

Recovery After Violence Support

Journey Map & 'Tree of Life'

PEER
SUPPORT
GROUP



Recovery After Violence Support



PEER SUPPORT GROUP

Page 03	PART ONE: JOURNEY MAP Tips, suggestions and resources to help prepare to leave a relationship where violence has been present; and thoughts about how to go forward in the best interests of your children
Page 05	1. I want to leave or seek alternatives to be able to stay at home safely
Page 07	2. I just left – what to do?
Page 08	3. Recovery from abuse... starting & continuing the healing journey
Page 09	4. Assisting children and young people
Page 09	5. Navigating post-separation & behaviour to look out for
Page 10	6. Mediation
Page 11	7. Court

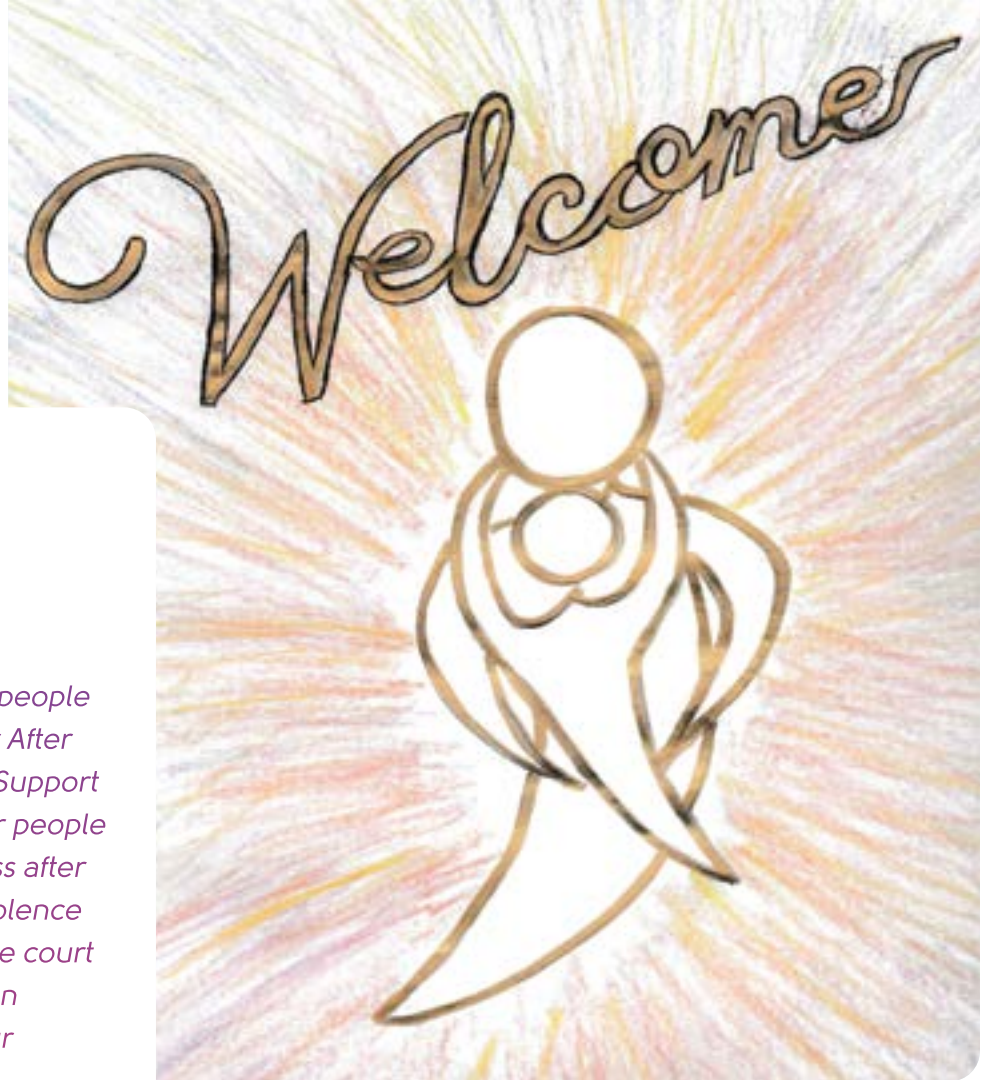


INSIDE

Page 12	PART TWO: 'TREE OF LIFE' A useful process to keep up our courage and stay connected to ourselves and others
Page 14	'Tree of Life' process
Page 15	Part A: Creating your 'tree'
Page 16	Part B: Forest gathering
Page 17	Part C: Getting through 'storms' Part D: Celebrations
Page 18	Thank yous

Acknowledgement of Country

Anglicare WA acknowledges the Aboriginal peoples of Western Australia as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which Anglicare WA works. We are privileged to work with and alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past and present.



To others who are on the journey...

Hello. We are a small group of people who met through the Recovery After Violence Support (RAVS) Peer Support Group. The support group is for people going through the court process after leaving a relationship where violence was present. For many of us, the court process has been a continuation of struggles that we faced in our relationships.

Thinking about a better future for our kids has been one of the ways we have kept strong and been able to keep going through the journey, however hard things have been.

Some of us have been through the journey and are coming out the other side (it does come!). Others are at the beginning or middle of the court process journey. All of us have learnt a lot through navigating all the aspects of life we've had to face.

We'd like to share some of the things we've learned, in the hope you might find something of use amongst it all. This resource is a small glimpse of all the learnings we have to share, we hope it helps to keep you going through the hard times and find a smoother path. Perhaps we'll see you at a future Peer Support Group gathering.

Warmly, Participants of the Recovery After Violence Support Peer Support Group May 2022

The resource is in two parts:

PART ONE: Journey Map (page 4-11)

We outline possible ways things might unfold as you travel through the court process. There are information and resources for each part of the journey, put together from our own experience and learning. RAVS workers contributed to give a fuller picture of what's out there to help get us through.

We also hope you might add your learnings (through RAVS) as time goes by.

We wish you and your loved ones a safe journey through the court process and beyond .

PART TWO: The 'Tree of Life' Process (page 12-18)

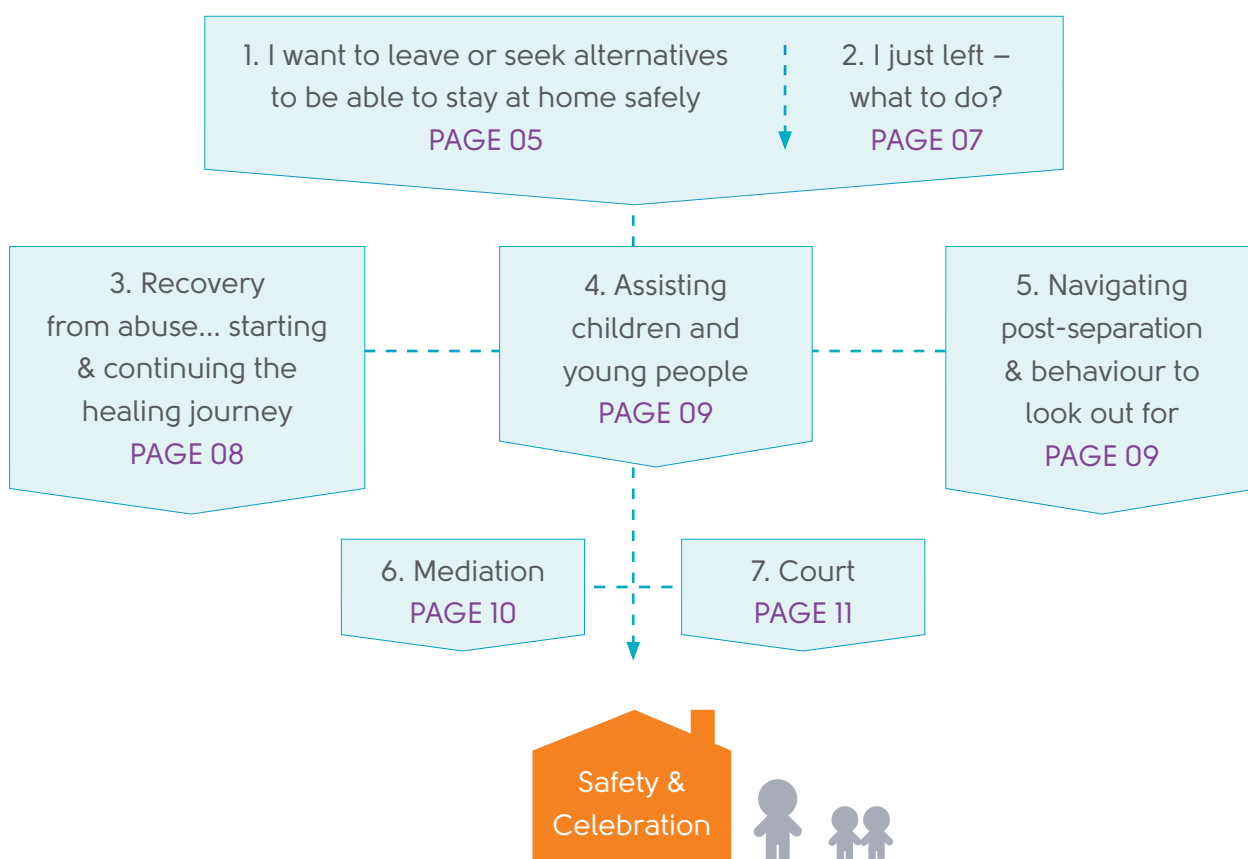
We have used the narrative 'Tree of Life' process to connect with ourselves, our personal strengths and resources, and connect with each other to recognise the common things we bring to the journey.

We hope you find something in here that is of use and helpful. And... it's a great place to begin to connect with more help, find new possibilities and reach out to the workers at Recovery After Violence Support.

Journey Map

Suggestions and resources for preparing to leave, and going forward from, a relationship where violence has been present.

LEAVING PLAN STEPS



“Remember it is everybody’s right to feel safe and to be treated with respect and love in a relationship. No one should live in fear. It will often take time before taking the final steps to leave the abusive or violent partner or situation. It will be often hard and require lots of courage.

In any abusive relationship, the responsibility for the abuse is always with the abuser. No one else can control or change that behaviour.

It’s important to be aware that the time leading up to and just after leaving can be the most dangerous for a person leaving abuse. Be mindful that telling the abuser that the relationship is over can result in an increase in violence.

Leaving a violent relationship will take planning and support. The following are suggestions of things to be considered when planning to leave.”

– NSW Communities & Justice

1. I want to leave or seek alternatives to be able to stay at home safely

Prepare the ground

Contact a support service and build confidence about your decision to act for change

- **1800 Respect** 1800 737 732, 1800respect.org.au
- **Crisis Care** May be able to provide three nights' accommodation, 9223 1111 (24hrs)
wa.gov.au/service/community-services/community-support/crisis-care
- **Entry Point** 6496 0001 | 1800 124 684
entrypointperth.com.au
- **Leaving Plan** facs.nsw.gov.au/domestic-violence/stay-safe/leaving-safely

Helpful directories to consider options and support:

- **Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing**
csws.org.au/directory/
- **Daisy App** 1800respect.org.au/daisy

Act as if nothing is happening

- **Go about your business** and be cautious talking to mutual friends about the situation. This can be helpful when friend loyalty may not be to you
- **Update password/Change pin** – For electronic devices, email, bank account, mobile phone provider; delete search history in your browser

Accommodation

- **Plan to secure a refuge**, even a temporary one
- **If accommodation is with a person you know** – ask yourself if it is likely they may let the other person or their family know what you are considering. Decide if this is the safest option for you, trust your 'gut'
- **Decide to stay** – prepare a plan to leave/run away even if you're the sole tenant/owner of the home (if there are no trusted people to support you, ring Crisis Care or 1800Respect to assist with finding safe accommodation). Safe at Home programs can support you to make security changes to your home

Find the Safe at Home program in your area:

- **Starick** 9458 1107
starick.org.au/services/safe-at-home

- **Ovis** 9535 4775
ovis.org.au/keeping-you-safe-in-your-home/
- **Pat Giles Centre** 9300 0340, patgilescentre.org.au
- **Lucy Saw Women's Refuge Centre** 9527 6872

Rental repair

There are domestic violence (DV) tenancy provisions in place for the perpetrator to be taken off the lease and held solely responsible for the repair costs to the property caused by the family and domestic violence (FDV).

commerce.wa.gov.au/consumer-protection/safe-tenancy-wa

Name transfer and open a new account for utilities

wa.gov.au/service/building-utilities-and-essential-services/energy-supply/transfer-your-electricity-account-when-you-are-moving-house

Redirect mail and buy a new SIM card

auspost.com.au/receiving/manage-your-mail/redirect-hold-mail/redirect-mail

Set aside money and gift cards

Place money in a safe place, a separate unknown account, or with a trusted person unknown to them. If you plan to leave, buy small gift cards along with groceries for later. Think about opening your own bank account. Most, if not all, of the big banks have specialist FDV staff to support victim survivors.

Not in the paid workforce

Check financial help options with Centrelink and employment options:

- **Uniting WA** 1300 663 298
unitingwa.org.au/services/escaping-violence-payment/
- **Red Cross** 1800 733 276
redcross.org.au/migration/family-and-domestic-violence-financial-assistance-program
- **Commonwealth Bank** 1800 222 387
commbank.com.au/support/dv-assistance

Centrelink payment recipient

You may be eligible for a crisis payment if you receive Centrelink payments and need to leave your home due to domestic violence.

servicesaustralia.gov.au/crisis-payment-for-extreme-circumstances-family-and-domestic-violence

Employed

If safe and you feel comfortable to do so, talk to your boss, human resources, or someone you identify as supportive. Most employers offer domestic violence leave, this is in the process of being written into legislation.

fairwork.gov.au/leave/family-and-domestic-violence-leave

Develop a network of people

Ensure they do not know the other parent.

Know where your nearest police station is

Do not hesitate to call 000 if you are concerned about your safety. If you require police attendance, but are safe, call 131 444. If there are safety concerns and there may be a time fast police response is vital, an alert can be placed on their system alongside your address and name.

If there are safety concerns, and a time-fast police response is vital, an alert can be placed on the police system along with your address and name.

Gathering evidence

It can be extremely hard to gather evidence with the perpetrator of violence around, however without evidence it is difficult to prove abuse when you present in court.

- Write a detailed diary/log of the abuse incidents, with details of the abuse, exact dates and times
- Write a sheet for communications if you can store it safely
- Never delete any text messages and emails that could be used as evidence
- Take photos of damage caused by the perpetrator
- If it's safe to do so, have an electronic device or voice recording phone app on hand to record at least one incident
- Leave door/windows/blinds open for witnesses

Remember it is everybody's right to feel safe and to be treated with respect and love in a relationship

- ARC app provides a central place to keep records and upload photos, arc-app.org.au

Lawyers – Meet with several, free or low-cost

- **Citizens Advice Bureau** 20-minute consultation \$50 9221 5711, cabwa.com.au
- **Family Relationship Advice Line** Free 20-minute consultation, 1800 050 321, familyrelationships.gov.au/talk-someone/advice-line
- **Legal Aid** (For income earners below \$80k) 1300 650 579, legalaid.wa.gov.au
- **Women's Legal Services** Phone consultation, 1800 625 122
- **Aboriginal Family Legal Services | Community Legal WA** 1800 469 246, wlsa.org.au

TIP – Try not to use expensive law firms unless other avenues have been exhausted or ruled out.

Close to leaving

- Have a bag packed and keep it in a safe place or with a person you trust
- Helpful things to pack: some cash, important documents (for both you and your children), ID, clothes and personal hygiene items. Know your Medicare and Centrelink details
- Consider purchasing a new mobile phone and transferring all your phonebook/info across. It may be better to leave your existing mobile phone behind to stop the perpetrator (or anyone else not supportive of you) contacting you or tracking you
- Store important items like passports and original ID documents in a safe place, ideally away from the property. If these items would be noticed missing, keep them in the one place for easy access and make a copy of all documents. Utilise your digital wallet if it is safe to do so

2. I just left – What to do?

Look after yourself – Your children need a parent, make time to get counselling

- **Anglicare WA** 1300 11 44 46, info@anglicarewa.org.au
- **Centrecare** 9325 6644, enquiries@centrecare.com.au
- **Relationship Australia** 1300 364 277
- **1800Respect** 1800 737 732
- **Employee Assistance Program** Check with your employer if they offer mental health support
- **Beyond Blue** Depressed or suicidal? 1300 224 636
- **WA Government Health Service** 1300 555 788

Ensure your safety

If you are in danger or feel unsafe, leave. Even if it is your place. If the perpetrator no longer lives with you, inform your neighbours/property owner.

- Get the locks changed. Park your car inside the garage if possible.
- **Safe with Milli** for cameras safewithmilli@anglicarewa.org.au
- **Safe at Home**
- **Safety Planning** anglicarewa.org.au/get-help/family-and-domestic-violence
- Inform your employer of the situation and let them know about expected arrival times at work. They may be able to offer you temporary on-site parking or arrange for a colleague to walk you to/from your car. Change the travel route and park as close to your work possible
- Ensure peace of mind by blocking the perpetrator and their allies on the phone, social media and email
- Watch out for people who may cause you harm

TIP – Take care of yourself: Prioritise your recovery. Everyone's recovery looks different and is individual. Be aware and cautious of those trying to involve you in their own FDV experiences or trying to establish unhealthy or co-dependent relationships with you.

Restraining order – Perth Magistrates Court

Attend as soon as it opens at 9am, it is an easy process, and the order can be issued the same day.

- **Court information** wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-justice/commissioner-victims-of-crime/restraining-orders
- **Legal Aid** legallaid.wa.gov.au/find-legal-answers/restraining-orders/restraining-orders/violence-restraining-orders/court-procedure

If you are concerned for your kids' safety

Try to get them included for protection on your order. Even if they are not listed as protected persons on the order, it can be ordered that the restrained person is not able to remove them from school/day care or be in the vicinity of these places.

- Always keep a copy with you. If children are involved, ensure the school/daycare is aware of the order and has a copy
- Report all (even minor) breaches of the restraining order at the police station as soon as possible
- The perpetrator of violence can contest the restraining order, but there is no need to worry if there is evidence. An alternative outcome can be a conduct agreement order (which could be problematic in the Family Court) legallaid.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/1291919-Infosheet-Family.pdf

Property

- **Interest in a property not registered in your name**
Consider the lodgment of a caveat (similar to an injunction) to protect your interest and stop the other party from being able to sell or dispose of the property until an agreement is reached gotocourt.com.au/family-law/caveats-property-family-law
- **Property is in your name** - Go to the police station to get a police order that requires the perpetrator to leave the property
- **Family Violence Restraining Order in place** - The Magistrate puts your property address on the order, which prevents them from being in or approaching the property once it is served
- **Reside in a rental property** commerce.wa.gov.au/consumer-protection/safe-tenancy-wa



3. Recovery from abuse – starting & continuing the healing journey

Resources we found helpful

- **Melanie Tonia Evans** An excellent resource for information about narcissism and self-recovery. Her program helps immensely with recovery from PTSD induced by the abuses and neglect inflicted by a narcissist (or other personality disordered individuals) and allows for self-actualisation to blossom
- **Phoenix Support and Advocacy Service** Fremantle location. Video understanding trauma: youtu.be/v60Pi87sqhI
- **Dr Ramani Durvasula, Dr Les Carter, HG Tudor** Basics about narcissists and healing for beginners
- **Prof. Sam Vaknin, Dr Todd Grande & Med Cycle** Narcissism, psychopaths, sociopaths (heavier read)
- **Rebecca Zung** Empowerment, women of impact. Generally cost-free but for people who are well into their recovery

Subscription-based information

- **Dr Ramani Durvasula** US\$25 a month subscription
- **Leon Sylvester** Eye-opening if you self-medicated with alcohol during or after the abuse. Free first consultation available, then quite expensive.
- **Dr Les Carter** Quite expensive

Good books

- **Pete Walker** *From Surviving to Thriving*
- **Sun Tzu** *The Art of War*

Essential online

- **National Alliance on Mental Health** nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/January-2021/Six-Self-Care-Tips-on-Overcoming-Abuse-Related-Trauma
- **Anglicare WA** anglicarewa.org.au/get-help/family-and-domestic-violence/recovery-after-violence-support
- **RUAH** ruah.org.au/services-support/family-services/
- **Bring Up Respect** respect.gov.au

4. Assisting children & young people

Counselling for children and young people

Check in with them and if they need or want counselling try the following:

- Inform the school about the situation, they can organise a school psychologist or chaplain
- **Anglicare WA Young Hearts Service** 1300 11 44 46
anglicarewa.org.au/get-help/family-and-domestic-violence/young-hearts-child-counselling-service
- **Anglicare WA Support For Children After Separation Program (SCASP)** 1300 11 44 46
anglicarewa.org.au/get-help/relationships-and-separation/supporting-children-after-separation
- **Relationships Australia** 1300 364 277
relationshipsaustralia.org.au/Services/Counselling/Counselling-for-Children-and-Young-People
- **Centrecare** 9325 6644
centrecare.com.au/metro-services/family-and-domestic-violence-services-1/specialised-family-violence-service
- **Child Support** 1300 650 579
legalaid.wa.gov.au/find-legal-answers/family/child-support/get-help-child-support

Be mindful when talking around your children

Remember to not talk about Court, use the magic phrase: 'Mum and Dad / your parents are sorting things out'. Be ready if your kids find out anyway.

Ensure your kids have a safety plan and know it

If the kids are old enough, discuss the situation with them. Develop a safety plan and codes/safe word or feeling unsafe word. Inform your kids about the plan if you think it is safe, helpful and age appropriate. Discuss with your counsellor or support person whose opinion you value.

- **Emerging Minds for parents and caregivers**
A great resource to help children with their journey of healing.
emergingminds.com.au/resources/toolkits/community-trauma-toolkit/parents-and-caregivers/
- **Trusted adults** Teach kids how to contact the people

they feel safe with. Have them practice their full name, your contact details, and the phone number of another person they feel safe with.

- **Visit diary** Keep a detailed diary for every single visit between the kids and the perpetrator.

If the perpetrator is not following arrangements

- **Contact or attend the Family Court** to let them know (Application in a Case, with Affidavit). You may need to apply for a Contravention Hearing. A contravention of court orders occurs when orders set by the court are not followed. "Contravention" is the legal term for 'breach'.
familycourt.wa.gov.au/C/contravention.aspx

I am afraid of the perpetrator and the risk they pose to my kids

- **Get a risk assessment**
cwsw.org.au/services/safe-at-home-3/
- **Get personal safety measures from the Family Court via the eCourts portal.** They can organise a video conference and keep you in a separate room, enter via the Federal Circuit entrance.

"With RAVS and my counsellors providing support, and the belief that I could 'do it', I was able to navigate the court system and not feel so alone. I got my inner power back."

5. Behaviour to look for post-separation

Perpetrators may follow a very similar pattern of behaviour at the Court/mediation, they may say things like 'it didn't happen'. It's important to have copies of any evidence of the abuse, even a text when they indirectly admit something took place. They may also say things like 'you were the abusive one'. Try to ensure the evidence shows the entire sequence of the abuse, such as an email exchange that shows a form of coercion or gaslighting.

Gaslighting happens when an abuser tries to control a victim by twisting their sense of reality. An

example of gaslighting would be a partner doing something abusive and then deny it happened. Gaslighters may also convince their victims they are mentally unfit or too sensitive. More things they may say are 'you are crazy' or 'the kids prefer me'. Try to have support people with you to witness interactions and to validate your reality.

There are many ways that abuse may continue post-separation. It can be helpful to start building an awareness of some of the ways abuse may continue. It can also be important to build your own skills, knowledge and support to counter this abuse.

Useful ways to counter the abuse

- **Financial abuse** = Develop financial independence step by step
- **Legal abuse** = Surround yourself with support and advice through trusted sources, and think it will all end someday
- **Counter-parenting** = Remember you have a right to parent your child in line with your beliefs
- **Neglectful or abusive parenting** = Report it to

Department of Communities Child Protection, WA Police and Family Court as soon as possible

- **Domestic violence by proxy, harassment, or stalking before/around the Family Court** = Be prepared if the court accepts their version of events and not yours, this preparation may help avoid a lot of disappointment

Make sure to keep a record of and highlight in the court process whenever they talk about their own woes rather than the kids' best interest'.

6. Mediation

You can seek an exemption to the Family Court mediation process due to domestic violence if you are unsure about going ahead or do not feel safe.

- **Legal Aid online resources**
 - legalaid.wa.gov.au/get-legal-help/get-lawyer-run-your-case/family-violence-cross-examination-scheme
 - legalaid.wa.gov.au/news/strength-strength-and-stronger-women-new-family-law-programs
- **Rebecca Zung's YouTube channel**



“I am now living in a supported community house and have taken out a FDVO and the police have a CAD (Computer Aided Design assistance) alert on my home. I am now going through the Family Court with the support of RAVS – they have been fantastic.”

7. Court

The Family Court has your kid’s best interest in mind

To understand how their reasoning, read *Shared Care or Divided Lives* by Dr Philip Watts (warning: don’t read it when you are in a dark place).

- **Anglicare WA’s Mums and Dads Forever**

Sign up to the program as soon as you are served with the Court papers or upon application submission. The Family Court can order you to do it anyway. You could get counselling before the program starts, as it can be overwhelming as both survivors and perpetrators participate in the group

Family Court process

Most of the Court process is straightforward in the beginning. However, for the final Court phase, you may want to employ a good lawyer.

- **Contact the Family Court** if in doubt, do not pay the portal extra to submit documents in a wrong way (they provide a refund but with a great lag).
- Go to ‘My Current Matters’ to lodge an application in a case; to simply add extra documents and correspondence, go to ‘eLodgement’.
- **eCourts portal** 9224 8222; ecourts.justice.wa.gov.au

The court room/video conference

- Have a supportive person around, could be Recovery After Violence Support case manager
- Keep calm, it can benefit the perpetrator if you become emotional in the courtroom
- Focus on the kids, don’t speak badly of perpetrator
- Do not argue with the perpetrator or their lawyer
- Do not suggest solutions that could accuse you of parental alienation, like limited or no contact with the kids. Instead, make sure you stress your understanding that kids have a right to know both their parents, as long as it’s safe

- Suggest supervised visits by trusted family members or a child contact service if there are serious safety concerns
- Always use respectful language in relation to the perpetrator
- Be respectful to all court staff including the magistrate or judge
- When entering the court room for the matter to be heard, remember to bow towards the judge or magistrate at the door, stand when the magistrate enters and wait to be seated, then stand when magistrate leaves (they usually say ‘all rise’ before the magistrate leaves)

Resource Links

- **Family Court** familycourt.wa.gov.au/_apps/doclist/doclist.aspx?brochures
- **Legal Aid** legallaid.wa.gov.au/resources
 - legallaid.wa.gov.au/get-legal-help/get-lawyer-run-your-case/applying-grant-aid
 - legallaid.wa.gov.au/find-legal-answers/family/resolving-family-law-disputes/fdr-exemptions
 - legallaid.wa.gov.au/get-legal-help/get-lawyer-run-your-case/family-violence-cross-examination-scheme
- **Women’s Legal Centre** wlsa.org.au
- **Domestic Violence Advocacy Service** whfs.org.au/services/family-and-domestic-violence/
- **Community Legal Centres** communitylegalwa.org.au/
- **WA Government** wa.gov.au/service/community-services/counselling-services/family-and-domestic-violence-support-and-advice
- **FASS Family and Advocacy Support Service** Based at the Family Court, level 1 and 2 legallaid.wa.gov.au

Support of others

New friends

Resources

Understanding of the situation

Safe

Space

We are all NORMAL

Sister-hood

Laughing @ things

Breath of air

Creative space



Consistent contact + check-in.

Community of like minded people

Guidance on the path

RAVS

talking about everything

Knowledge base

Crying about things

Connection with others

Feeling everything



'Tree of Life'

We have adapted the 'Tree of Life' process used by our Recovery After Violence Support Peer Support Group for this booklet. You could use it by yourself or with a friend. The process comes from narrative community work and is designed to help:

- Speak about our lives in ways that make us stronger
- Connect with others – our 'forest'
- Draw on strengths and connections through hard times and challenges – getting through 'storms'
- Celebrate and stay connected to what we love and value about our lives

The original 'Tree of Life' exercise was created in 2005 by David Denborough of South Australia's Dulwich Centre Foundation and Ncazelo Ncube (REPSSI). dulwichcentre.com.au/the-tree-of-life/

Artwork by Recovery After Violence Support peers, to encourage others who are perhaps navigating the 'storms' of separation from a violent relationship and the challenge of the Family Courts.

Messages from your peers at 2022 Recovery After Violence Support Group

"I put a copy of my 'Tree of Life' on my dressing table. It reminds me of everyone else's Trees of Life too and I'm also really glad my kids can see it."

"It's nice to have some other kind of story based on hopes and skills and those kinds of things, like the 'Tree of Life' helps with, because it's easy to feel dragged down by endless negative stories and struggles of the court process. Through doing the Tree you ended up feeling more hopeful."

"My heritage, my relationship with my Granny keeps me strong. It was good to see this on the roots of my tree."

"It was quite confronting filling in the leaves – I lost so many people through the court process and everything that has happened. It's like this tree is an autumn tree. It was good to do the other parts as well – like I was 'hanging on to the good stuff.'"

"Through the 'Tree of Life' process I re-learned and remembered who I was through reconnecting with drawing. It really added to the narrative we have in our group – it really lifted spirits."

"One of my biggest commitments is also a value – striving for justice."

What is the 'Tree of Life' process?

The 'Tree of Life' is a visual metaphor in which a tree represents our life and things that are important to us. It can help us explore our strengths, values, gifts, and life skills we have,

including ways of getting through hard times. It enables people to speak about our lives in ways that strengthen our relationships with our own history, our culture, and the significant people we choose to have in our lives.

There are four parts to the process:

PART A CREATE YOUR TREE



PART B FOREST GATHERING



PART C FOREST 'STORMS'



PART D CELEBRATION



Tree Detail Suggestions

Ground = Chosen things in our daily lives that contribute to our wellbeing. Simple things you enjoy – walks, coffee, reading bedtime books to kids, cooking, phoning friends, swims, fitness, sport, bookclub, gardening, meditation, sunrises.

Roots = Deep-rooted heritage, events and places that nurtured you, cultural practices, ancestry, music, books, cubby houses, holidays, religion, spirituality, sports, languages, family history, clubs and associations, groups, origin country, birth family, significant events that had positive impact.

Trunk = Strength that keeps us upright; our strengths, skills, passions, commitments and values that bring joy and we love deeply.

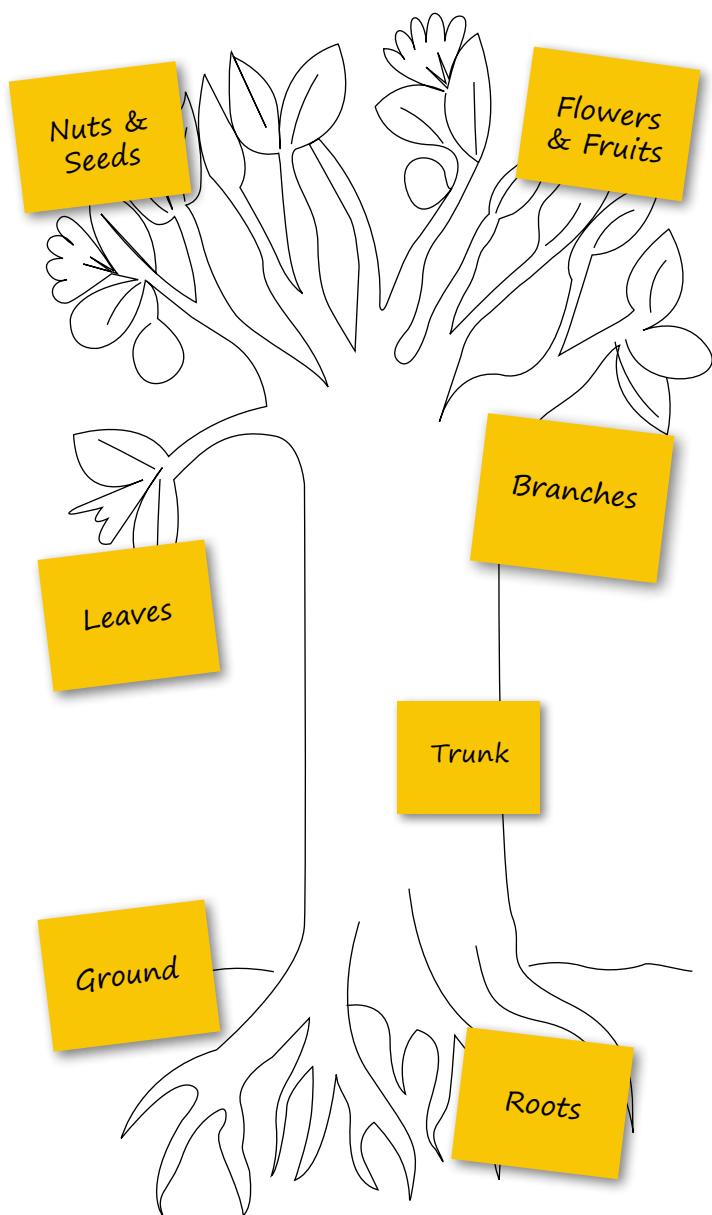
Branches = Hopes, dreams and positive things we want to see happen in the world, for ourselves, families and communities. Hopes and dreams for today or the distant future.

Leaves = Positive people that have influenced you. Perhaps a teacher, childhood friend, a mentor, a child or someone you admire. They might have inspired you with teaching, writing, singing, reading and passing on culture to you. They can live close or far away. They may be alive or have passed on.

Flower/Fruit = Gifts/contributions from others that have made your life. Gifts may be from people you named on the leaves. They may have cared for you, given you skills, courage or a precious material item.

Nuts & Seeds = What you hope to pass on to others.

PART A Creating Your Tree



Step 1 – Draw your tree

- Draw the outline of a tree with roots, trunk, ground, branches, leaves, fruits/flowers, nuts/seeds.
- It might represent a tree you know and love, or one you make up.
- If you find tree drawing tricky or unfamiliar, use the tree to the left as a guide.
- We suggest 5-10 mins to create the tree, then add words. You can always return to add details and colours to the tree when you have added your chosen words.

Step 2 – Add words to describe aspects of your life

- Spend around 7-10 minutes on each area of the tree – trunk, ground, roots, branches, leaves, fruits, flowers, nuts and seeds. The different areas of the tree show all the aspects of life to add. See ideas for tree details on previous page.

TIPS

- There's no right or wrong tree – don't worry if art is not your strength, all trees are unique and beautiful
- Some people like to draw in pencil first, others choose colour straight away
- It can take time to get the tree how you like it
- It can be helpful to draw a tree you know well, maybe think of a tree in your street... or make up a 'fantasy tree' with rainbow colours!



A message from your Peer Support Group

"Our names may be anonymous as we are undergoing the court process, however we want you to know there are others in the 'forest of support' with you, adding their strength and wishing you all the best on your journey through the storms and into sunnier times. We invite new RAVS group members going through the Family Court process to try the 'Tree of Life' journey, as many of us found it helpful and supportive. We know how things can be up and down, and we wish you the best."

PART B Gathering in the 'forest' of life

Forest of support

In this part, we thought about the ways in which we are connected to others in the online Peer Support Group, and there were also particular workers within organisations, that felt like part of our 'forest of support'. Some of us included people who they had read about in books or knew through blogs or YouTube, helpful lawyers, mediators, friends and all kinds of people. Some of us, thought of those we didn't know but face similar struggles which we felt solidarity with. Thinking of these people was a big reason we created this resource.

Just like in the support group, often we are in the position to help other members of our support network's 'forest' – it's a two-way street. For example, one of us was able to help a lawyer understand the legal complexities of the situation we face. The lawyer's better understanding helped them to offer assistance to others who face similar circumstances.

TIP

- Another drawing option is a 'Forest of Support' Map, showing the support networks you are a part of.
- If your forest feels a bit 'sparse', many of us have been in that situation too. You can add to it over time.

When trees live as part of forests,
they are stronger and more resilient



Support Group Peer message

"The concept I had was together, the trees create a canopy that shields from the storms above. And the canopy environment is perfect for flowers and mushrooms and moss and all sorts of beautiful things that cover the forest floor."

PART C
Getting through 'storms'

Trees can be affected by all kinds of challenges – fires, droughts, cyclones, pests, disease, being cut down, soil erosion, rising salt levels...

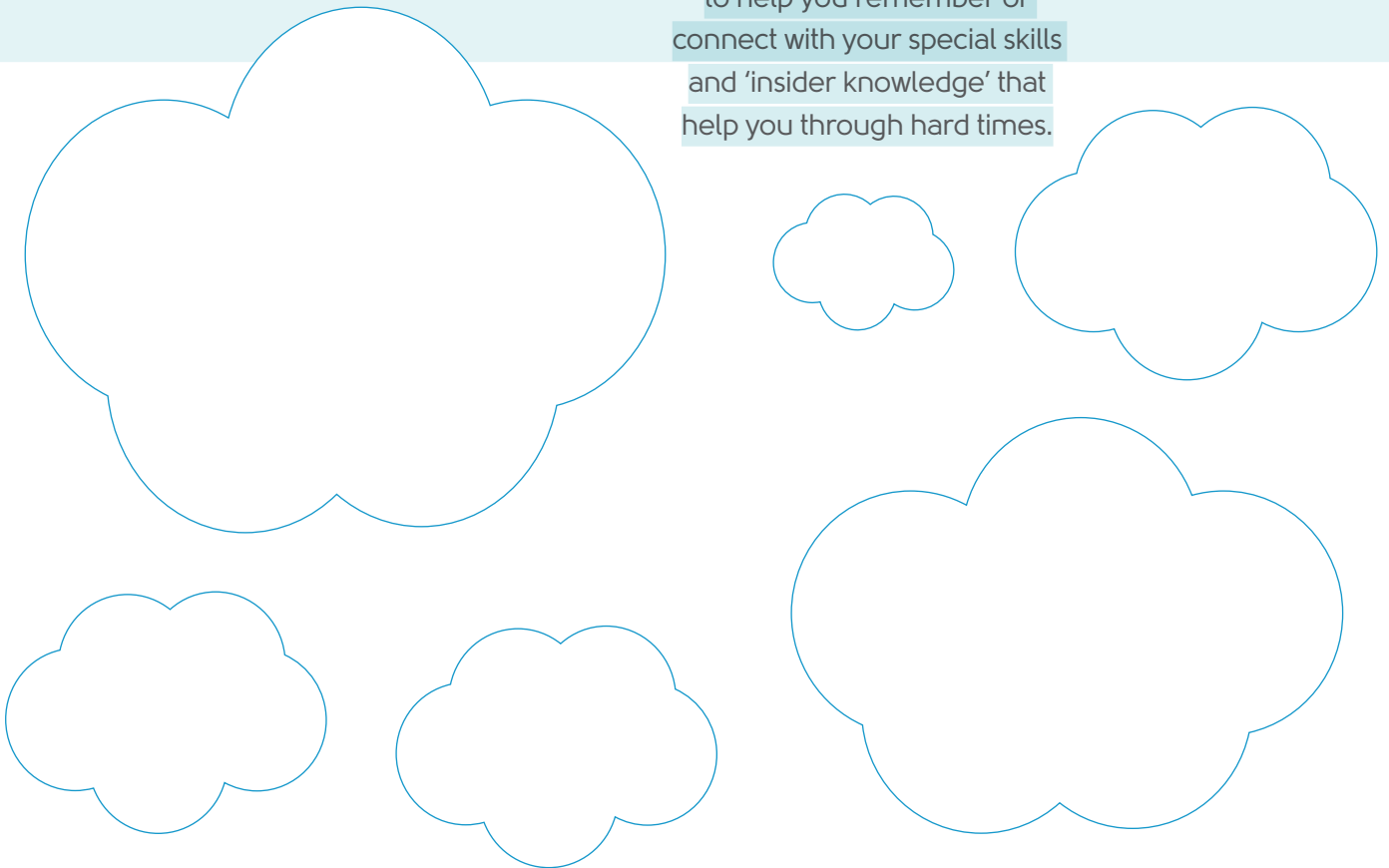
Peer Support Group members shared some of the 'storms' they have faced and their 'storm' names (artwork right)

- *Society's Hammer* – expectations to be a mother, partner, friend, neighbour, daughter, employee...
- *Judiciary Shackles* – The Family Court feels like wearing a straight jacket. You are stuck in the mud, a sitting duck, a target that's bogged
- *Crazy Cat Lady* – Being on guard all the time as most 'normal people' don't get the process
- *Curse of independence, keeping a roof overhead*



You may recognise some of these storms in your own life, using different names. What 'storms' can you think of? Write in the clouds below, you could use creative storm names such as 'Firestorm of Frustration' or 'Missing the Kids'.

TIP – Refer to your 'tree' to help you remember or connect with your special skills and 'insider knowledge' that help you through hard times.



Good wishes for your journey

From your Peer Group and everyone at RAVS...

We hope you enjoyed the 'Tree of Life'. Share it with anyone who might find it helpful or might like to join the 'forest of support' as they navigate a separation or the Family Court. We would like to say – 'even though it seemed impossible at times, and things can continue to be up and down, better times can come'. We hope you can find your way through to better times too. We wish you strength and courage, and everything you need, for the journey.

Thankyous & acknowledgements

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And special thanks also to the dedicated RAVS case workers Carolina Bonner and Jodie B who were part of getting the Peer Support Group going; to 'Tree of Life' and project consultant Liz Nicholas; and to the AWA staff who supported this project in so many different ways – Sarah Anselmo, Amanda Beer, Clare Brady, Megan Cherry, Isabell Evans, Joy Hartig, Renae Hilder, and Melanie Pearse.

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Support Services

Mental Health Emergency Response Line
1300 555 788

Crisis Care
9223 1111 / 1800 199 008

Lifeline
13 11 14

1800RESPECT
1800 737 732

Women's Domestic Violence Helpline
9223 1188 / 1800 007 339

Men's Domestic Violence Helpline
9223 1199 / 1800 000 599

Kids Helpline
1800 551 800

Legal Aid
1300 650 579

Family Advocacy and Support Service
9224 8690

Sexual Assault Resource Centre
6458 1828 / 1800 199 888

Alcohol and Drugs Support Line
9442 5000 / 1800 198 024