feel now, because of SAFE that I can manage most things and that I am emotionally able to now talk to my girls about their thoughts and feelings."

"My counsellor has given me so much respect for myself and what I can do. I am so much more positive and happier, and I know I am a good Mum."

"My children have learnt to deal with all of the feelings and emotions they have been carrying from their experiences and our relationship as a family is so much stronger."

"(The group facilitator) empowers us all to think for ourselves, she is brilliant, I've learnt so much about myself from attending the group."

"I don't know what it is about you guys at SAFE, it's like you sprinkle your magic with everything you touch. You all have fairy dust that helps families, our family has changed so much, we are all so much happier, ---- is a different boy and can't wait to chat with you, he gets so excited. Nikki has given me so much respect for myself and what I can do. I am a good mum. I am so much more positive and happier. I have a couple a bad days a month instead of a couple of good days. I am so much stronger and more confident. SAFE have given me the ability to believe in myself and my future, it's just magic, SAFE are magical. We love you as a family. "

Professionals

"The service you are providing sounds amazing and vital and is great for families."
CAFCASS worker

"I feel SAFE are doing an amazing job and I feel the family are in very safe hands with SAFE, I can see the changes already in my clients."
CAMHS worker

"Sometimes a child's behaviour doesn't make sense to us. It's so brilliant you can come in and really listen to the children and understand what is going on for them."
School Wellbeing Support

"Since starting work with SAFE we have noticed that (child) is more trusting of the adults around her and can use her voice to share her worries."
Primary School Teacher

"Since starting counselling with SAFE we have noticed a massive change in (parent) and this is an amazing turnaround."
TAF member

"SAFE's holistic approach has delivered solid results for [the family]... who are skeptical about professional's commitment to them. [They] have valued the consistent and long-term commitment that SAFE offers, providing an opportunity to build a much-needed trusted professional relationship." – CAMHS worker

"In school we have noticed that W is a lot more reflective of his behaviour when incidents happen, and he is able to take responsibility for his actions and responses."
Parent Support, Primary

INTERVENTION

Cara was referred to SAFE under the Flourishing Families Programme. She told us she wanted to give her children a different life from the one she had and to receive support when it came to dealing with her ex and keeping her children safe.

WORK COMPLETED

In therapy Cara completed work on:

- Making sense of and awareness of her childhood
- Understanding how this affects her now
- Healing younger self & accepting of adult self
- Creating healthy boundaries & expressing these

CHANGE

Cara was engaged and committed to her process. She worked hard on identifying and then challenging her core belief of 'I am bad'. Cara felt she deserved to be in pain because she was bad. Now as an adult, when she felt pain she would punish herself by isolating and denying herself contact with others. Cara now recognises when her core belief surfaces and takes an action to reach out for support. Cara understands feeling pain is inevitable but she does not need to suffer anymore.

ASSESSMENT / CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES

Cara finally reported the last attack from her ex before leaving the relationship. Threats to her wellbeing continue and the investigation is ongoing. She lives with high anxiety, panic attacks and dissociation. She attempted suicide 5 years ago after the birth of her youngest, in the depths of postpartum depression.

PROFILE / BACKGROUND

Cara grew up in a physically, emotionally and psychologically unsafe and abusive environment. She began a 10 year relationship with her children's father when she was 19 years old. He was heavily addicted to cocaine and abused Cara for the entirety of their relationship.

I am Cara and
this is my story...

3 *'Talking about my past is really hard but I know I need to do it. It's dark but I feel like I'm finding my voice and tapping into my strength. That's giving me light.'*

4 *'I'm learning that I didn't deserve the things that happened to me. I understand why a part of me tried to protect my abusers. I need to remind myself daily that ALL of my feelings are okay. Even my anxiety and depression.'*

2 *'I couldn't ever tell anyone about what was happening with my ex because I feared for my life and my children's. I never thought I would come to therapy but I'm on my own now and I need help. I don't know where to start.'*

5 *'Now that I'm acknowledging my needs, I know how to manage my anxiety and better care for my kids. I don't feel so alone now, and I have hope that I can create a better life for my family.'*

1 *'It started when I was 5, and no one ever thought twice about the beatings. Dad would always apologise and give me gifts or money the day after to make me feel better.'*

7 IMPACT

Toward the end of her journey Cara felt "changed in a way she couldn't explain" and "in an entirely new relationship with herself." She still experiences emotional pain but has a deeper understanding of her emotions and doesn't invalidate them as much anymore. She understands that doing the action despite how she is feeling is an integral part of her healing and recovery process, as well as continuing the practice of strengthening her internal boundaries. In reflecting on her story, Cara was able to make sense of her history and gain insight into the narrative she told herself as an adult. In sharing her most painful experiences (and being witnessed in this) her narrative shifted and this empowered her to create a different life moving forward.

6 OUTCOME

As Cara untangled her traumatic experiences in childhood she uncovered that she was not to blame, that it was not her fault and she now understood why she felt so much fear as an adult. She gained an understanding of how these experiences unconsciously shaped her decision-making as an adult and how she now can take responsibility for her behaviour, thoughts and emotions. She learned to understand that her anxiety was masking fear and if she validated the fear her anxiety reduced.

INTERVENTION

- 1x home visit
- 14 x 1:1 sessions
- 2 x family sessions
- Attendance at monthly core group meetings and 3x Child Protection conference and reviews.
- Parent had felt trauma recovery group x 8 and 1:1 counselling sessions.

WORK COMPLETED

creative work was covered on:

- Feelings and emotions/emotional literacy
- Feelings/actions/consequences/choices
- Safety
- Strategies to re-connect with parent
- Relationships and family
- Support networks
- Positive affirmations

CHANGE

In her initial assessment, E's views were very negative. She reported that she hated going to school, rarely felt safe at home, couldn't sleep and was angry and frustrated all the time. She felt that people never listened to her and nobody understood how she felt. She couldn't express her feelings and her family didn't trust one another and never did fun things together.

After a year's intervention, in her closing assessment, these were completely reversed. She reported having a strong support network, enjoyed going to school, rarely felt angry and always felt safe at home. E completely trusted the important people in her life, could describe how she was feeling and felt good about herself. She said her family did fun things together, trusted and listened to each other and know when she is upset. She felt her family valued and loved her and she really cared about her family.

OUTCOMES

A month after starting family work, parents stopped smoking cannabis. This has been maintained for over a year now.

Family moved up to Child Protection, down to Child in need and back down to Early Help within the year.

E and her mum have a much better relationship. Her mum understands when she is being triggered by E's behavior and has strategies to control her

ASSESSMENT / CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES

E and Mum had a volatile relationship and poor attachment. E presented challenging behavior and struggled to concentrate and listen to mum or accept support. Mum said she saw a lot of her father in E's behavior which contributed to attachment breakdown.

E was distrustful of adults, but seeking attachment. She had problems sleeping, poor emotional literacy and was resistant to talking to anyone about her feelings and behavior.

Mum believed E had a genetic problem from her father such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder but she didn't meet the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service threshold.

PROFILE / BACKGROUND

Eldest child of two. On Child Protection (CP) for emotional neglect.

Both mum and stepdad heavy marijuana users. Stepdad supportive but inconsistent.

Mum was pregnant while when they came into service and had her third child while they were in service

DV from her birth father but the relationship broke down when she was young and she was suffering from the lasting impact of the trauma on her parent but didn't remember it herself.

I am Ellie and
this is my story...

3
'I am a lot nicer
at home
because you are
helping me!'

4
'Mummy helps me
to be calm.
Mummy's cuddles
make me feel nice,
happy calm and
loved'

5
'I have left all of
my anger at the
flat and won't
be taking it to
the new house'

6
'Now I can tell
people about my
feelings. I have lots
of people who can
help me. That's nice'

2
'I don't like talking
about feelings. When
I talk to the lady who
I have to talk about
my feelings to at
school I never know
what to say so I just
make it up'

1
'I am scared and sad
at home. I get shouted
at a lot by Mummy and
Daddy and I go to my
room and cry. I am
scared the police will
take Mummy away'

IMPACT

Mum and E have a happy, healthy relationship with good attachment and communication. E no longer needs pastoral support from school. Marijuana is no longer used in the family. The family have coping strategies when things get difficult. E has increased self esteem and knows her value within the family.

Emerging Themes from Trauma Responsive Therapy

The gift of therapy grants us the privilege to view someone's life through their own window. We create an alliance, a relationship, which nurtures trust and gives hope that clients can build a life worth living. We support our clients to fully reveal themselves so they may find understanding and acceptance.

Self-awareness is a supreme gift and one that will allow us the opportunity to become our true selves without the restriction of our inherited narrative. When we are supported to bring into the light the narrative we have been living by, and replace it with a new narrative, we move from reacting to acting, from reactors to actors. We consider what we are doing and who we are being, and in turn this reduces the impact we have on ourselves and others. When we know better, we do better. When we know ourselves, we can be ourselves. Challenges become easier to navigate, decisions become informed, problem-solving becomes manageable, emotional resilience becomes emotional agility and society becomes kinder.

Key to our recovery programmes is this essential theme. We strive to support those who are lost to find who they really are. To unpick the messaging they have been given from their caregivers and to discover for themselves why they think and feel as they do. They connect safely with their Felt Trauma and become their own healer which in turn they will pass to their children and their children to their children. Healing the Felt Trauma will change how our children parent for years to come. The greater our understanding of ourself, the greater our ability to find healthy solutions.

Several therapeutic themes have emerged during this programme. We have identified that clients coming into our service often struggle with the same things. Although this is the case, quite often our clients also struggle in silence with a belief that these issues are somehow unique to them. This makes them feel they have inherent or fundamental flaws, rather than commonality of the human experience.

Theme 1: Comparing self to others

We believe this is the core of low self-esteem. We observed a trend of clients comparing themselves to how others are doing, what others have, and how well others are coping in their life. Clients show a tendency to compare their insides with others' outsides. Because clients do not see what it is that other people are struggling with, they assume that they are doing better than them. Indeed, social media compounds this.

Most of our clients present with anxiety and/or depression. They reported feeling guilty, particularly around their parenting, tended to minimize the abuse they suffered and nearly all reported feeling alone.

Theme 2: More compassion for others than self

We noted many of our clients were relentless in critical self-talk. In many cases, the compassion extended towards friends, family or even others in the group exceeds that of the compassion and empathy they were willing to extend to themselves.

This showed up in self-deprecating language, using humour to mask pain and expressing themselves passively.

Theme 3: Wanting things to be different than they are

Many of our clients talked about wanting things to be different than they are, wanting people to be different, wanting circumstances to change, expecting things to be fair and wanting others to see things the way they see them. There was a real theme of looking back on things that have happened and wishing they were different. We believe that much of human suffering is caused by our inability to accept things as they are – focusing on what should have been rather than what is.

Theme 4: Distorted thinking

All our clients present with some level of distorted thinking. This shows up in various ways – jumping to conclusions, overgeneralizing, taking things personally, mind reading, thinking in black and white terms, and filtering out the good things and magnifying the bad. Clients tended to be overly negative and demonstrated an unbalanced view of their circumstances.

Theme 5: Social anxiety

Some of the most confident-seeming clients struggled when meeting new people and said they found it difficult to know what to say – often berating themselves afterwards for saying something they perceived to be ‘stupid’. Many had a fear of how others viewed them and had a deep desire to fit-in or belong.

Theme 6: Difficulty being vulnerable

We know most humans have a desire to connect with others on a deep and meaningful level. Even though this is the case, we observed clients often struggling to either let others in or share who they are. We believe that past hurts, losses, fears and wounding causes us to seek protection over connection.

Theme 7: Shame

Many of our clients carry toxic shame – shame that has been induced into them from their parents or caregivers and will show up in various ways. Shame is a core belief as well as a feeling – the feeling of being bad, flawed, without value or broken, a sense of if others knew who I really am, they would not love me.

Theme 8: Desire for control

We know many of our clients come from a background of chaos, unpredictability and dysfunction – many things were outside of their control. The need for control is often heightened in our clients and manifests itself differently – perfectionism, obsessive compulsive traits, manipulation of other people, high levels of structure or organization, a desire to change or manage the control of others, critical or judgmental to name a few.

Lower Self-esteem

I change who I am to fit in with others

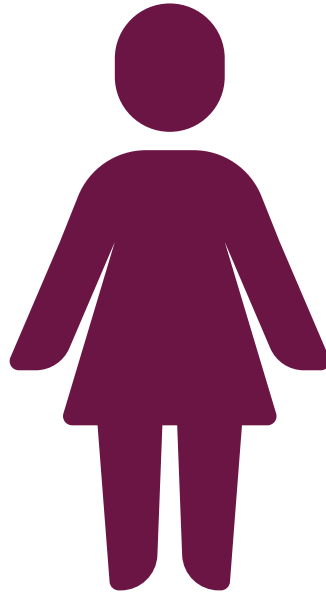
I struggle to make my own decisions

I cannot accept myself but seek acceptance from others

I struggle to accept I am good at anything and I am self critical most of the time

I need recognition from others to feel good about myself

What I am defines me more than who I am



Higher Self-esteem

I feel good about myself regardless of others opinion

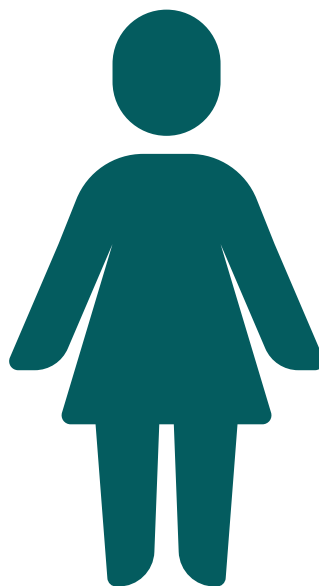
I am confident in my own decision making

I am confident in my own values and beliefs and allow others to be themselves

I am defined by who I am more than what I am

I am able to accept who I am and don't require acceptance from others

I understand my own thought processes and am aware of how I impact others



We Want to Create Social Impact Not Own It

Alongside the Flourishing Families intervention, SAFE Foundation has developed a one-day workshop that introduces delegates to Felt Trauma and our approach to recovery. Our Introduction to Felt Trauma Therapy workshop gives meaning to the Felt Trauma, brings in the concept of trauma age, explores primary symptoms and gives an overview of Co-dependence, Family of Origin and Addiction, Cross-Addiction and Trauma, and how these relate to Felt Trauma.

Delegates learn where Felt Trauma comes from, how it shows up in clients and families and how it impacts. They learn that by making sense of trauma age they can begin to make sense of behaviours in clients that can leave them, as practitioners, feeling frustrated, stuck, and helpless and thereby unintentionally compounding the client's sense of unworthiness.

We are becoming a trauma-conscious society and increasingly aware of the prevalence of trauma not only in our clients but in ourselves too. We want to respond to this awareness by developing a shared understanding of trauma and creating a shared language that all, not just those working in the sector, can make sense of. We want to respond to this awareness by sharing our approach, our intervention, our resources, and our expertise with other organisations. The training arm of our organisation starts this process - by building a strong Felt Trauma network we believe we can support each other, and influence systems change.

The Felt Trauma Therapy training does two things - it provides a clear, concrete, understandable approach to trauma recovery through a tiered training model and on-going supervision and support; it also encourages self-reflection in practitioners and how Felt Trauma may show up in us and in our work. As we become more aware of the Felt Trauma, SAFE's model provides a vehicle to successfully translate that awareness into action for both clients and ourselves.

Training in the half-day modules gives delegates a deeper understanding of the subtle ways Felt Trauma impacts clients and how it shows up in their everyday interactions. The Family of Origin module helps delegates to identify the narrative or story that clients may tell themselves and gives practitioners confidence to begin to apply gentle challenge.

To date, SAFE foundation has trained 137 delegates in our Introduction to Felt Trauma Therapy workshop. Participants from both the statutory and voluntary sectors have attended including Children's Centres, Social Care, Police, Youth Intervention Team, Family Intervention Team, Housing, Domestic Abuse and voluntary sector organisations.

Data gathered via our Evaluation Form is consistently strong with 97% of delegates reporting their knowledge of trauma has increased; 96% say they understand what Felt Trauma is and 92% report they understand how the Felt Trauma Therapy approach helps people to recover. 84% state they have gained an understanding of trauma age - it is through the understanding

of trauma age that practitioners can truly get alongside their clients and provide the intervention for clients to grow themselves up emotionally.

Qualitative data gathered tells us that delegates have a desire to know more particularly around Family of Origin work. When delegates learn about core beliefs and the narrative that clients tell themselves many of the behaviours that practitioners are seeing in their caseloads begin to make sense. This creates an excitement and a 'buzz' throughout the group, and a fresh perspective is generated. Many delegates have said so much more makes sense to them now – both professionally and personally.

Delegates who have attended the training so far have said:

"It was very enlightening! I've already used some of what we discussed with positive impacts on some students. I would very much like you to do the same thing at our school and will be suggesting this to our senior leadership team. Thank you!"

"Fantastic training, very informative and useful for the work we do. Gained so much insight and knowledge into trauma and how to recognise it to support the family. Would like to learn more".

"Trauma being a feeling was a lightbulb moment".

"Questioning our feelings and the importance of this in supporting parents to recognise their children's feelings".

"I found the whole day so beneficial. I have attended trauma training before however this was the most informative and effectively explained. This has supported me on a personal level and helped me make sense of a few things".

"I found it all so informative. It has really opened my eyes to the cause of behaviour. Every practitioner working with family's needs to do this training".

"Primary and secondary symptoms supported my understanding of how the primary symptoms relate to early parental relationships".

"I enjoyed all sections and feel that it is all beneficial. It opened up great conversations and lit a fire within all of us to take forward".

"Trauma age, interesting, related to a lot of my families. Would love to do the extra workshops".

"I found the whole training so thought provoking and thinking about changes that need to be made to our service".

"I had a family who went through Flourishing Families – I could not believe the difference in mum. She absolutely knew her core beliefs and how to deal with them".

"Looking at Felt Trauma and addressing the feelings was massive for me, previously I looked at the big stuff but this opened my eyes to what trauma is".

Our training package is evolving, and we offer various options to meet the needs of our partners. Options are designed to grow skills and confidence and for organisations to take the learning forwards and mould it to their priorities and their remit. Felt Trauma Champions are identified within the workforce who engage in supervision and consultancy with SAFE Foundation to take the approach forward and weave it into their organisation, like a golden thread. We know 'one size fits all' approaches rarely meet the needs of the individual – more often they meet a need of the system which is why driving system-change is a priority for SAFE Foundation.

Systems Thinking, Systems Changing – Imagine a world where people responded from their conscious mind

Families are complex systems. Domestic violence, abuse, addiction and offending are complex problems because they stem from the complex family system. Linear cause and effect solutions ignore the wider interactions within the whole system and therefore will likely fail. If the solution fails, the family fails, if the family fails, society fails. In order to avoid failing we must zoom out and consider how all aspects of all systems might influence success. We need to allow ourselves the chance to see the bigger picture. Explore how the dynamics of families are working or not working and alongside explore how the dynamics of societal systems are working or not working. It is good for families, it is good for everyone.

We need to stop seeking short term quick fix solutions that focus on behaviour change first and foremost and focus on healing the feeling. Shifting the focus from addressing the behaviours to focus on what is driving the behaviours or, in other words, addressing the root cause rather than the symptoms. We know that behaviours are a response to feelings, feelings that are alien and frightening – by taming the feelings we tame the behaviours. By understanding the feelings we understand the behaviours and by focussing intervention on changing the feelings we change the behaviours. Taking this approach from the outset will drastically improve outcomes thereby interrupting the trajectory and breaking the cycle of abuse. A sticky plaster solution just won't cut it anymore. We must be brave and innovative to look beyond the issue that is being presented and talk about the hidden harm as well as the obvious harm. This will require a different conversation and collaboration to find whole system solutions.

SAFE Foundation wants to start that conversation alongside our direct delivery and training offering. We want to create a shared language about Felt Trauma that can be used to drive eco-system change and influence policy. We want to work with partners and build understanding, togetherness and raise our collective voice to influence change. We want to share learnings, ideas and research so we can, together, build happier, healthier and kinder communities.

We continue to evolve our programmes and know we can always do better. Fundamental to our approach is the belief that when the Felt Trauma is moved from the unconscious to the conscious mind it alters our perspective of ourselves, others and the world around us. It creates knowledge as to why we may feel and respond as we do and with that knowledge becomes the ability to make conscious choices about our actions. We are aware of how we feel and are therefore more able to be aware of how others may feel. In other words, as we learn to have forgiveness, empathy and compassion for ourselves we are able to transfer that to others. We cannot give to others what we do not hold for ourselves. So then imagine a world when those around us acted and responded from their empathic self rather than from their trauma age? Imagine if people were able to be aware of the pain and uncomfortable feelings they have, understand them and allow them to be felt rather than seeking behaviours, substances or medications to numb it. If we imagine this then we can imagine the impact of this on health services, criminal justice, education, domestic abuse and mental health.

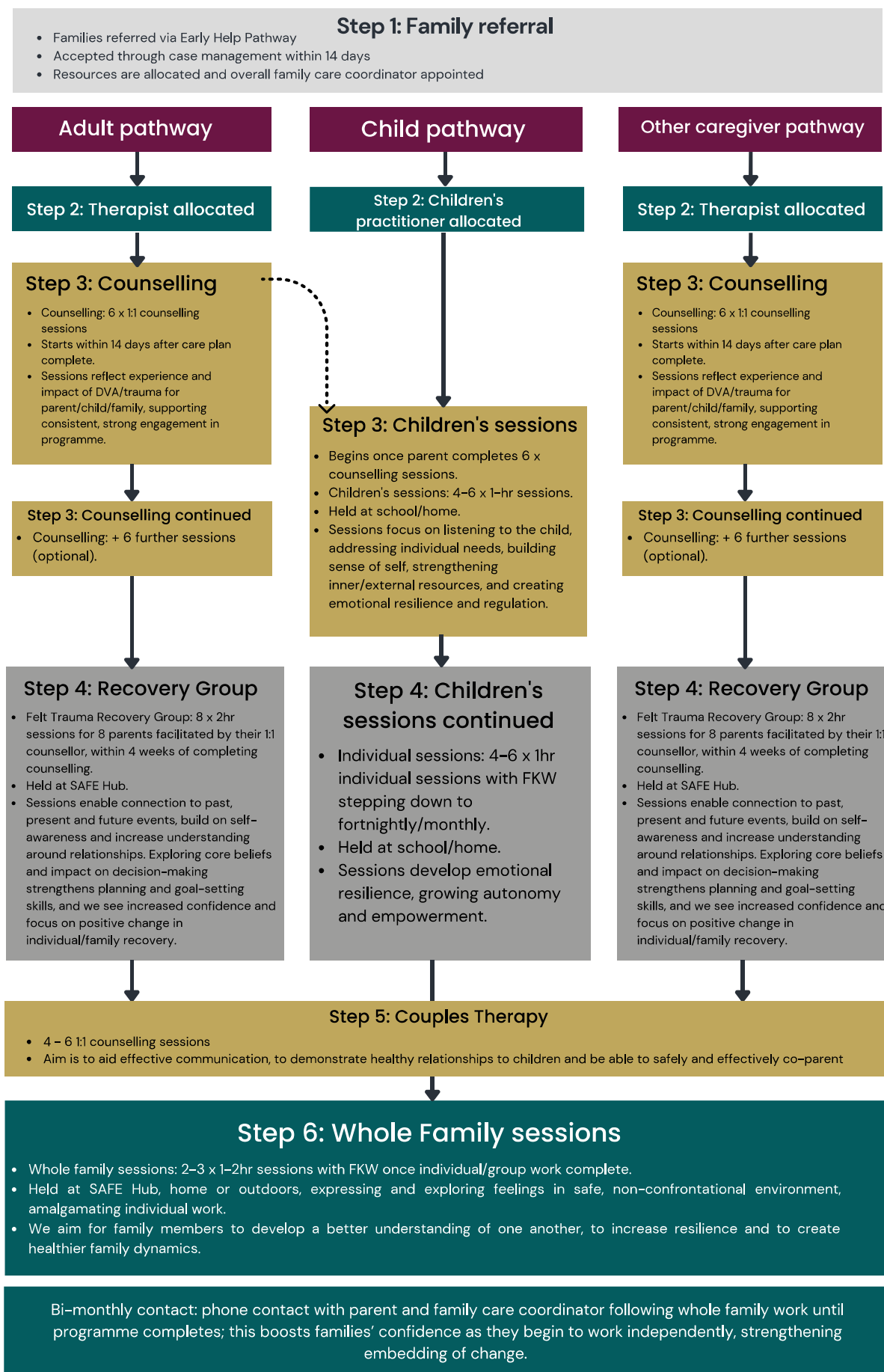
We know this is a big ask but we are not afraid to take on the challenge. We are happy to lead by example and demonstrate impact at local level to influence change at national level. Over the coming months we will be further refining our provision and adding the opportunity for the other caregivers within the family (including the abusive adult) to access support via the FF programme. We will work with the family and include extended family to increase the depth of impact we can achieve and provide the opportunity for healing across all family members.

As we extend our offer, we know that safety is vital and is our main priority. There are both eligibility and suitability criteria that must be agreed before any work is commenced with on-going assessment points throughout the work. We believe for change to happen it must come from our internal driver rather than external requirement – we hope to reduce abusive behaviours or identify a different course of action.

The need to work with the whole family to deliver lasting change is undeniable and is recognised within Devon's strategic response to the Domestic Abuse Act. We recognise that violence within relationships does not always come from the same place. SAFE's model offers a response to addressing situational couple violence, to respond to those couples where conflict and violence is an identified component, and they are choosing to remain in their relationship.

A Framework has been developed to set out why, what and how our approach aims to meet specified outcomes forming part of Devon's Domestic Abuse Strategy and where this approach sits within the landscape of domestic abuse. An Assessment Tool is in its early stages of development and comes from the Felt Trauma perspective to drill down into unconscious drivers.

The Flourishing Families Delivery Model (Including Other Caregivers)



We will be extending our training offer with additional CPD modules including, Shame, Co-dependence, Family Of Origin and Addiction, Cross Addiction and Trauma. Professionals from any sector and whole organisations will be able to join our movement for change by becoming members of SAFE Foundation. Members will have access to training offers, consultancy services, supervision sessions, webinars and other benefits. It will also be a place to share ideas, research, reflections and learnings. It will be a place to have the conversation we need to have about Felt Trauma and the damage it is doing to so many.

We know that Felt Trauma and the themes we have identified in our clients are not unique to the domestic abuse sector. Our work with our partners tells us that they see these themes too. Felt Trauma is identified in those who present to mental health services, social welfare, criminal justice, youth services and across the healthcare service including medical problems associated with smoking, obesity and lack of personal care. We believe what sits underneath presentations across these other sectors is quite often the unresolved and unprocessed Felt Trauma of individuals – individuals whose emotional distress gets pathologized or medicalised instead of viewed as a response to abnormal experiences. Our work now takes us into these sectors and we welcome the opportunity to shift the narrative and work together to deliver long term change.

As a result of conversations with Early Help at Exeter, Mid and East Devon, we have discussed a need to ensure that our work is responsive to those who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health but where there may not necessarily be domestic abuse. None the less, individuals and families are struggling to access support and as such we have proposed the trial alongside Early Help to deliver a specific mental health support service which will be delivered under the project name 'Flourishing Minds'. We must address the needs of the individual from a holistic perspective rather than attempting to categorise them for the benefit of commissioners and stakeholders which serves no benefit to the individual. This is an ongoing part of our desire to change systems and our drive to challenge the sector to provide intervention at point of need not point of crisis.

If we accept that we hold a collective responsibility to improve the lives of people who access services then for how much longer are we prepared to accept things the way they are? When we reach crisis? Many would argue we are already there. How high can prison numbers get, how much pressure can health services maintain, how many children and young people self harming through substance misuse, eating disorders and suicidal ideation is too many? Things need to change. The system needs to change. If nothing changes, no one changes. It's time to be brave, to raise our heads about the parapet, to broaden our perspective and to start the conversations. Conversations that will bring more clarity, care and

comprehension to our partners, to our commissioners and to society. Conversations that will make success much more likely – success in terms of both personal transformation and social change. We invite you to join us, are you ready to join the conversation?

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