



HOW TO HOST A MORAL INJURY GROUP

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Portland Health Care System

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Boise Veterans Hospital Administration

- ▶ Trauma informed ministry
- ▶ Describe moral injury
- ▶ Differentiate moral injury from PTSD
- ▶ Current treatments for moral injury
- ▶ Address possible clergy approaches to helping Veterans with moral injury
- ▶ Consider when to refer Veterans to mental health providers

OBJECTIVES

TRAUMA INFORMED MINISTRY

A program, organization,
or system:

- ▶ Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery
- ▶ Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system
- ▶ Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices
- ▶ Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization

6 Key Principles to Trauma
Informed Care

- ▶ Safety
- ▶ Trustworthiness and Transparency
- ▶ Peer support
- ▶ Collaboration and mutuality
- ▶ Empowerment, voice and choice
- ▶ Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

<https://www.samhsa.gov/programs>



WHAT ARE MORALS?

Answer in the chat

“Perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.” (Litz et al., 2009)

“Disruption in an individual’s confidence and expectations about one’s own or others’ motivation or capacity to behave in a just and ethical manner, brought about by bearing witness to perceived immoral acts, failure to stop such actions, or perpetration of immoral acts, in particular acts that are inhumane, cruel, depraved, or violent, bringing about pain, suffering, or death of others.” (Drescher et al., in press)

“Betrayal of what’s right by someone who holds legitimate authority in a high-stakes situation.” (Shay, 2010)

“Stress resulting from witnessing or perpetrating acts or failures to act that transgress deeply held, communally shared moral beliefs and expectations.” (Nash et al., in press)

MORAL INJURY

NO STRICT CONSENSUS ON DEFINITION

Moral Injury

- ▶ moral affront
- ▶ moral distress
- ▶ moral pain
- ▶ moral trauma
- ▶ moral wounds
- ▶ moral disruption
- ▶ emotional injury
- ▶ personal values injury'
- ▶ 'life values injury'
- ▶ Moral betrayal
- ▶ Moral perpetration

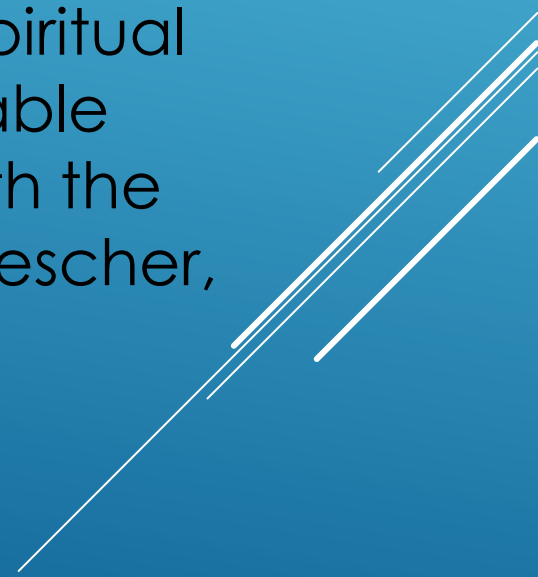
Spiritual injury

- ▶ Soul loss
- ▶ Soul wound
- ▶ Soul injury
- ▶ Spiritual injury
- ▶ Religious injury

Moral Pain • The experience of dysphoric moral emotions and cognitions in response to a morally injurious event.

Moral Suffering • Avoidance behaviors that a person engages in that are in response to moral pain. These can include substance abuse, depression, suicidality, anger, abuse, isolation, over working....etc.

Moral Injury • Social, psychological and spiritual suffering stemming from costly or unworkable attempts to manage, control, or cope with the experience of moral pain. (Farnsworth, Drescher, Evans, & Walser, 2017)

A decorative graphic consisting of several parallel white lines of varying lengths, slanted diagonally from the bottom right towards the top right, set against the blue background.

MODELS OF MORAL INJURY

I feel betrayed by leaders I once trusted

I have done things that betray my personal code

I violated my own morals by not doing something

Moral Beliefs prior to event

Moral Beliefs established in context of the event

Moral Injury Event(s)

Moral Pain/Tension

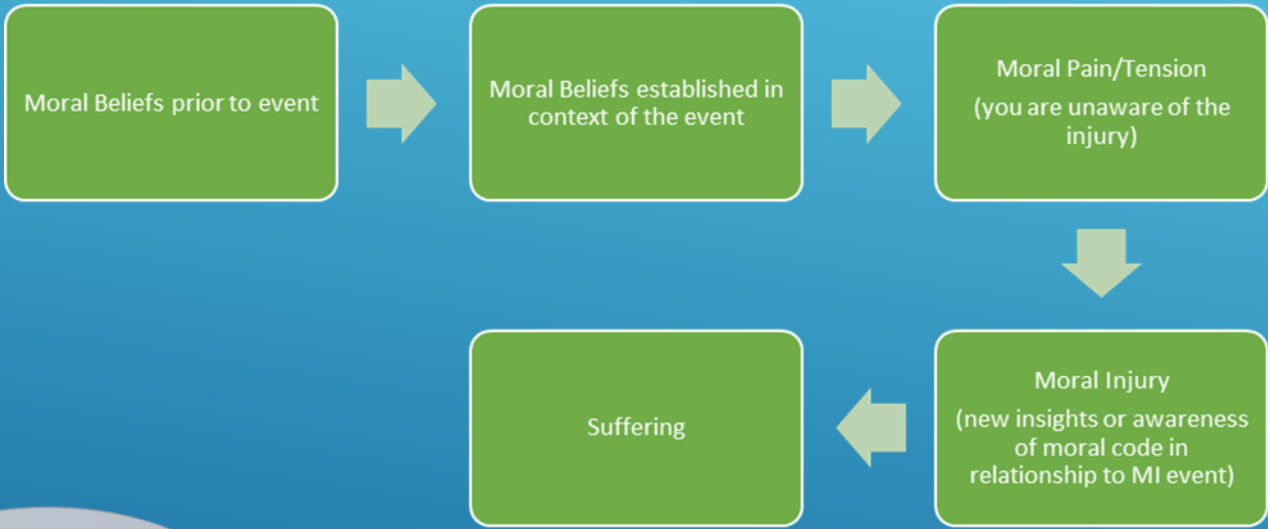
Suffering

I am troubled by witnessing others immoral acts



MODELS OF MORAL INJURY CONT

I have acted out of revenge or retribution

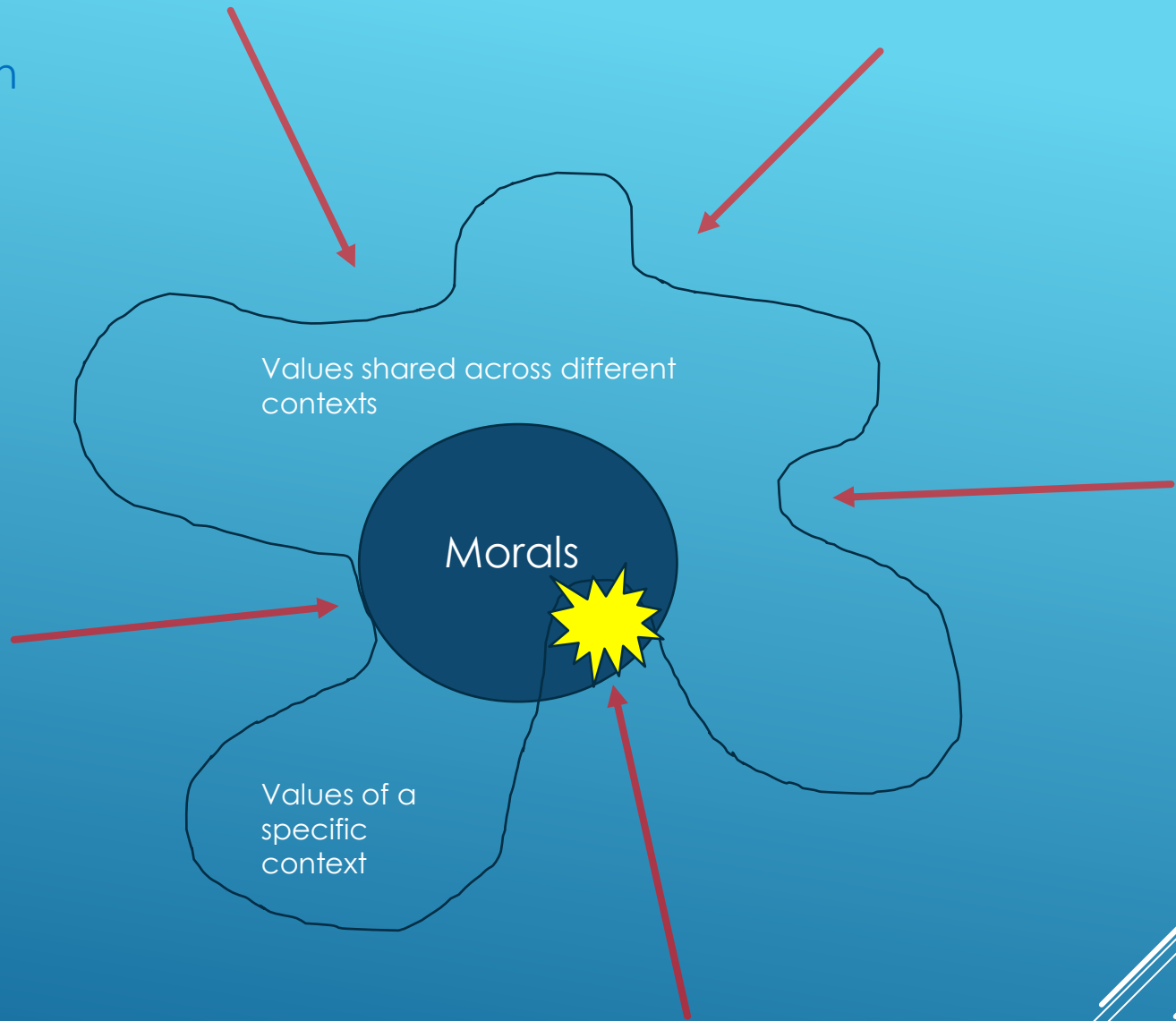


I witnessed the death of innocent people

I caused the death of innocent people

Moral Injury can cause you to feel:

- ✓ Guilt
- ✓ Shame
- ✓ Betrayal
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Anger
- ✓ Anxiety
- ✓ Difficulty Forgiving
- ✓ Grief
- ✓ Loss



The Moral Amoeba

Sodom and lots family: Genesis 19

King David is an example of Teshuva: 2 Samuel 12:1-23

Muhammad's community in medina fighting polytheists: Qur'an 2:190-193)

Buddhist story of the redemption of Angulimāla: Pali Canon

Homer's *illiad* and *odyssey*

Take a minute to think of stories from your own religious/spiritual tradition that may be moral injury

RELIGIOUS EXAMPLES



Acts of betrayal
by peers,
leaders, or self

Disproportionate
violence inflicted
on others

Death or harm
to civilians

Violence within
military ranks

Concealed acts
of cowardice,
failure to do duty

Exposure to
body parts

Inability to
prevent death or
suffering

Resulting in
ethical dilemmas
or moral conflicts

Military Sexual
Trauma

Discrimination

MILITARY EXAMPLES



- Dehumanization of Enemy
- Killing
- Survivor Guilt
- Grief
- Encountering and Handling human remains
- Participation in torture or atrocities
- Betrayal by Authorities
- Doubt (uncertainty about goals or mission)



MORAL CHALLENGES OF WAR

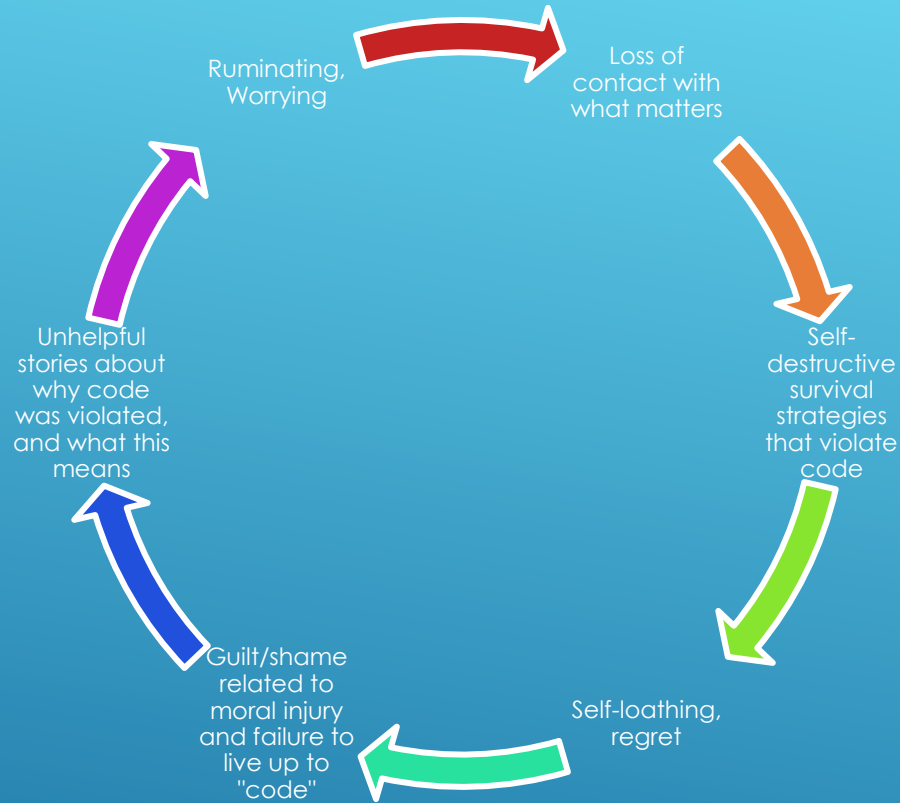
IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

- ▶ Moral transgression is subjective
- ▶ Based on Service members own moral standards, expectations, and interpretations
- ▶ Based on a person's perception and interpretation of values and morals within a specific context
- ▶ Based on the community values and morals
- ▶ Based on the religious teachings of the community



Biological/ physical injury	Psychological/ emotional injury	Social/ familial injury	Spiritual injury
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insomnia • “Startle-reflex” • Alcohol abuse • Drug addiction • Loss of memory • Self-sabotage / • Self-harm • Suicide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger & Betrayal • Shame, Guilt, Sorrow • Loss of trust in self • Loss of trust in others • Fear and Anxiety • Re-experiencing the moral conflict/Flashbacks • Nightmares • Gambling addiction • Sexual/Porn Addiction • Self-deprecation • Loss of self-worth • Depression • Suicidal ideation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spousal/Partner Disconnection • Child-Parent Disconnection • Family Disconnection • Collegial Disconnection • Occupational dysfunction • Professional Disconnection • Legal and disciplinary issues • Community/Cultural Disconnection • Social Alienation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger & Betrayal • Shame, Guilt, Sorrow • Loss of trust in self • Loss of trust in others • Loss of faith/ belief • Moral pain /dissonance • Questioning morality • Self-condemnation • Spiritual/existential crisis • Loss of purpose in life • Fatalism • Loss of caring • Ontological loss of meaning. • Feeling “haunted”

MORAL INJURY SYMPTOMS



THE LOOP OF MORAL INJURY THINKING

WHEN
SERVICE
MEMBERS
DISCHARGE
THEY MAY
FEEL:

- ▶ Removed from military context
- ▶ Not with buddies/unit
- ▶ With family/friends who don't understand
- ▶ Veteran no longer understands own actions
- ▶ Disconnect from community
- ▶ Feel out of place in daily life because of moral transgression
- ▶ Faith/religious crisis
- ▶ Will be punished by higher power for actions/lack of action

SYMPTOM OVERLAP

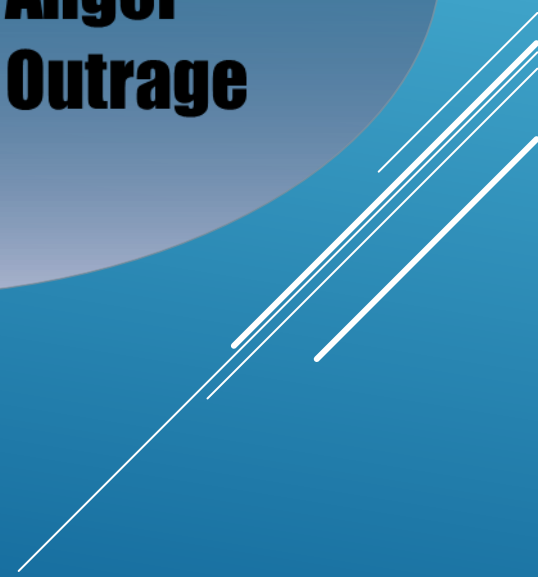
PTSD

Moral Injury

Fear
Disgust
Horror
Helplessness

Avoidance
Re-experiencing
Mood changes
Physiological arousal

Shame
Guilt
Anger
Outrage



DSM-5	PTSD	Moral Injury
Stressor (A)	Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence	Acts that violate deeply held [moral] values
Individual's role at time of the event	Witness, victim or direct exposure	Witness, victim [or failed to prevent]
Intrusion Symptoms (B)	YES	YES
Avoidance (C)	YES	YES
Cognition and Moods (D)	Persistent fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame	Guilt, shame or anger
Arousal and Reactivity (E)	YES	NO
What necessity is lost?	Safety	Trust, [Self- or other compassion, forgiveableness, faith]

Adapted and updated from William P. Nash, M.D., *Moral Injury and Moral Repair: Overview of Constructs and Early Data*. Presentation at 13th Annual Force Health Protection Conference August 12, 2010. Input from Sidney Davis, Kent Drescher, Kimberly Gronemeyer, Brett Litz, Lowell Kronick, William Nash, Jason Nieuwsma, Jonathan Shay.

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENTS FOR MORAL INJURY

Impact of Killing in War (IOK)

- ▶ Self-forgiveness (therapy and/or spiritual/ religious practices)
- ▶ Making amends

Adaptive Disclosure (AD)

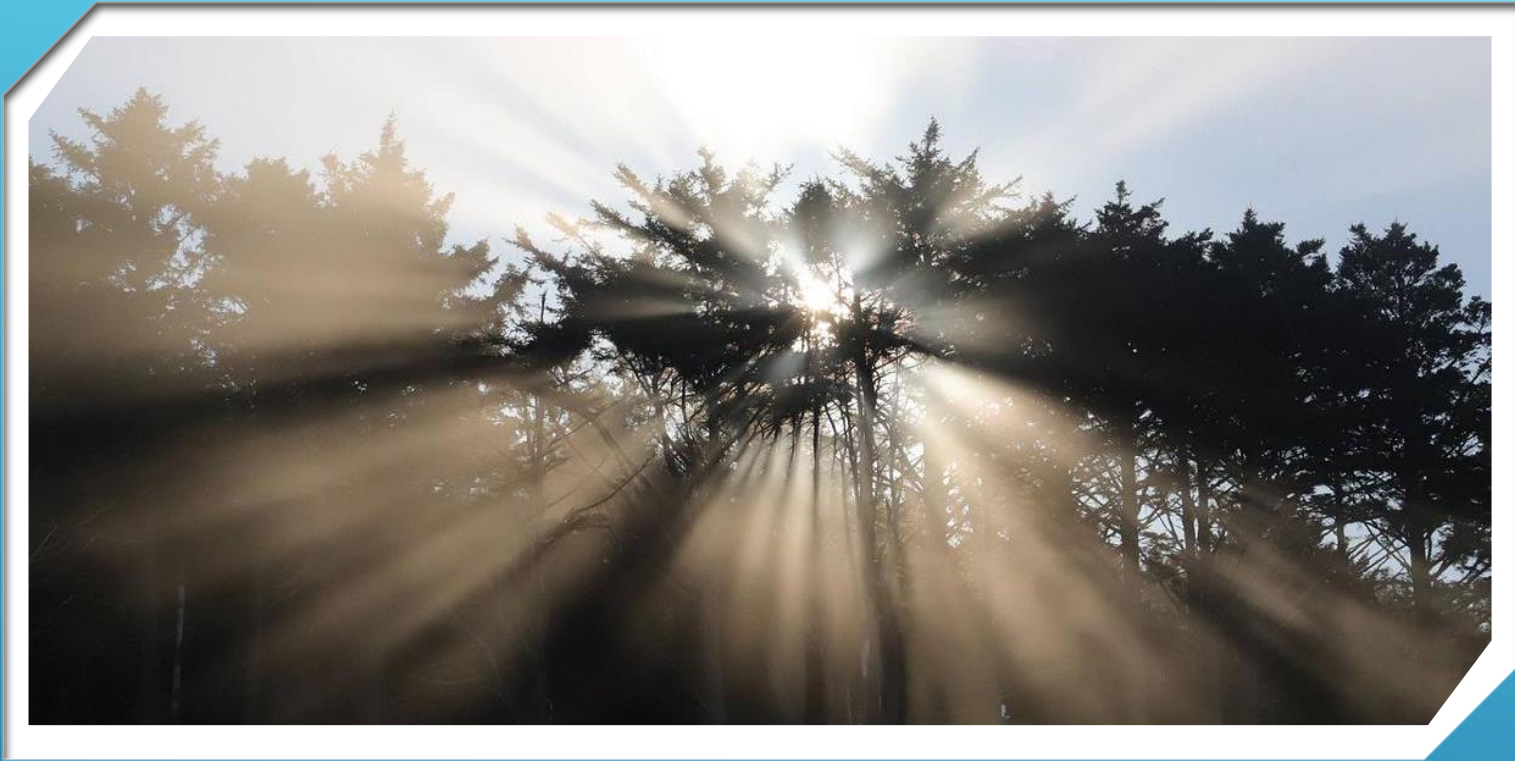
- ▶ Imaginary dialogue with the lost person
- ▶ Guided dialogue with a forgiving and compassionate moral authority

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)

- ▶ Present moment awareness, values, committed action, self as context, acceptance, diffusion

5 MINUTE BREAK





SPIRITUAL HEALING IS MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

There are many ideas and ways of looking at how to facilitate spiritual and moral healing

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

- ▶ What difficult conversations about war, conflict, and moral injury does your community need to have?





Paradox – by Gunilla Norris

It is a paradox that we encounter so much internal noise

When we first try to sit in silence.

It is a paradox that experiencing pain releases pain.

It is a paradox that keeping still can lead us so fully into life and being.

Our minds do not like paradoxes. We want things to be clear, so we can maintain our illusions of safety.

Certainty breeds tremendous smugness.

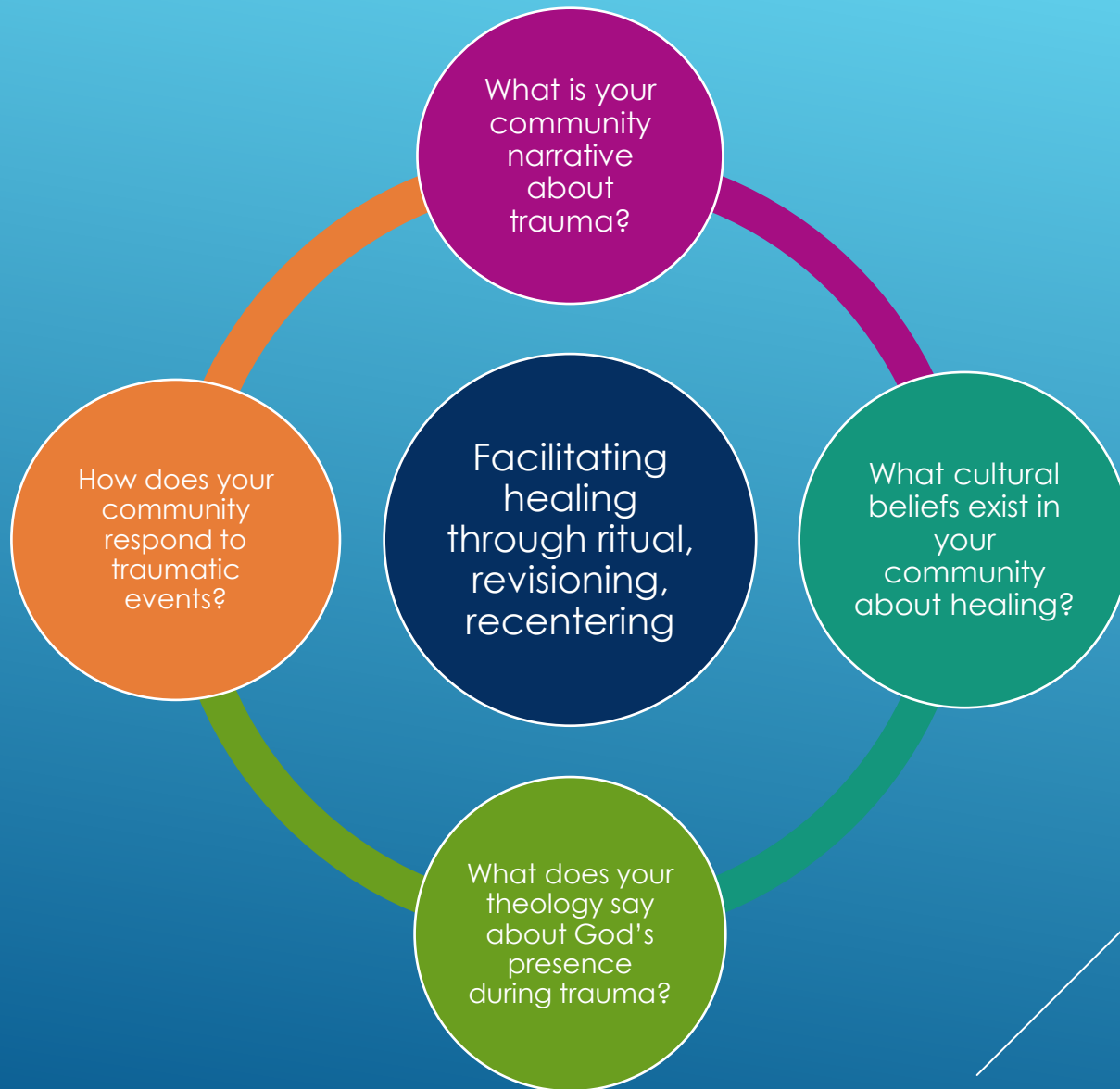
We each possess a deeper level of being, however, which loves paradox. It knows that summer is already

growing like a seed in the depth of winter. It knows that the moment we are born, we begin to die. It knows

that all of life shimmers, in shades of becoming – that shadow and light are always together, the visible mingled with the invisible.

When we sit in stillness we are profoundly active. Keeping silent, we can hear the roar of existence. Through our willingness to be the one we are, we become one with everything.

ADDRESSING MORAL INJURY THROUGH EXPLORING LARGER SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT



MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MORAL REPAIR

Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sleep• Reduce stress load• Restore physical health (diet, exercise, play)• Restore authority of prefrontal cortex
Mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Face demons• Tolerate intense negative moral emotions (shame, guilt, anger)• Assess culpability (self and others)• Clarify distorted thinking (e.g., overgeneralizations)
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connection• Trust• Love• Seek true justice (not revenge)
Spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God• Prayer• Meditation• Religious practices• Beauty



William P. Nash, "Common Goals for Preventing and Repairing Moral Injury," DCoE Chaplains Working Group Teleconference, 4 March 2015.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Crucial for coping
- Protective factor
- Provides evidence that:
 - World is benevolent, meaningful
 - Survivor is deemed worthy
- Pastoral care = an understanding confidant
- Groups = mini-community



- ▶ Specialist in guilt, shame, forgiveness, restoration, community, and ritual
- ▶ Moral/ethical authority
- ▶ Representative of the Divine
- ▶ Less stigma than a mental health provider
- ▶ Front Line Provider ie. A veteran or service member will go to you first before seeking mental health care
- ▶ You meet the veteran in daily community life
- ▶ Religious and spiritual communities are already built around common morals, values, and resources
- ▶ Well, there are more of you then there are of me!

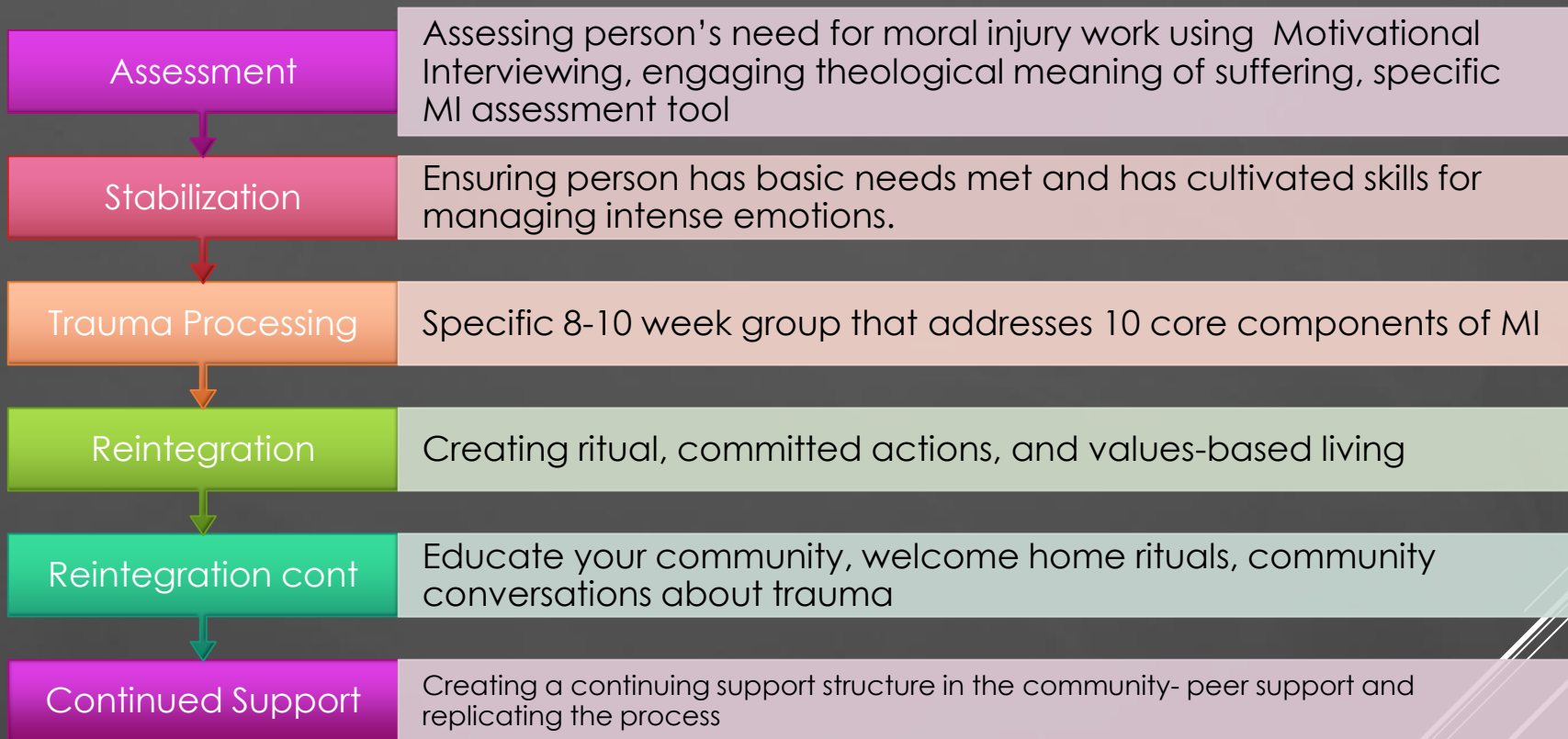
WHY CLERGY, SPIRITUAL
COMMUNITIES, AND COMMUNITY
MEMBERS ARE SO IMPORTANT

- ▶ Community building
- ▶ Less threatening due to comfort level with other veterans or community
- ▶ tailored to unique needs
- ▶ Can engage from a specific theological perspective



VETERAN SUPPORT GROUPS

5 PHASES OF MORAL INJURY GROUP



Dr. Judith Herman's three-stage model of recovery found in *Trauma and Recovery* (1997); *Stabilization, Trauma Processing, Reintegration*

Phase 1: Assessments for Moral Injury

Instrument	Key focus	Specialty	
Spiritual injury scale/index (24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilt • Anger or resentment • Grief or sadness • Lack of meaning or purpose • Despair or hopelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling that God/life abandoned • Religious doubt or disbelief • Fear of death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health • Spiritual Injury • Moral Injury
Impact of Event Scale—Revised (IES-R) (25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traumatic Events • Intrusion into life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hyper-arousal • Avoidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Military & veterans • PTSD/Moral injury • Health & emergency service personnel
Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES) (26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betrayal • Morality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immorality • Ethics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Military & veterans • PTSD/Moral injury
Spiritual Distress Scale (19) ^(a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilt • Sadness/grief • Resentment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger/ • Despair/hopelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health • Military & Veterans • PTSD/Moral Injury • Suicide
Moral Injury Questionnaire—Military (MIQM) (27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betrayal • Guilt • Retribution • Humanization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence • Destruction • Death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health • Military & Veterans • PTSD/Moral Injury
Modified Military Moral Injury Questionnaire (M3IQ) (11) ^(b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immoral acts (witnessed and/or perpetrated) • Death/injury (civilians, military, enemy) • Betrayal (self & others) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical dilemmas (decision-making, humanization) • Disproportional violence/retribution • Grief, shame and unresolved issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral injury • Existential/spiritual • Ethics/morality • Military & veterans
Moral Injury Symptoms Scale—Military (MISS-M) (28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betrayal • Guilt • Shame • Moral concerns • Religious struggles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Meaning/purpose • Forgiveness • Self-condemnation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health • PTSD • Moral Injury • Military & Veterans

^(a)Instruments presented in chronological order ^(a)(29) developed from (24) Spiritual Injury Scale; ^(b)M3IQ: Based on the MIES (26) and the MIQM (27).

BREAK OUT SESSION

- ▶ Introduce yourselves
 - ▶ Do you have experience with doing assessments? If so, what do you use that is most helpful?
- 

PHASE 2: STABILIZATION

► Resources for Stabilization

Hospitals

Nearest VA or vet center

Rehab centers

Homeless shelters

Housing and job assistance

Food pantries

Suicide prevention

Mental health care

Ptsd treatment

Sud treatment

Health, diet, exercise

Legal help

Transportation

► Skills for stabilization

Prayer

Contemplative prayer

Mindfulness

Meditation

Creating sacred space

Practicing present moment awareness

Engaging in religious life: services, rituals, sacraments

Conversations about why religious/spiritual values are important. What matters most

Emotional Regulation

BREAK OUT SESSION

- ▶ Introduce yourselves
 - ▶ Pick 2-3 in resources section and share with the group what you know is available in your area or state.
- 

PHASE 3: TRAUMA PROCESSING

10-week specific teaching series

Week 1: Introduction to moral injury, review stabilization and religious coping skills

Week 2: Identifying the morals that have shaped the person from childhood through to the present moment

Week 3: Connecting values to morals and exploring how the morals were violated by the moral injury.

Week 4: Theodicy

Week 5: Guilt and Shame-betrayal and perpetration

Week 6: Forgiveness

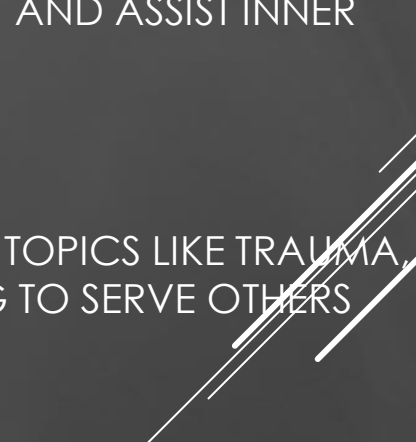
Week 7: Lament and Grief

Week 8: Restoration and reconciliation


Week 9: Committed action that aligns with their current values and making a plan

Week 10: Welcome home ceremony (possible the most important week).

WAYS TO TEACH THE 10 CORES OF MORAL INJURY

- HELPING PEOPLE TO BE INVOLVED IN THE RHYTHMS OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR WHICH ENCOURAGES RENEWAL (HELPING TO DEVELOP NEW NEURAL PATHWAYS) WHICH CAN ALSO LEAD TO TRANSFORMATION VIA CONSTANT REPETITION OF RENEWAL
 - THE INCLUSION OF SACRAMENTAL STRUCTURE FOR ONE'S LIFE (E.G., PENANCE AND ABSOLUTION)
 - DRAMATIC RE-ENACTMENT AND IMAGINATION OF PAST SACRED STORIES OF REDEMPTION THAT CORRELATE/RELEVANT FOR THE HERE AND NOW
 - THE POWER OF ART (IN ITS MANY FORMS) TO TOUCH THE HEART AND ASSIST INNER HEALING
 - EQUINE FACILITATED LEARNING
 - OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL THERAPY
 - COMMUNITY THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT AROUND SPECIFIC TOPICS LIKE TRAUMA, SUFFERING, WAR, CONFLICT, COMMUNITY/RELIGIOUS CALLING TO SERVE OTHERS
 - SEND-OFF AND WELCOME HOME RITUALS
 - WORSHIP AND RITUAL
- 


BREAK OUT SESSION

- ▶ Introduce yourselves
 - ▶ For weeks 4-5, have you already taught classes or sermons on these topics? If so, do you have any tips or tools that were helpful?
- 

PHASE 4: REINTEGRATION

- ▶ Activities for Reintegration and meaning making
- ▶ Helping people to be involved in the rhythms of the liturgical year which encourages renewal (helping to develop new neural pathways) which can also lead to transformation via constant repetition of renewal
- ▶ The inclusion of sacramental structure for one's life (e.g., penance and absolution)
- ▶ Dramatic re-enactment and imagination of past sacred stories of redemption that correlate/relevant for the here and now
- ▶ The power of art (in its many forms) to touch the heart and assist inner healing
- ▶ Equine facilitated learning
- ▶ Outdoor recreational therapy
- ▶ Community theological engagement around specific topics like trauma, suffering, war, conflict, community/religious calling to serve others
- ▶ Send-off and Welcome Home rituals
- ▶ Worship and ritual

BREAK OUT SESSION

- ▶ Introduce yourselves
 - ▶ What does your community already do for meaning making and community building? What are some ideas for an activity that is moral injury focused?
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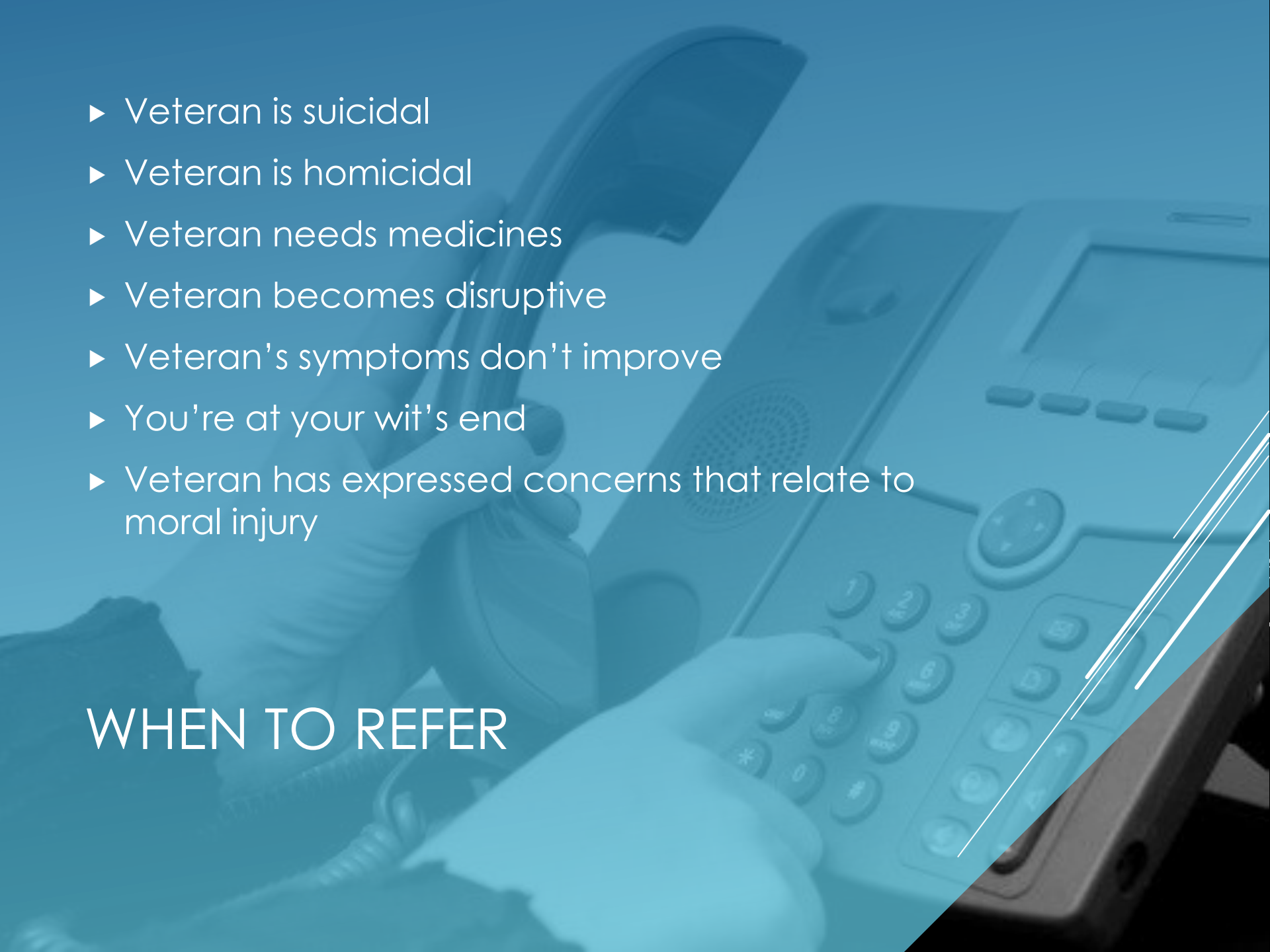
PHASE 5:
CONTINUED
SUPPORT-
PEER
SUPPORT
AND
REPLICATING
THE PROCESS

- ▶ Nami peer Support training
- ▶ Sahmsa
- ▶ Train other leaders in your community
- ▶ Invite “graduates” to be a part of future classes
- ▶ Create an ongoing mentor group-home base
- ▶ Continuing education and dialogue for the community

BREAK OUT SESSION

- ▶ Introduce yourselves
- ▶ What is going to be your committed action ?



- 
- A hand is shown holding a black telephone receiver over a multi-line office phone base. The phone base has a numeric keypad, several function buttons, and a small display screen. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. In the bottom right corner, there are several white diagonal lines.
- ▶ Veteran is suicidal
 - ▶ Veteran is homicidal
 - ▶ Veteran needs medicines
 - ▶ Veteran becomes disruptive
 - ▶ Veteran's symptoms don't improve
 - ▶ You're at your wit's end
 - ▶ Veteran has expressed concerns that relate to moral injury

WHEN TO REFER



WHERE TO REFER

- ▶ Nearest VA
- ▶ Veterans Crisis Line
- ▶ Nearest ER
- ▶ Community mental health clinic
- ▶ Primary care provider
- ▶ VA Chaplains



If concerned about Veteran's immediate safety, it's best to escort them there or turn over to someone else who will.

Friday June 25, 2021, 2-4:30 pm: Workshop

In this comprehensive 2.5 hour workshop we will go from theory to practice by empowering you to create and facilitate a moral injury healing group in your community. We will cover:

- ▶ A review of moral injury
- ▶ Providing trauma-informed pastoral care
- ▶ How to create your own moral injury healing group- I will give you the tools and time to come up with an outline and plan that is uniquely designed for your community.

NEXT TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

To register for future training,
submit questions or feedback:

CH rachel mikaelsen, M.Div. bCC
208-422-1000 ex. 7712

Rachel.mikaelsen@va.gov

thank you

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS?