SESSION
9

Having Children on the Island

Refer back to page 9 to remind yourself of The Holiday exercise we did. We're thinking about what it would be like if the king impregnated the woman with twins, and how she and her children would experience the island.

Pregnancy	**Woman:** Lonely, Lacking support (no family or friends), Reduced/no access to medical care, Scared, Forced to have a termination, Not allowed a termination, Lack of healthy food, No control of the finances, Can't get the things the baby needs, No control, Nobody to give her TLC; cut her toe nails, massage her back etc., May still have sex demanded of her, Subjected to physical violence (worried about the baby), Can't read/learn about her pregnancy, No antenatal classes, No choice in the birth plan. **Unborn baby:** May not survive or may be injured as a result of the king's violence, May not get the nutrients needed, May not have any developmental issues recognised due to limited medical care, Doesn't have a quiet and calm environment to grow in. Your ideas:
Newborn	Not allowed to breastfeed, Forced to breastfeed, No peace and quiet, No support for the woman, No wider family, No visitors, All responsibility on the woman, Might be prevented from caring for or even touching her child, Children unable to bond properly with their mother, Routine difficult to establish, May not have the right equipment that they need, Woman may become depressed and is isolated, No co-parenting support, She isn't allowed to choose the children's names, Children not stimulated as the king is causing their mum to be overwhelmed with everything, Not being allowed to cuddle the children, The king may insist that the boy has to man up and learn to self soothe. Your ideas:

OWN MY MIND

Having Children on the Island

9 years old	Not getting to school, They know the king is in charge, They may devalue and be negative about their mother, They may have behavioural issues from the king undermining their mother's authority, They may not have the equipment or healthy food that they need, The boy may be encouraged to be aggressive and unkind, The girl may be encouraged to be passive, They haven't had all their needs met up until this point, Not wanting to leave their mother for fear of what the king may do, Becoming one of the king's spies, telling him what their mother is doing,Feeling superior to others on the island, but inside feeling bad and isolated. Struggle to make friends, Feel unsafe, Constantly on edge not knowing what the king will do next, Feeling they have to keep all the bad stuff secret, The king may have physically hurt them, Issues with eating and food, Special occasions (birthdays, Christmas etc) will often be ruined by the king, Not getting enough sleep or rest. Your ideas:
15 years old	The boy may have become just like the king, and the king, will reward him for this (he may instead hate the king and resist his abuse), Both children may feel worthless and alone, Both children may seek to protect their mother in defiance of the king, They may begin using coping strategies like self-harm, drugs or alcohol, This will be what they've always known; it will be normal to them, They won't know who they can trust, They may join the island resistance. Your ideas:

Now thinking about if the woman and her children were rescued from the island, what would some of the changes to their life at different ages include?

Rescued when the twins are 12 years old	They might be able to get support and counselling on the mainland, They'll learn that their experience growing up wasn't normal, They can build a healthier relationship with their mother, They might feel hugely alienated and like they don't fit on the mainland, They might begin to feel safe enough to act out and be naughty, Their mother can show that she loves them, They can connect with their wider family, They can talk about what the king did to them, They should be safer. Your ideas:

OWN MY MIND

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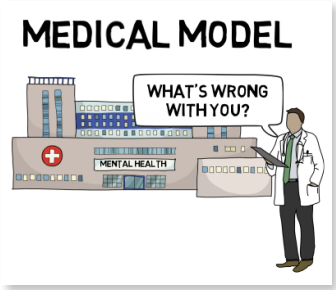
Rescued when the twins are 6 years old	They will have most of their childhood left to recover and move on, They will adjust to the mainland quicker, They have six more years without the king ruling their life, They can focus on things like their education and building friendships, The island can be de-normalised quicker. Your ideas:
Rescued when the woman is 7 months pregnant.	She can create a totally different life for herself and her children, The king will not control the children, The children will be able to have relationships with their wider family (on their mother's side), The woman will have had less exposure to the king's abuse. Your ideas:

Use this space to reflect on any thoughts or feelings this exercise has raised for you.

OWN MY MIND

Power Threat Meaning Framework

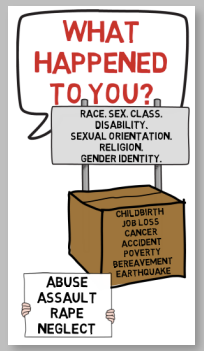


The dominant view of "mental health issues" is that, if someone behaves "abnormally", they are treated as ill and presumed to have something wrong with them. A medical professional will find out their symptoms, provide a diagnosis and then they will be treated. Treatment may involve medication, therapy, or other interventions. This is known as a Medical Model.

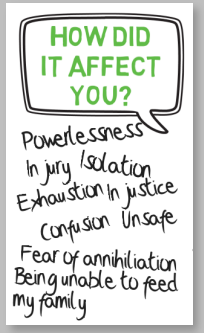
However, this model is flawed. Who gets to decide what is normal? And what if the behaviours that are deemed "abnormal" or seen as "symptoms of mental illness "are actually a normal response to abnormal circumstances? Mostly, the Medical Model is not particularly focused on what may have led to the supposedly abnormal behaviours.

This is where a different model may be more helpful: the Power Threat Meaning Framework. Rather than presuming something is wrong with people, this model assumes that something wrong has happened, and that most cases of mental and emotional difficulty are the results of situations where someone is negatively affected by power in their life and relationships

This framework asks four questions instead of "what's wrong with you?":

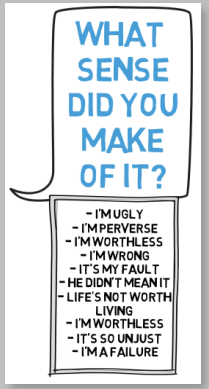


"What happened to you" is a question about how power was taken from us. This might be ideological power, where we're given messages by others, or by society, about how we should think, feel or behave. It may touch on us being excluded, marginalised or punished for failing to live up to societal expectations and standards, perhaps as a result of our race, sex or class. It could be because we have a disability, or because of our sexual orientation, religion or gender identity. It could include being stereotyped or ignored, threatened or discriminated against, disbelieved or denied access to services or support. This could also be about circumstances, such as childbirth, job loss, cancer, a car accident, the death of a close friend or relative, poverty, or a natural disaster like an earthquake. It could be when someone chooses to hurt us: abuse, violence, rape, or neglect.

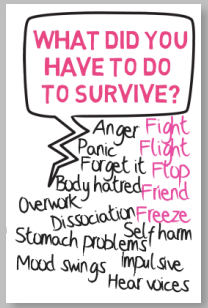


"How did it affect you" is about what was threatened when power was taken away from us. We might be overwhelmed by isolation, injury, exhaustion, a lack of justice, a lack of safety, confusion, fear of being completely destroyed, or the threat of being unable to feed our family.

Power Threat Meaning Framework



The question "what sense did you make of it" deals with how we dealt with what has happened to us or been done to us, our body, mind and emotions. The unrealistic beauty standards women are subjected to may leave women believing they're ugly. Homophobia may leave a gay or lesbian person thinking they're perverted. The messages in society that state that people have to be able bodied to have value may leave disabled people believing they are worthless. Racism may leave a black person feeling that they're inherently wrong. We may decide that the actions of others are our fault to avoid feeling powerless. We might presume that the person who hurt us didn't mean it, or make sense of our pain by deciding life isn't worth living. We may conclude that we're unlovable, dirty or worthless. Humans have a deeply in-built need for justice. When there is no justice in a situation, we might rationalise the injustice by believing that it must be our fault, or that we've failed.



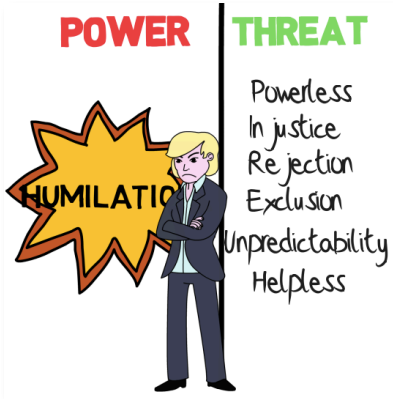
This question looks at what the Medical Model would call "abnormal" behaviour or "symptoms". In order to survive an assault on our power, and overcome a threat, we do things that our body, mind or feelings deem helpful for survival. Most of the time these threat responses are physiological, not something we can control: the Five Fs of fight, flight, flop, friend and freeze. We might also experience, anger at ourselves or others. Or panic and high levels of fear. Our mind might wipe the memory of the situation. We might hate our body and self-harm. We could throw ourselves into work to avoid thinking too much or use dissociation to stay disconnected from the pain. We might end up with stomach problems, be impulsive, begin hearing voices or have severe mood swings.

The first question is about power, the second about threat, the third about meaning and the fourth about threat responses. Hence, the model is called the Power Threat Meaning Framework.

Let's take shame as an example. Writer Rana Awdish says, "Shame doesn't strike like a fist. It rots its way in. Shame unravels us at our most fragile seams…It's unique in its devastating ability to make us feel exposed and worthless." Shame may feel deeply personal and internal, but it's a social emotion, a sense or fear of being judged negatively by others, not just for what we do, but for who we are.

In the Medical Model, shame might be treated independently, by trying to build up feelings of worth and value. While this can be helpful, the Power Threat Meaning Framework would seek to know what power issues were operating prior to the shame. Let's take humiliation as an example.

Maida's husband Gilbert humiliated her by mocking her at a dinner party. After sex, he made her watch him wash himself because he said she was so dirty he had to wash her off him. Gilbert's humiliating acts leave Maida feeling powerless. Her deep need for justice is threatened as she can't make sense of why Gilbert would be so horrible.

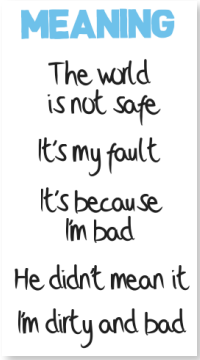


Power Threat Meaning Framework

His actions exclude her from feeling part of a world with people who have not been humiliated. His unpredictable behaviour leaves Maida feeling helpless. The idea of telling people what Gilbert has done horrifies Maida: she fears she will be seen as pathetic and that people will judge her. When she was at school, boys mocked girls' genitals and she's heard plenty of jokes about them. Maybe Gilbert is right - maybe she is disgusting?

In order to deal with these threats, Maida's brain, body and feelings will seek to make sense of what Gilbert has done. Deciding the world is not safe, Maida becomes distrustful of others and may become paranoid about her body, who she is and what people think about her. In order to overcome powerlessness, Maida becomes sure that she made Gilbert do it. If she could MAKE him treat her badly, then that makes her incredibly powerful. To deal with the overwhelming injustice of Gilbert's behaviour, Maida concludes that his behaviour is fair, because she is so bad that she deserves to be treated horribly. To make sense of Gilbert's rejection, Maida concludes that Gilbert didn't mean it. She creates a new narrative where he was joking or he didn't know that it would be hurtful. To make sense of living in a world where female genitals are denigrated, Maida accepts that she is dirty and bad.

The social messages she has received leave Maida feeling disgusted at her own body, while Gilbert's behaviour, and the sense Maida's brain has made of it, leaves Maida feeling alienated from herself and others. She may feel resentful and angry, or totally mentally defeated. She may shut down, leaving her feeling numb, and self-harming to try and feel again.



Under a Medical Model Maida would be asked "What's wrong with you?" But there is nothing wrong with Maida. What's wrong is how Gilbert has treated her and how society has damaged her. By recognising this, Maida can begin the process of moving forward.

In the Power Threat Meaning framework, the process of moving forward is shaped by two questions:

Accepting that we've been powerless, subjected to injustice, and rejected by someone is a LOT to deal with. So too is realising we live in a world where we are demeaned and devalued because we are female. But this acceptance is the first step forward. We can begin to make new meaning, writing a new narrative for our lives and identifying our strengths.

In her new narrative Maida may realise that she is not disgusting, dirty and to blame. She may recognise that shame was a way of coping and making meaning. By placing responsibility on Gilbert for humiliating her and on society for making her feel that her genitals are wrong, she can rewrite her narrative. Maida can reject the shame, instead placing it on Gilbert and the wider society, and she may be able to begin viewing herself as powerful and strong.

We can all begin making new meanings and writing new narratives for our lives, identifying the strength that we have and how extraordinary we are to have made it through.

We are not the problem and we can create a new story!

PTM Framework Exercise

Have a think about a situation where you have experienced power negatively. It could be about ideological power (e.g. racism, sexism, classism, homophobia), circumstances (e.g. job loss, illness) or someone's choice (e.g. abuse, violence). Using the Power Threat Meaning Framework complete this table to identify each facet of the framework.

POWER	THREAT	MEANING	THREAT RESPONSES
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?	HOW DID IT AFFECT YOU?	WHAT SENSE DID YOU MAKE OF IT?	WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO DO TO SURVIVE?

PTM Framework Exercise

If you feel able, use this space to write down some of your strengths (you can ask other people to help you) and then consider what your story is. Where does fault lie and what meaning do you want to make of your life?

What are my strengths?	What is my story?

The Power Threat Meaning Framework was developed by the British Psychological Society to provide an alternative way of understanding mental health issues. Lucy Johnstone, one of the lead authors explains:

"The Power Threat Meaning Framework can be used as a way of helping people to create more hopeful narratives or stories about their lives and the difficulties they have faced or are still facing, instead of seeing themselves as blameworthy, weak, deficient or 'mentally ill'. It highlights and clarifies the links between wider social factors such as poverty, discrimination and inequality, along with traumas such as abuse and violence, and the resulting emotional distress or troubled behaviour, whether it is confusion, fear, despair or troubled or troubling behaviour. It also shows why those of us who do not have an obvious history of trauma or adversity can still struggle to find a sense of self-worth, meaning and identity."

More information about the Framework can be found at: https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/introducing-power-threat-meaning-framework

Did you find the Power Threat Meaning Framework useful and/or helpful?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Not sure

Child Contact

Enid left her fiancé Earl after he was violent and controlling. Although Enid had custody of their son Percy, who is four, Earl has contact every other weekend, starting at 6pm on Friday. Each Friday night, Earl arrives 30 minutes early and sits outside beeping his horn and revving his engine. Percy becomes extremely anxious and their Friday dinnertime is almost always ruined by Earl's intimidating behaviour. During contact Earl constantly undermines Enid's rules for Percy's behaviour and frequently makes unkind comments about Enid to Percy.

ACTION	
OBSTACLE	
OVERCOME	

ACTION	
OBSTACLE	
OVERCOME	

ACTION	
OBSTACLE	
OVERCOME	

ACTION	
OBSTACLE	
OVERCOME	

In the table write:

1. Actions Enid could take to change things for the better.
2. Obstacles Earl might put in Enid's way to prevent her achieving change.
3. Ways Enid could overcome Earl's obstacles.

OWN MY CHOICES

Children's Roles Quiz Part 1

Put a tick in the column on the right for each child you would be concerned about.

	Tick
1. Edna is seven. She is very quiet and shy. Her teacher, Mr Smith, says that she never puts her hand up in class, generally she sits on her own at break and lunch, and doesn't like to join in much with the games children are playing.	
2. Hilda is eleven. She is constantly telling tales. At home she tells her dad how her mum has not let her do what she wants. When she was playing a game on her mum's phone, her mum caught her reading the text messages.	
3. Victor is six. He regularly pretends to be poorly to stay off school, especially if his dad is home from working away. He always tries to keep everything tidy as he knows mess makes his dad cross. He gives his dad lots of cuddles so that his dad feels happy.	
4. Clifton is twelve. When he was eight he was diagnosed with ADHD. He is no longer in mainstream school as he tried to burn it down. His parents don't know how to help him behave.	
5. Gladys is nine. She doesn't eat much and her mum has noticed she's been pulling her hair out. She keeps on having time off school, complaining of tummy aches.	
6. Linus is ten. He is predicted to get high grades for his SATs. His teacher Ms Brown says he is perfectly behaved. At home he always does as he is told and rarely gets told off.	
7. Mortimer is eight. At school he refuses to do what he is told, at home he screams and swears at his mum. Occasionally he has thrown his toys at her and kicked her.	

OWN MY RELATIONSHIPS

Children's Roles

The Problem Child

Acts up at home and/or school. They may be diagnosed with behavioural issues and are difficult, if not impossible, to manage.

The Star Pupil

Tries to make everyone happy so they will stop fighting. They are usually very well behaved, excel at school and seem to be unaffected by what the abuser is doing.

The Informer

Seeks to gain approval, they are encouraged by the abuser to tell him everything we do and are rewarded for passing information about us on to the abuser. It can feel like they are siding against us and blame us for everything.

The Peacekeeper

Tries to calm situations down, they become the negotiator and they want to fix the problems.

The Invisible

Stays quiet and hides from the abuse, they may be withdrawn and much quieter than it is normal for children to be.

When a child is living with (or has contact with) a parent who has been abusive, there are various roles they may take to deal with what that parent is doing. In order to support children well, it is helpful to understand these roles, and what strategy is being used to try and keep the child emotionally and/or physically safe.

Use this space if it would be helpful to write or draw your thoughts or feelings about the roles children may play to deal with what is being done around them.

The Copycat

Becomes abusive too. They may call us names, become violent, and will be disrespectful to us constantly.

The Scapegoat

Takes the blame for the abuse, this might be because they feel it is their fault or because they are told it is.

OWN MY RELATIONSHIPS

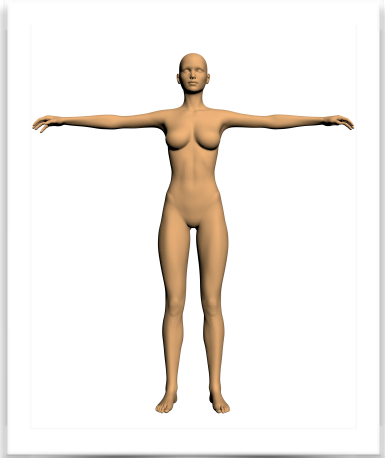
Children's Roles Quiz Part 2

Having now read through the Children's Roles and with a bit more information about each child, which role is each child using?

	Role
1. Edna is seven. She is very quiet and shy. Her teacher, Mr Smith, says that she never puts her hand up in class, generally she sits on her own at break and lunch, and doesn't like to join in much with the games children are playing. At home when things kick off, she hides under her bed until it's over.	
2. Hilda is eleven. She is constantly telling tales. At home she tells her dad how her mum has not let her do what she wants. When she was playing a game on her mum's phone, her mum caught her reading the text messages. When her mum asked her what she was doing, Hilda said her dad had told her he would give her extra pocket money if she told him what her mum had been up to.	
3. Victor is six. He regularly pretends to be poorly to stay off school, especially if his dad is home from working away. He always tries to keep everything tidy as he knows mess makes his dad cross. He gives his dad lots of cuddles so that his dad feels happy. If things kick off at home, Victor tries to calm his dad down.	
4. Clifton is twelve. When he was eight he was diagnosed with ADHD. He is no longer in mainstream school as he tried to burn it down. His mum doesn't know how to help him behave. His dad is in prison after he tried to kill Clifton's mum.	
5. Gladys is nine. She doesn't eat much and her mum has noticed she's been pulling her hair out. She keeps on having time off school, complaining of tummy aches. Gladys blames herself for what her step-dad does at home.	
6. Linus is ten. He is predicted to get high grades for his SATs. His teacher Ms Brown says he is perfectly behaved. At home he always does as he is told and rarely gets told off. Linus' mum's boyfriend controls everything his mum does and at night when Linus is supposed to be asleep, he hears his mum trying not to cry.	
7. Mortimer is eight. At school he refuses to do what he is told, at home he screams and swears at his mum. Occasionally he has thrown his toys at her and kicked her. Mortimer's dad also does this to his mum.	

OWN MY RELATIONSHIPS

Body Modification



Women have bodies, each unique and amazing. But we live in a society that tells us that we should hate our bodies. We're encouraged to bleach or dye our hair, straighten it, perm it, cut or grow it. To wear make-up and use tweezers, threading or wax on our eyebrows and other facial hair. To use moisturiser to avoid wrinkles. If the hair on our arms is visible, we're told to bleach or wax it. Our nails must be grown, painted or covered with acrylics. Our armpits must be shaved or waxed. Our breasts must be perky, through push up bras, underwires or surgery. Our stomachs must be flat, even after having children. We are told to use tummy control underwear, to starve ourselves or to have surgery. We are told to change how our genitals smell, to shave or wax our pubic hair and to have surgery if our vulvas aren't neat or our vaginas aren't tight. We're told to shave or wax our legs, while our feet must be squeezed into high heels that are damaging and unhealthy. If our skin is light, we're told to tan it with sun beds or tanning lotion. If our skin is dark, we're told to bleach it. And in the end, there's nothing left of us.

Very few women could honestly say they have never modified their body. Even before we are teenagers, most of us felt that we needed to change things about us. On reaching puberty and growing body hair, most of us will have begun removing it, along with seeking to change our appearance with make up, dieting, push up bras and more. However, if any of us were to look at a baby girl, each of us would think she was perfect and couldn't imagine suggesting she need to change in any way. Why does so much change between a girl baby as she grows up?

Most of us would justify our body modification by saying we do it for ourselves, that it makes us feel better about ourselves, but is that really true? Or is it because we live in a world where all the messages we receive tell us we are not good enough and need to modify ourselves to be good enough?

What thoughts or feelings did the Body Modification video bring up for you?

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Consider the ways you modify your body and how old you were when you started. What does the things you do to modify yourself say about you?

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Think of a girl child you know and care about. How might you help her not to feel like she needs to modify herself to feel good enough?

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Notes

OWN MY LIFE