



Illustration: Therese Brännström

Where there is violence, there is resistance

Material on Response-Based Practice



Centre for Response-Based Practice



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Introduction

There are major challenges in society when it comes to interpersonal violence, especially men's violence against women. Violence is the source of immense physical and psychological harm¹.

According to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, women and girls experience more violence from men than men experience from women. The perpetrator is often a man who was, or is, in an intimate relationship with a female partner.

In this material, two of the three scenarios involve men's violence against women. The third involves violence by boys against another boy. It is important to keep in mind that both men and women can experience intimate partner violence and other forms of violence, even if men are more likely to use violence². To be able to offer support to those who experience threats and violence, it is important for professionals to have knowledge about all forms of violence, including men's violence in the context of close relationships. You can learn more on this topic from the digital web Introductory Course on men's violence against woman from the National Centre for Knowledge of Men's Violence against women and the County Administrative Board to support your use of this tutorial³.

1 Makt mål och myndighet, -feministisk politik för en jämställd framtid (Skr 2016/17:10) Elanders, November 2016.

2 Brottsförebyggande rådet, Kriminalstatistik 2019, misstänkta personer, s25-27

3 www.webbkursomvold.se



Illustratör: Terese Brännström.

This illustration was commissioned in conjunction with the conference Where there is violence, there is resistance. The image was inspired in part by the power possessed by the eucalyptus tree in Australia. On hot days, oil evaporates from the trees and the steam, which is highly flammable, easily becomes an accelerant in forest fires. Despite fire-ravaged landscapes and harsh living conditions, the eucalyptus tree grows and thrives with the help of roots that grow deep in the earth in their search for water. Sometimes these long roots even find gold, which has given the tree's leaves a golden shimmering colour. The image also illustrates how those who experience violence preserve their inner strength and dignity.

Background

Collaboration Against Violence was a collaboration that started in 2012, between the municipalities in Norrbotten, the County Council of Norrbotten, the Police Authorities in Norrbotten and the Swedish prosecution Authority in Norrbotten. The aim of this collaboration was to provide support for individuals that had experienced violence and also offer support for the authorities in Norrbotten. Several of the agency's from Norrbotten attended a two-day conference in Gothenburg, in 2011 where the key note speaker was the Canadian researcher and therapist Allan Wade. After that initial contact, Allan Wade was invited to Luleå and that was the starting point of a collaboration with Allan Wade and Collaboration Against Violence in Norrbotten. The collaboration has consisted of conferences and seminars but Allan also worked as a tutor for several social workers who work with violence against women in Boden, Luleå, and Piteå.

The pedagogical theatre concept had its origins in the conference Where there is violence, there is resistance (Där det finns våld finns det motstånd) which took place in May 2015. The initiative for the conference was Collaboration against violence, and the County Administrative Board in Norrbotten. It was also financed by the Swedish Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority. The focus of the conference was Response-Based Practice (RBP), a model that highlights the resistance and responses of people experiencing violence and emphasises the significance of language when it comes to supporting recovery, working with offenders, and addressing violence. The conference sought to increase knowledge in the effort to counteract interpersonal violence, with a focus on men's violence against women.

To be able to present how RBP works a collaboration was initiated with Teater Scratch in Luleå who were responsible for the script, direction and artistic production. The same concept where lectures on Response-Based Practice are interspersed with interactive theatre and audience discussions was repeated on three occasions. At the conference in Stockholm the Gender Equality Agency was a part of the seminar, where they presented their assignments on prevent and combat men's violence against women.

European conference of Domestic violence in Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2015

International Dignity Conference in Perth, Australia, 2017

Dignity Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, 2018

After the conferences, the work began with putting together an educational concept for different professions within the field. The ambition was to be able to disseminate the material at no cost to several bodies.

THE TUTORIAL CONSISTS OF THREE PARTS

Part 1 - Explains the basics of RBP

Part 2 - Introduces the reader to the film sequences, conversations, questions and expert comments

Part 3 - Recommended links, articles and material that is part of response-based practice

Part 1

Introduction to response-based practice
(RBP)

What is response-based practise (RBP)?

Response-Based Practice (RBP) involves ideas and methods that have been developed initially by Linda Coates, Nick Todd, and Allan Wade, and more recently by Cathy Richardson and Shelly Bonnah at the Centre for Response-Based Practice, Canada.

RBP involves a dignified approach, with a confidence in people's competence and ability to respond. This practice invites everyone who encounters people who have experienced violence, to develop their way of thinking, and understand the importance of language in how they speak to them.

It is important to call violence for what it is, in clear and accurate language, and examine how a person who has experienced violence actually responded in the moment and later. The focus is on visualising how those who experiencing violence respond through, for example, behaviour that resists violence or oppression, and through doing their utmost to preserve their dignity and the dignity of others.⁴

How people respond to, and resist violence is strongly linked to the social responses they actually receive and anticipate receiving. Adequate response where resistance is made visible and acknowledged, tend to restore a sense of security and dignity.⁵

It is also important that the perpetrators actions and responsibility are documented, and made visible, as well as acknowledge the resistance of the person who experienced the violence in case there is a legal process.

RBP provides a theoretical and practical framework for meeting with people who have experienced violence and who have committed violence.

Important key points

- **Violent acts are unilateral, not mutual.**
Violence consists of actions that one person performs against the will and well-being of another.
- **People are active subjects, not passive and affected objects.**
- **Violence is deliberate.**
Those who use violence make planned and conscious choices to use violence.
- **Resistance is always present.**
People resist all forms of violence, directly and indirectly, as it is committed and often long after the violence has stopped.
- **Violence is a violation of dignity.**
It is through our social interactions that we gain and develop our sense of identity, self-esteem and self-worth. Even in extreme situations, the person experiencing violence searches for and finds ways of maintaining and asserting their dignity.

⁴ Response-Based Practice - en metod för att synliggöra motstånd mot våld, 2018-09-03, Unizon

⁵ We're in the 21st Century After All': Analysis of Social Responses in Individual Support and Institutional Reform in Hyden, M., Gadd, D. & Wade, A. (2016) Response-based Approaches to Interpersonal Violence, Palgrave-Macmillan.

Violent acts are unilateral, not mutual

A premise of Response-Based Practice is that violence is with rare exceptions unilateral, committed by one person or group against another, not mutual or joint. It is important to understand and convey that the person who has experienced the violence is not portrayed as a participant in the violence, and is therefore to blame. The perpetrator is solely responsible.

It is important to provide accurate and complete descriptions in cases of violence. This can be difficult because language is so often used to conceal the violence, protect the perpetrator, and blame the victimized person. A bank robbery is not a 'financial transaction'. In the same way, domestic violence is not a marriage problem: Rape is not sexual intercourse, child rape is not sex tourism, and so on. The use of mutual language suggests that the victimized person has contributed to, and shares responsibility for, the violence. This obscures the actions and sole responsibility of the perpetrator and obscures the victim's resistance.

The perpetrator benefits from the use of language that describes violent acts as mutual action. The language used is thus especially important to consider for both professionals and acquaintances and friends encountering someone who has experienced violence – as language can obscure both violence and resistance.

Examples

A woman lives with a man who is violent towards her. She and those in her social network say that she is in a "violent relationship" or "abusive relationship". Here, the professional needs to be attentive and understand the linguistic difference between "living in a violent relationship" and "living with a partner who is violent". The first expression intertwines the person experiencing violence as partly responsible for the violence, while the second highlights the actions of the perpetrator.

An act of violence that is described as "the couple had a volatile discussion and the woman said something that made the man angry, so he grabbed her by the neck in a chokehold" portrays the victimized person as an accomplice.

Also consider the following: In a kiss, both parties judge the other's responses and signals, and the next step is a consequence of these judgments. But when one person forces their mouth onto the mouth of another, and forces their tongue into their mouth, it is not a kiss: It is an aggressive and violent act that is hidden by the word "kiss".

Inaccurate language, which is very common in society, suggests that both parties are participants in the violence that takes place.

It is important to remember that relationships consist of gradual habits and that couples usually relate logically to each other in a process where they become increasingly intertwined. The woman that experience violence tries to adjust to an everyday that consist of violence. There are periods without of violence, which awakens hope for an everyday life free of violence. The person who experiences violence might choose to stay in the relationship. This might be a strategic choice to avoid more extreme violence, keep the children safe, calm a situation down, and wait for a safer time to escape. The victimized person might stay in the house for practical reasons, not stay in the relationship⁶.

6 Viveka Enander och Carin Holmberg, Varför går hon? Studentlitteratur, 2011.

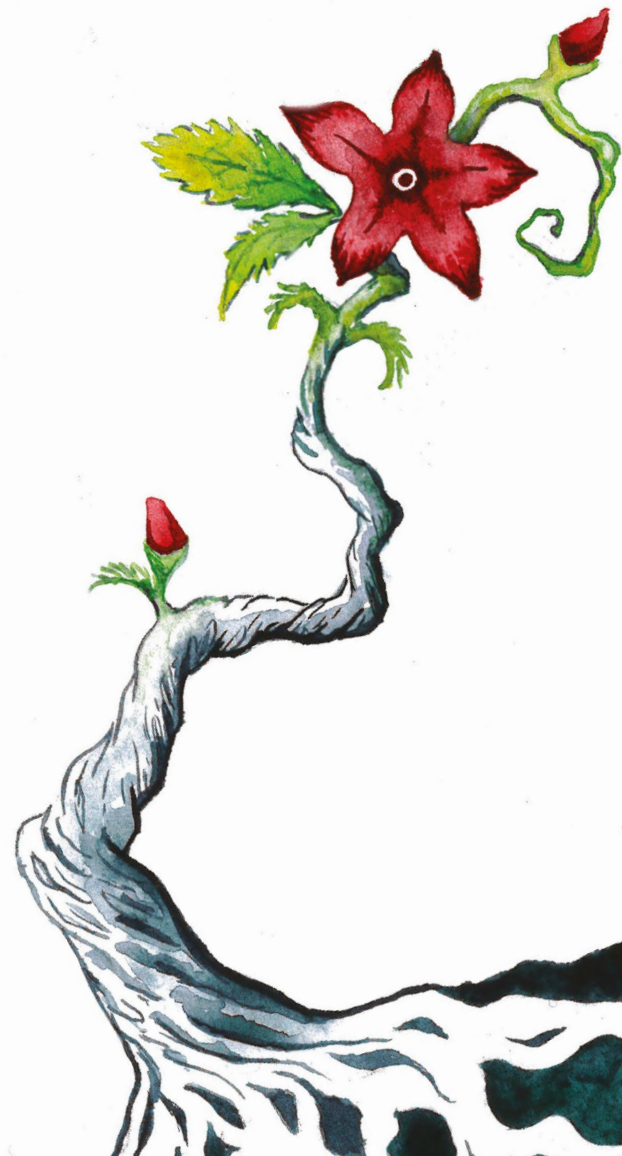
People are active subjects – not passive and affected objects

In RBP, the analysis of social interactions is primary. With RBP, there is a significant difference between an effect of violence and a response to violence.

The emotions and actions of individuals who experience violence are responses to rather than effects of violence. Many people – both professionals and the general public – believe that some women choose men who use violence and tend to be passive and accept the violence. This is partly because women are forced to resist in subtle and concealed ways in order to protect themselves and their children from even more extreme violence. Resistance can be open and defiant but is often indirect and may exist only in the privacy of the mind. For example, a woman who is refusing to be content with the abuse, and feeling extremely sad and discouraged, might be seen as suffering from depression, and seen as “mentally ill”. She may seem to be passive at first, but with the help of careful and respectful questions, her subtle and covert responses and resistance can become visible. What has happened in silence, behind the scenes? In what other ways has she been expressing her discontent with the violence? What tactics does she use to protect herself and her children? How does she continue to respond and resist despite the pain and danger?

The difference between response and effect

A woman is experiencing violence from her husband. He has threatened her before, but this time he hits her. It hurts, the woman screams but at the same time tries not to wake the children. One of the children wakes up anyway and comes in and witnesses the violence. The woman then worries about this, she withdraws, gets scared, becomes dejected and tries to avoid it happening again. She is having trouble concentrating, her short-term memory is getting worse, she is eating too little and showing all the signs of clinical depression. She is eventually given a diagnosis and medicine. *There is a risk that the woman is diagnosed and medicated when she really needs another type of care. The woman has acted and responded relevantly, and her resistance to the violence was healthy. However she will need help to understand and talk about what happened.*



Resistance is ever-present

ASK APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

How has the person who is experiencing violence responded to the violence? Have they tried to prevent, divert or mitigate the events to protect themselves and others? These are questions that may be appropriate to start with for the person who has experienced violence to feel seen and heard.

VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR IS DELIBERATE AND STRATEGIC

People who commit violent acts anticipate and work to suppress the resistance of the people they abuse. For example, the perpetrating person often works to isolate the victimized person to prevent them from obtaining help and support from others. However, professionals often overlook and obscure the person's resistance for several reasons. They tend to focus only on supposed "effects" and "impacts" rather than "responses". "Resistance" is often seen only as open and direct combat, as if it was a struggle between equals. This is the least common and often the most dangerous form of resistance. The problem is that evidence of resistance is reduced to screams, bruises, skin under the nails, and so on.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF RESISTANCE

Resistance takes many forms, from quiet withdrawal to direct physical self-defense, and cannot be captured in any single definition. It is not up to the "expert" to say which responses are forms of resistance and which are not. Rather, it is important to adopt an attitude of respectful and focused curiosity, and to consider how particular responses might be understandable as forms of resistance. To do this, it is necessary to ask good questions about social interaction in context and learn how the person made sense of the situation.⁷

DESCRIBE PHYSICAL ACTION, THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS

We tend to focus on how the person responded – mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually - during and after specific acts of violence and other forms of oppression.

For example, the question, "When you saw that they were about to attack you, how did you respond? What did you do?", allows the person to describe their physical actions as well as their thoughts and emotions. Through this process, the person takes up the 'subject position' and emerges as a person who did what they could in the moment, even if they could not escape or stop the violence. This upholds the dignity of the person and challenges the blame that is often aimed at victims who are thought to have done nothing, or the wrong thing.

PROFESSIONALS OFTEN FOCUS ON EFFECT

Although resistance is ever-present, many people who experience violence have never had the opportunity to talk about their responses and resistance. The idea that they responded appropriately and resisted as best they could may be a completely new idea. There are several reasons for this. One is that the focus in the mental health professions tends to be on the 'effects' or 'impacts' or 'sequelae' of violence or 'trauma'. Another is that people who have been victimized are often blamed; portrayed as jointly responsible, as passive and dysfunctional, or even as inviting or attracting the violence.

Many people are reluctant to talk about violence for these reasons.⁸

ACCURATE LANGUAGE

The awareness and skill of the interviewer is crucial, therefore. Sometimes when we ask about responses, the victim says they did nothing at first. We simply accept this as a sincere expression of the person's experience of the moment. Questions about responses to violence must be asked in a sensitive manner and with accurate language.

⁸ Allan Wade write up for pedagogical theater 2019

⁷ Texten är tagen från en artikel av Renoux och Wade, 2008.

We do not ask, "How did you resist?" because this question is too abstract and can come across as an accusation, as if we were saying "You should have resisted" reveal pre-existing awareness and capacity.

However, normally we continue to ask for more information

"How did you do nothing?"

"What was going through your mind?"

"How did you 'freeze'?"

"How did you hold your body?"

"What would have happened if you had done something else?"

These kinds of questions gradually reveal that the person did what they could. To do "nothing" - to be quiet, calm, silent, or still - can be truly life-saving forms of resistance.

TWO DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SAME SITUATION

To conceal the victim's resistance is also to conceal the perpetrator's efforts to overcome and suppress that resistance. The victim can then appear passive, the violence can seem to be less extreme, and the perpetrator can seem to be less responsible. To conceal the victim's resistance benefits only the perpetrator. Consequently, exploring the victim's resistance should be an element of all investigations and records. Below are two different descriptions of the same situation, a stranger-rape in a park. The first description omits mention of the victim's responses. The second description includes the victim's responses and resistance.

EXAMPLE 1

He followed her along the path. He increased his speed to catch her. He grabbed her by the shoulders and threw her on the ground. He dragged her towards the bushes. He overpowered her and dragged her into the bush. He held a stone over her head and threatened to kill her if she screamed. He called her derogatory names. He forced his mouth on her face. He tried to open her belt. He grabbed her trousers and pulled them down. He overpowered her and raped her vaginally.

EXAMPLE 2

He followed her along the path. ***She increased her speed.*** He increased his speed to catch her. ***She moved to the side.*** He grabbed her by the shoulders and threw her on the ground. ***She rolled to get away.*** He dragged her towards the bushes. ***She grabbed hold of a tree to stop him pulling her into the bushes.*** He overpowered her and dragged her into the bush. ***She started screaming.*** He held a stone over her head and threatened to kill her if she screamed. ***She stopped screaming.*** He called her derogatory names. ***She said: "You don't want to do this. You don't want to hurt me."*** He forced his mouth on her face. ***She twisted her face to the side.*** He tried to open her belt. ***She pushed out her stomach to stop him opening her belt.*** He grabbed her trousers and pulled them down. ***She crossed her ankles to prevent him from pulling off her trousers.*** He overpowered her and raped her vaginally. ***She stayed still to avoid injury and focused her thoughts on something else.***

By including the victim's resistance, we can see the deliberate efforts of the perpetrator to overcome and suppress that resistance. It also shows that the perpetrator was not out of control and did not misunderstand. Rather, it shows the perpetrator acted intentionally and actually encountered the victim's resistance. This is important for the assessment of guilt and sentencing in a trial. Descriptions of the responses are important to the woman who has been assaulted, as she is then portrayed as actively defending herself, and is less likely to be blamed.

Violence is a violation of dignity

All forms of violence generally involve humiliating the victim. Long after the physical injuries heal, the sense of humiliation may remain.

Dignity is a core principle in RBP. Dignity means “worth”. To experience “dignity” is to experience one’s self as worthy in one’s own eyes and the eyes of others. Dignity encompasses safety (respect for one’s social, physical, spiritual, psychological integrity), autonomy (freedom to choose and to put one’s choices into effect), equality (to be no less than others), inclusion (to be welcomed for who you are), and the capacity to care for loved ones, such as children and parents.

In human rights documents “dignity” is an “inherent” property of the person: Every person is said to possess dignity and is entitled to be treated with dignity by others and by public institutions within the state. Dignity is also a constant concern in the endless social interactions that make up daily life. We return sincere greetings, avoid publicly embarrassing others, respect others’ physical and social space, acknowledge the meaning of suffering and loss, care for the aged and infirm, laugh heroically at failed jokes, respect diverse identities, ignore accidental farts, defer to elders, cherish children, refuse to laugh at others’ misfortunes, treat others as competent, show interest in others’ lives, resist giving unwanted advice, and so on.

All forms of violence involve an attack on the dignity of the person and their loved ones. The perpetrator may use strategies designed to maximize humiliation. And the experience of humiliation may be the most intense and lasting injury. Further, many people fear they will be further humiliated by professionals when they talk about the violence.

Consequently, in all cases, it is important to explore how the victimized person has tried to preserve and reassert their basic human dignity, directly and indirectly, not only in response to the violence, but in their contacts with professionals and others who become involved.

Part 2

Films and conversation questions

Introduction

The films consist of three different scenarios and two versions of each scenario.

The scenarios are fictional in that they are professionally acted from scripts. But they are realistic in that they concern common types of violence, the first versions of the interviews in each scenario are common among the respective professions, and the second versions of the interviews are quite true to response-based practice. We hope viewers will be able to discuss the differences between the interviews in each scenario to gain a better sense of response-based practice. Comments by Allan Wade are included for each of the scenes.



1. Eva and the Police Officer



2. Eric and the Counselor



3. Sara and the Social Worker

The first version of each interview omits any real exploration of the victim's responses and resistance. The second version of each interview illustrates how the various professionals, despite their different mandates, worked to uphold the dignity of their "clients" by using language skillfully, asking good questions about social interaction (i.e., offenders' actions and victims' responses) and the immediate contexts in which the violence was committed.



Eva and the Police Officer

DESCRIPTION

The scene takes place at a police station. Eva has been raped. It happened in the laundry room on the ground floor of the building where she and her daughter live. Eva called the police several hours after the rape. A Police Officer immediately came to the scene and conducted an initial interview. In the following scenes, Eva is being interviewed a second time at the police station by another Police Officer. This is the first time this Police Officer and Eva have met.

Instructions

Watch the film “Eva and the Police Officer, version 1”.

- Reflect on Eva’s situation.
- What happens in her encounter with the Police Officer?
- Reflect on the Police Officer’s approach.
- Reflect on resistance and dignity. Describe Eva’s responses to the violence?
- Discusses the Police Officer assessment of who is responsible?

Regarding word choices and behaviour – what would you like to change in this scene?

Watch the film “Eva and the Police Officer, version 2”.

- What is different between versions 1 and 2?
- Identify and describe Eva’s responses to the violence?
- Discuss how the Police Officer works to obtain an accurate account and uphold Eva’s dignity.
- Other thoughts?



Allan Wade comments

In scenario 2, the Police Officer adopts a much more contextual approach to the interview, right from the beginning:

Police Officer: "Ok, thanks. Do you know what we'll do, Eva? We'll do it like this, we'll start from the beginning. And I'd like you to go through every detail, everything that happened, including your own actions. Leave nothing out, even if you think it was something insignificant. Start from the beginning, what was the first thing that happened?"

This passage reflects a number of key "theoretical" and "practical" assumptions on the part of the Police. First, the phrase, "including your own actions", assumes (a) that Eva did respond actively in some manner and (b) that her responses are relevant and can shed light on the assault. Although this is in one sense an obvious assumption, it is not necessarily widely held. A great deal of literature concerning victims suggests they are essentially passive or driven solely by automatic reactions and cannot adequately remember the events.⁹

⁹ [Linda Coats and Allan Wade "Telling it like it isn't: obscuring perpetrator responsibility for violent crime. Discourse & Society 2004](#)

THE IMPORTANCE OF SMALL ACTS

The follow-up, "leave nothing out, even if you think it was something insignificant", highlights the importance of "small acts" in the context of ongoing face-to-face social interaction. In the context of intense, co-present, inescapable social and physical contact between an offender and a victim, or by an offender against a victim, "small" actions can be profoundly important. How the victim holds their body, what the victim does and does not say, where the victim directs their gaze, how fully the victim does or does not comply, and so on, are crucially important and can be the difference between life and death.

MINNAS PART

In the next sequence, the Police Officer follows up when Eva mentions the presence of Minna, her daughter, in the courtyard just outside the laundry room. With Minna already an important part of the interview - because the Police recognized how important Minna's presence could be in the situation and had the awareness to follow up - Eva once again has Minna more freshly on her mind and is more able to fully recount the importance of Minna, present in the courtyard, during the assault.

Eva's statement, "All I can think about is Minna. What will she do if she hears him shouting?", reveals the "situational logic" of Eva's ongoing responses and forms of resistance. This is apparent in the exchange that comes next:

Eva: "I become terrified that Minna will come to the basement window and look in. She usually does this when she wants something. And I... think about what would happen if she sees or hears something that is happening in here now? Or if he sees her, what happens then?"

Police Officer: "So you stay quiet so that Minna won't hear you and he won't discover her? Is that right?"

For Eva, open defiance and physical resistance, including shouting for help, are not possible as Minna would hear and come to the window. Minna's life would then be at risk. Eva knows, "I have to get it over with", to keep Minna unaware and safe. It is extremely important that the Police Officer openly acknowledges the importance of Minna and presents his understanding of this directly to Eva. This allows Eva to see that the Police Officer is working to understand the situation and her concerns and, as a result, creates more safety and a sense of collaboration. Eva is then better able to understand what kind of information the Police Officer wants and provide that information, in the required detail, as the interview proceeds. The result is a more contextual interview with better information.

With added contextual information, along with a greater sense of safety and collaboration, the Police Officer is in a better position to ask Eva why she waited until later in the evening to call the police.

Knowing that this question could be taken as an accusation, the Police Officer asks for permission.

Police Officer: "Can you explain why it took so long for you to contact the police, almost an entire day?"

Eva: "I didn't have a babysitter for Minna. And I knew that my father would come over that evening, and I thought I would contact the police then."

Police Officer: "So you were with Minna for the rest of the day and then you contacted the police?"

Eva: (nods)

Police Officer: "Why could you not call someone else, a neighbour or a friend?"

Eva: "I didn't want Minna to get worried. I didn't want to trouble my father either, he has enough to deal with. He's sick at the moment."

THE POLICE OFFICER CONFIRMS EVAS RESISTANCE

Once again, Eva is able to provide the "situational logic" behind her own responses and the decisions she made in context. By the end of the interview, the Police Officer is in a position to honour and acknowledge Eva's ongoing resistance, prudent and loving protection of Minna, and "extreme courage". The Police is not merely trying to be "strengths-based" or "positive" or even highlight Eva's "resilience". Rather, the acknowledgments the Police Officer provides, which are indeed moving, follow logically from the facts presented by Eva. With a contextual and response-based approach to the interview, Eva is able to describe the attack and her own responses and forms of resistance. The Police Officer is able to obtain crucial information – a better quality of information – and uphold Eva's dignity and love for her daughter, Minna.

Every professional intervention, from a brief phone call, to a detailed interview, to a long-term relationship, is a social response that can make a difference – either positive or negative.



Eric and the Counselor

DESCRIPTION

This scene takes place at the clinic of a Counselor. Eric has been depressed and with no energy for more than a year after graduating from high school. Eric can neither work nor study. His mother is worried and has persuaded him to seek help. Eric has therefore turned to a health centre and contacted a Counselor. They have talked once on the phone and Eric has briefly explained why he is not feeling well. In the following scene Eric and the Counselor meet for the first time.

Instructions

Watch the film “Eric and the Counselor, version 1”.

Reflect on Eric’s situation.

- What happens in the meeting with the Counselor?
- Reflect on the Counselor’s approach.
- Reflect on resistance and dignity. Is, for example, Eric’s resistance to the harassment and bullying made visible? Through their questions, does the Counselor highlight who is responsible for the violence?
- regarding word choices and behaviour – what would you like to change in the scene?

Watch the film “Eric and the Counselor, version 2”.

- What is different between versions 1 and 2?
- Do the differences ‘make a difference’ for Eric?
- Identify and describe Eric’s responses to the violence?
- Discuss if the counselor behaved in a way that helps Eric appreciate his own responses?
- How does the grammar of the questions differ in the two interviews?



Allan Wade comments

Eric (19) has followed his mother's advice, or request, and come to an appointment with the Counselor. It seems Eric's mother sees that Eric is sad and depressed but does not know of the assault and social cruelty at school, possibly because Eric does not want her to know. In scenario 1, the Counselor simply reassures Eric that his mother "will not get to know".

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In scenario 2, the Counselor becomes curious about why Eric is concerned about his mother knowing what happened, and asks a series of questions: "And the fact that you don't want to tell your mother, do you think she would get worried about what has happened? Not talking about it – could that be out of consideration for her? So that she doesn't get upset?" By this point in the interview, Eric has already mentioned that he was following up on his mother's request in coming to see the Counselor, and that he has been depressed and sad after being beaten up and bullied. Eric has also shared that he is "sort of nobody anymore". Social exclusion is a powerful form of social abuse for young people.

The first question is "systemic" in that it presumes that Eric's relationship with his mother is important and that he might be concerned for her welfare, even though he is depressed and sad in response to the violence. Young people are often concerned for the well-being of their friends and loved ones and act protectively. Sometimes, young people worry that their distress can be a burden to others, so try to maintain their privacy. As well, in the aftermath of painful experiences, the social responses of others can be crucially important - for everyone, but especially for young people who remain dependent on older adults for practical and emotional reasons. The question opens the topic of Eric's relationship with his mother and possibly others and in this way creates the opportunity to explore how those relationships might relate to exactly how Eric responded to the assault and exclusion at school. More subtly, the question presumes that Eric's concerns are in a sense larger than himself. Young adults are often portrayed as self-absorbed and not yet mature enough to seriously take others into account. This can be true, or partly true, but it can also be true of adults. More often, we find, young people are highly aware of others, especially friends and loved ones.

ERIC'S RELATION TO HIS MOTHER

The second and third questions suggest possibilities for Eric to consider. Eric's responses to these questions can provide the Counselor with important information about the quality of social responses Eric has received and the level of support he has in this difficult time. Eric's own sense of well-being is tied to his mother's well-being and, as we see later on, his brother's well-being. In this way, the Counselor begins the process of "contextualising" Eric's concerns: In what context did they arise? How are they given meaning? What and who is Eric most concerned about at this difficult time? What relationships can be called upon for understanding and help? Eric's first response, "Yes, she would be upset", confirms he is worried about his mother even while he is sad and depressed on his own behalf. The Counselor honours Eric's concern for his mother by gently introducing the idea that he may be taking "her feelings into account". Eric then accepts this quite honourable idea.

NOTICE THE ACTS OF VIOLENCE

In both scenarios, when Eric says, "some in the class started messing with me", the Counselor asks "Okay, what kinds of things did they do?". The purpose is to put the focus on the actions of those who were "messing with" Eric. It is important for the Counselor to obtain clear descriptions of the aggressive and abusive actions in context, as long as Eric is comfortable providing that information. Too often in cases of violence, the focus shifts away from the actions of the perpetrators to questions about the minds-feelings-bodies of those who are harmed.

Later in the second scenario, the Counselor works to obtain more details by asking, "How many of them were there?" After Eric responds and reveals that it was a gang attack, the Counselor asks Eric, "How did you respond when they...", and uses Eric's language to complete the question. Eric is then able to describe his actions and eventually his thinking. In this way, Eric becomes not only a person who was attacked, but a person who was attacked and responded as best he could in the moment.

Over the next few exchanges, Eric is able to detail many acts of resistance, and his thinking as he tried to manage the situation. The Counselor is then able to stress, "You did what you could", and later, "it was the only thing to do". Eric's responses and forms of resistance make complete sense when understood in context.

When the Counselor exclaims, "That sounds to me like a hell of a lot of resistance", Eric agrees. Then the fact that Eric went back to school ("even though this had happened . . . and you could expect more harassment") becomes understandable in a new light, as a sign of strength and determination. It was not that Eric missed a lot school because he "lacked strength", as suggested in the first interview: Rather, Eric returned to school despite humiliation and significant risks.

The question, "Where did you get the inner strength . . .", asks Eric to consider (a) that he does have inner strength and (b) where, in what kinds of experiences, that might originate. Coming full circle, to concern for his family, Eric mentions the strength and inspiration he draws from his brother. We can see here that the opening segment, in which the Counselor asks Eric about his concern for his mother, created enough emotional safety for Eric to talk about his sacred relationships.



Sara and the Social Worker

DESCRIPTION

The scene takes place at the social welfare office. Sara has recently left her husband Stefan, who has used violence against her for many years. A neighbour reported the violence and police arrived to their home along with the social services. Sara and her son Max sought protection at a women's shelter. The municipality has a signed contract with the shelter, but it was not possible for Sara and Max to stay there. Now they live temporarily with Sara's mother. In the following scene, Sara and the Social Worker meet to talk about housing for Sara and her son. They have met once before.

Instructions

Watch the film "Sara and the Social Worker, version 1".

Reflect on Sara's situation.

- What happens in the meeting with the Social Worker?
- Reflect on the Social Worker's approach.
- Reflect on resistance and dignity. Is Sara's resistance to Stefan's violence made visible? Through their questions, does the Social Worker highlight who is responsible for the violence?
- Regarding word choices and behaviour – what would you like to change in the scene?

Watch the film "Sara and the Social Worker, version 2".

- What is different between versions 1 and 2?
- Does it include the changes you want to see?
- Is something missing, and if so, what?
- Identify and describe Sara's responses to the violence?
- Discuss how the Social worker upholds Sara's dignity?



Allan Wade comments

Scenario 1 and senario 2 depict very different approaches by the Social Worker to interviewing Sara.

In scenario 1, Sara's resistance to Stefan's violence is left unexplored, even though Sara spontaneously mentions some of her responses. The Social Worker does not ask Sara to discuss how she has responded to various forms of abuse and so is unable to bring these responses forward as forms of resistance. As a result, in scenario 1, Sara is portrayed as going along with the abuse. Sara is portrayed as blameworthy because she sometimes provoked Stefan and was an unprotecti-ve mother because she failed to leave and therefore exposed Max to the abuse

SOCIAL SITUATION AND REALITY

In scenario 2, the Social Worker puts the focus on the social realities Sara is facing and her responses to those realities, including Stefan's abusive behaviour. This begins immediately. In the beginning of scenario 1 the Social Worker asks, "But, first, how are you feeling today?". This is a simple question that might be asked with compassion. At the same time, it asks Sara to talk about her inner self instead of the realities she is facing. In scenario 2, the Social Worker asks, "How are you getting on with things?".

This question portrays Sara as actively "getting on with" (doing) and "things" refers to the circumstances she is facing.

Early in scenario 2, the Social Worker makes a point of asking about Sara's orientation to Stefan's behavio-ur when he phones Sara ("Did you want him to call you?") and follows up with a question about Sara's responses ("How do you respond to him when he calls? I mean, what do you do?"). Sara is then able to detail how she resists Stefan's abusive and manipulative behaviour. The Social Worker obtains more information about Sara's responses and forms of resistance as the interview progresses.

Sara's resistance shows that Sara did not go along with the abuse and provides the Social Worker with important information to contest Sara's claim that she is "such a door mat" and to show that the abuse was not mutual. When Sara uses mutualising language, the Social Worker is able to offer another description that described Stefan's actions in clear terms and suggest that Sara's responses were, in context, understandable as forms of resistance.

Here is the sequence as it appears in scenario 2: Sara: "You don't know him. What is logical to everyone else is not so for Stefan. He can be so bloody manipulative as well, and I'm so susceptible to it. I am annoyed with myself every damn day because I'm so weak. That I, like, didn't managed to get out in time, that I didn't stop him from the start, that I... I don't know how I could have become such a bloody doormat!" The Social Worker: "What do you mean you're a door-mat?" Sara: "Yes, he is literally stamping on me. Like a bloody doormat."

The Social Worker: "I've understood that he doesn't listen to you."

Sara: "No!"

The Social Worker: "But I've also understood that you've tried to do everything to make him stop. And I mean, a doormat doesn't put up the resistance that you do."

Sara: "No, but I'm not getting anywhere either."

The Social Worker: "Just because you don't get him to stop doesn't mean that you let it happen. You've tried everything to get him to understand. You can't take responsibility for Stefan, he has to take responsibility for his own actions and decisions."

The Social Worker skilfully contests the notion that the violence is mutual, or part of a mutual interaction, by refocusing on the strategic nature of Stefan's violent and controlling actions and Sara's ongoing resistance to those actions. Specifically, the Social Worker states, "you haven't pushed him over the edge. You showed him that you don't want to duck under his punches". Sara, like many people in her position, then goes on to reassert a mutual metaphor, "it takes two to tango". Again, however, the social worker does not let this pass and skilfully presents another perspective.

Consequently, we always work to understand actual and social responses from the victim's point of view and consider how the perpetrator might have used or

manipulated social responses to further isolate and violate the victim. The victim's resistance is generally linked to the quality of actual and possible social responses over time. With these and other practices, the Social Worker in scenario 2 is able to work with Sara to develop an account in which Sara emerges as a protective parent and person who has creatively resisted various forms of abuse even when it was dangerous to do so openly. The Social Worker also brings in a bit of humour to convey that Sara is not a fragile person who needs handling with kid gloves, but a competent and balanced person who can enjoy humour even in challenging times.

Part 3

Recommended reading

Links

[Att tala om motstånd. Från hjälplöst offer till aktivt subjekt.](#)

Three articles in Swedish about response based work in Gothenburg.

[Brottsofferjouren](#)

Victim Support Sweden helps victims of crime, witnesses and affected relatives.

[Skolarbetet i kläm när unga med neuropsykiatrisk funktionsnedsättning \(NPF\) möter rättsprocessen.](#)

Part of a national education material for school staff.

[Samverkan mot våld](#)

Information about support and help available in Norrbotten if you are exposed to domestic violence, human trafficking, prostitution or honor related oppression. Also information on collaboration and guidance for professionals in the field.

[Centre for Response-Based Practice](#)

The Centre for Response-Based Practice guides and co-ordinates research, development, & the application of Response-Based ideas in various settings. We aim to partner with individuals and organizations to promote the development and application of these ideas, to increase awareness, & to empower individuals & organizations in the use of Response-Based practice.

[Response-based practice- En metod för att synliggöra motstånd mot våld](#)

Unizons material on Response based practise.

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3. <https://webbkursomvald.se/>
4. [Response based practice- en metod för att synliggöra motstånd mot våld, UNIZON](#)
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6. Carin Holmberg och Viveka Enander. Varför går hon? Om att stödja misshandlande kvinnors uppbrottsprocesser 2011.
7. Allan Wade "draft write-up for Pedagogical Theatre" 2019-11-07
8. Artikel av Renoux & Allan Wade 2008.
9. [Telling it like it isn't: obscuring perpetrator responsibility for violent crime. Discourse & Society, 2004](#)

Recommended reading

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