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Accepting
Our
Roots

**Therapist
Mentor
Speaker**



THE AGENDA



- 1 The Why
- 2 The Who
- 3 The What
- 4 The When
- 5 The How



THE WHY

“

There is no greater agony than
bearing an untold story inside you.

-Maya Angelou



If you met
My
Family
YOU WOULD
UNDERSTAND





THE GOOD

THE BAD

THE UGLY

MARCUS' STORY

Marcus grew up in a tough neighborhood plagued by gang violence, poverty, and drugs. His father was incarcerated when Marcus was just five, leaving his mother to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. As the eldest of four children, Marcus took on a caregiver role early, often skipping school to look after his siblings. The streets became his second home, and by age 14, he was running small errands for local gang members, seeing it as the only way to contribute financially and protect his family.

By 18, Marcus had racked up multiple juvenile offenses, including petty theft and drug possession. Now an adult, he began facing increasingly harsh consequences until finally, he was facing a sentence that would derail his life for good. He would end up just like his father.

SARAH'S STORY

Sarah grew up in a middle-class suburban neighborhood that looked idyllic from the outside. However, her family hid a history of generational emotional abuse and rigid authoritarian parenting. Her father, a former Marine, controlled the household with strict rules, harsh discipline, and little emotional warmth. Her mother, though physically present, was often passive and avoided conflict, leaving Sarah and her siblings to navigate their father's outbursts alone.

By her teenage years, Sarah had internalized a belief that her worth depended on perfection and obedience. She excelled academically but struggled with crippling anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. In college, she began to self-medicate with alcohol to numb her emotions, eventually leading to several arrests for DUIs and disorderly conduct.

THE WHO

Who is a cycle breaker?

- Disrupters of negative or harmful patterns
- Awareness of Dysfunction
- Intentional Choice to Change
- Focus on Future Generations



20% = 30%



It's estimated that 20-30% of individuals who grew up in environments with significant dysfunction manage to break the cycle.

This leaves a substantial portion of the adult population still grappling with the effects of these cycles.

THE STATS

61% (671M)

Experience Adversity
Western culture ACEs

28% (190M)

Adults with more than 3
ACEs - in western cultures

50% (1B)

Children globally experience
some form of abuse or
family dysfunction

\$1 Trillion

Cost due to low
productivity caused by
mental health issues

Childhood Adversity is a Global Phenomenon

- Define ACEs - Significant or traumatic events occurring in a child's life before the age of 18.
- Normalization of Trauma
- Loss of Human Potential

MARCUS & SARAH'S TURNING POINTS

While in county jail awaiting trial, Marcus met Officer Thompson, a veteran law enforcement officer who had dedicated part of his career to mentoring young offenders. Thompson noticed Marcus's intelligence and leadership potential, buried under layers of survival instincts and street loyalty. During one of their conversations, Thompson asked Marcus, "Do you want your younger brother to follow in your footsteps? Because right now, you're showing him how to end up here."

That question struck a nerve. Marcus knew he didn't want his siblings to repeat his mistakes, but he felt trapped by his circumstances. Thompson offered an alternative: participate in rehabilitation focused on education, vocational training, and emotional development.

At 26, Sarah was arrested for assault during a drunken altercation outside a bar. This time, the court mandated a restorative justice program rather than jail time. The program paired offenders with victims and mediators to foster accountability and understanding. Sarah expected hostility from her victim, a young woman she had pushed during the altercation. Instead, the woman asked Sarah one simple question: "Why are you so angry?" The question unsettled Sarah. She had never thought of herself as angry—more like broken. But through the program, she began to see how unresolved emotions from her childhood had shaped her behavior.

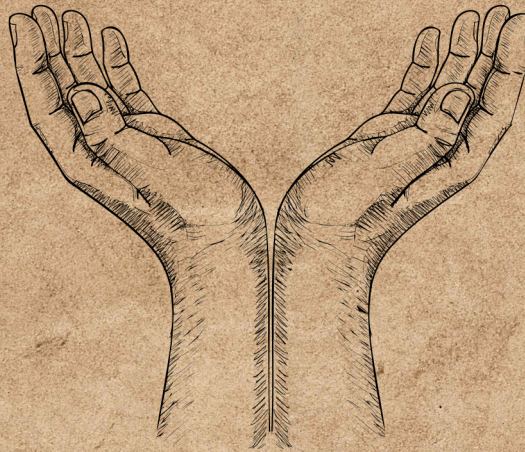
THE WHAT

What sets Cycle Breakers apart?



Intrinsic Qualities

Resilience
Self-efficacy
Identity Formation



External Factors

Social Support Systems
Community Resources
Culture



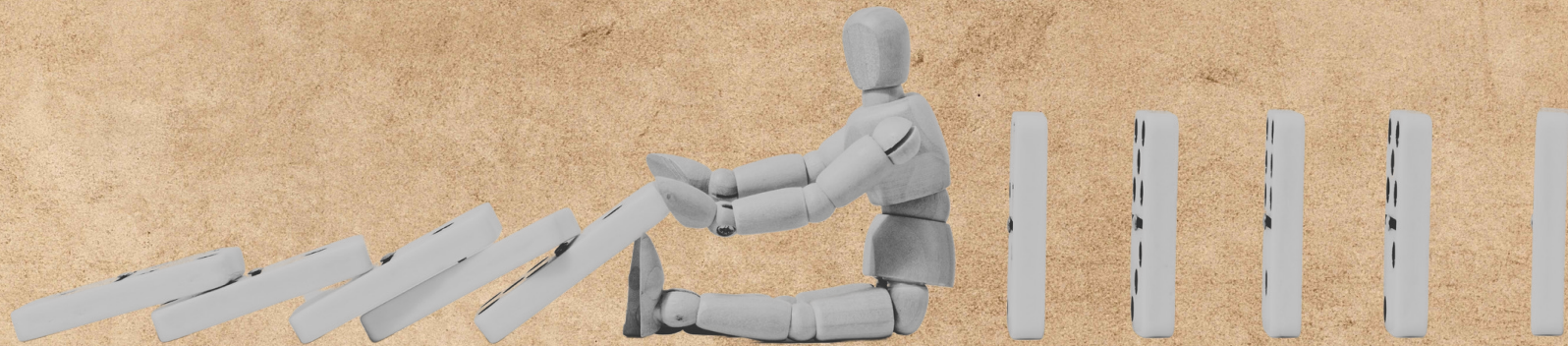
Coping Mechanisms

Problem-focused
Emotion-focused
Avoidance-based

RESILIENCE

What is this really?

- Ordinary Magic (protective factors)
- Attachment Theory
- Evolution of Resilience

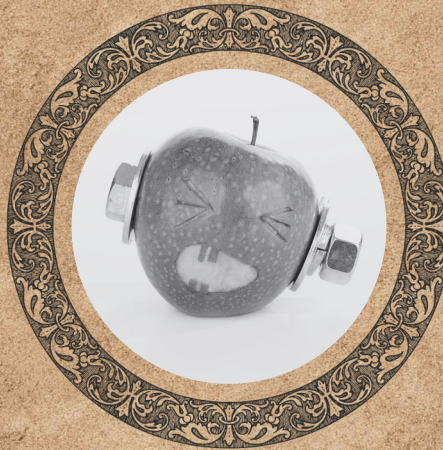


CULTURE



Support

Identifying and reinforcing the need to differentiate from adversity.



Pressure

Certain cultures heavily emphasize family loyalty, and isolation occurs.



Intersectionality

Multiple identities to satisfy - race, gender, socioeconomics - complicates cycle breaking.

COPING

Problem-focused

Addressing the sources of stress and conflict and involves practical steps such as planning, time management, seeking information, or negotiating solutions.

Emotion-focused

Aimed at managing the emotional responses to stress and involves techniques that help individuals regulate their emotions, reduce emotional distress, and maintain psychological equilibrium

Avoidance-based

Respond to stress by distancing themselves from the problem, either mentally or physically, and is characterized by denial, disengagement, procrastination, or substance use.

Adaptive

Essential for Cycle Breakers
Healthy and constructive methods

Adaptive/Maladaptive

Some coping can be adaptive initially but become problematic in the long run. Using coping tools in excess (like exercise).

Maladaptive

Linked to severe psychological distress
Using unhealthy methods to cope which typically will lead to more problems than solutions.



MARCUS & SARAH'S STRUGGLES

Through therapy, Marcus began to unpack the intergenerational cycles of incarceration, poverty, and neglect that shaped his life. He realized how his father's absence, his mother's struggles, and the pressures of being the eldest had all influenced his decisions.

Breaking the cycle wasn't easy. After his release, Marcus faced constant temptation from old friends and the lure of fast money. There were moments of relapse, like skipping job interviews or getting into heated arguments with family members. But with the support of his program mentor and a parole officer who genuinely believed in his potential, Marcus stayed on track.

Breaking the cycle wasn't linear. When Sarah tried to address her family's patterns directly, her father dismissed her as "ungrateful," and her mother begged her not to disrupt the family's fragile peace. For a time, Sarah distanced herself from her family to protect her progress. She struggled with guilt and self-doubt, questioning whether she was doing the right thing.

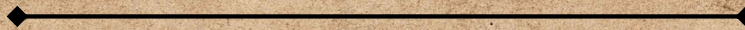
Her biggest breakthrough came during a group therapy session where she met others who had experienced similar familial pressures. Realizing she wasn't alone gave her the strength to stick to her boundaries and focus on building healthier relationships outside her family of origin.

THE WHEN

When do these needs for breaking the cycles begin?

Theoretical Frameworks

Family Systems Theory



Ecological Systems Theory
(Bioecological Model)



FAMILY SYSTEMS

Interdependence

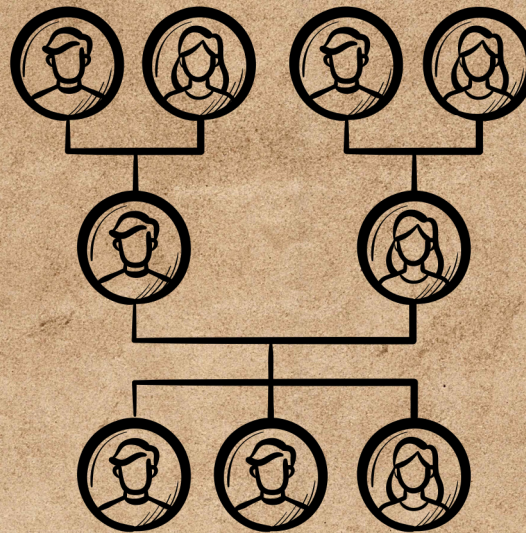
Families are emotional systems where each member's behavior impacts others.

Generational Transmission

Emotional and behavioral patterns (e.g., anxiety, conflict avoidance) are passed down. Unhealthy roles (e.g., scapegoat, rescuer) repeat across generations.

Triangles

When two members are in conflict, a third person is often pulled in, leading to unbalanced dynamics that perpetuate dysfunction.



Emotional System

The family operates as an emotional unit, where emotions flow through relationships and affect each member.

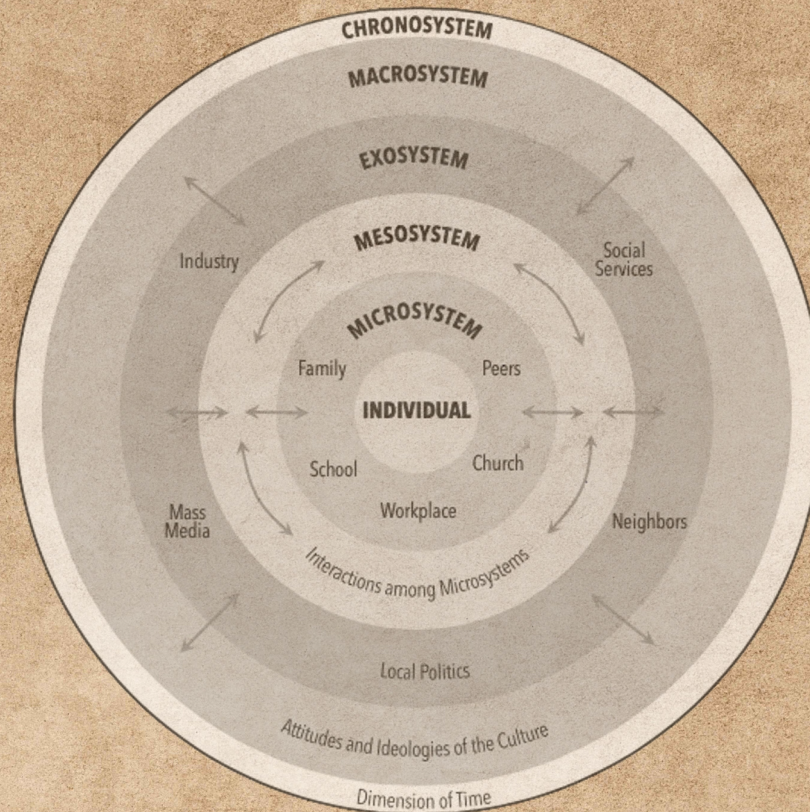
Family Projection

This is the process by which parents transfer their emotional issues or anxieties onto their children.

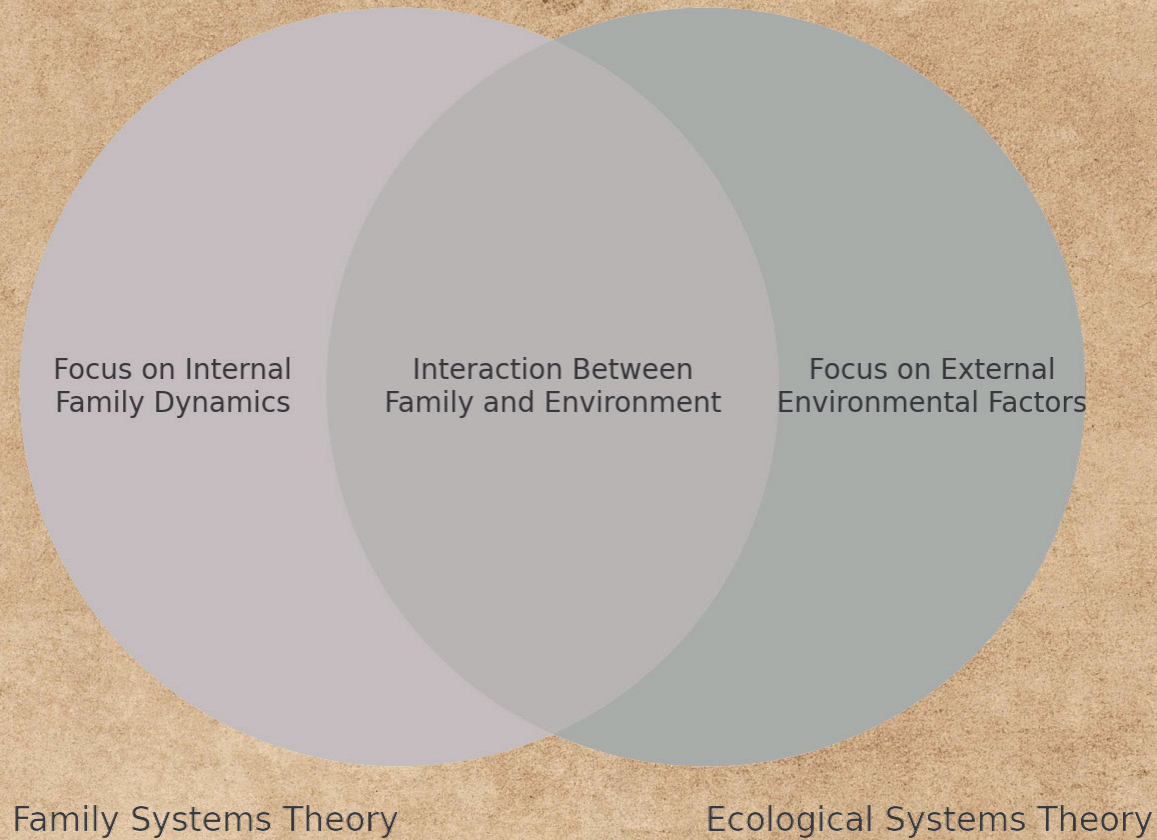
Differentiation of Self

The ability of an individual to separate their own intellectual and emotional functioning from that of their family system.

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS



THEORY OVERLAP



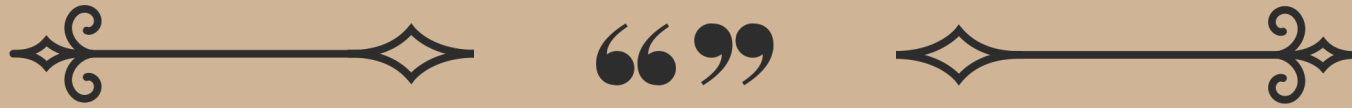
THE TRANSFORMATIONS

Today, at 28, Marcus owns a small auto repair shop and employs other at-risk youth, giving them the opportunities he wished he'd had earlier. He frequently speaks at schools and community centers, sharing his story to deter kids from making the same mistakes. Marcus has also become an unofficial liaison between his community and local law enforcement, helping to build trust and understanding between the two groups.



Today, Sarah works as a restorative justice coordinator, helping offenders and victims navigate the same process that changed her life. She has become an advocate for breaking the cycle of intergenerational emotional suppression and often speaks to law enforcement and legal professionals about the importance of addressing the root causes of criminal behavior. More importantly, Sarah redefined her relationship with her family. While her father never fully embraced her new boundaries, her siblings began to follow her lead, seeking therapy and working to build healthier dynamics in their own lives.

THE HOW



We REPEAT what we don't REPAIR
especially
When we are not AWARE



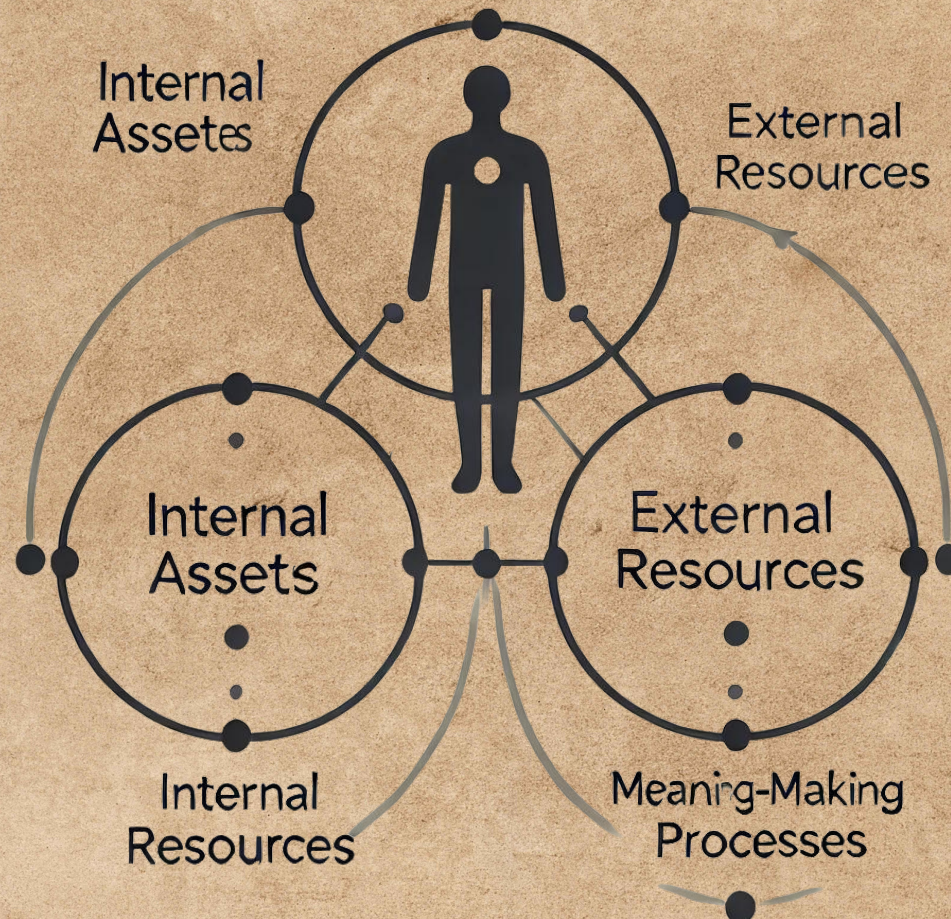
TOOLS FOR YOU

Use Screening Assessments



Tool	Purpose	Age Group
ACE Questionnaire	Screens for childhood trauma	Adults, Adolescents
BRIEF RESILIENCE SCALE (BRS)	Measures resilience	Adolescents, Adults (12+)
Brief COPE	Assesses coping strategies	Adolescents, Adults (12+)
Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)	Screens for emotional/behavioral problems	Children, Adolescents (4-17)
Brief Trauma Questionnaire (BTQ)	Screens for trauma exposure	Adolescents, Adults (16+)
Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)	Assesses perceived social support	Adolescents, Adults (12+)

RESILIENCE PORTFOLIO MODEL



HOW TO USE THE MODEL

1. Holistic Understanding

Multidimensional view of resilience - all resources

2. Focus on Strengths

Highlighting what they are doing well.

3. Create a Portfolio Together

Use assessment tools that explore a client's internal assets, external resources (e.g., social support, and meaning-making processes (e.g., values, beliefs, spirituality).

FRAMEWORK FOR INTERVENTION

By targeting each component of the model—internal, external, and meaning-making processes—strengthen their overall resilience and coping abilities.

YOUR PART

**Spotting
Potential**

**Assess &
Educate**

**Empathy &
Collaboration**

**Intervention
Resources**

**Bridging
the Gap**

Practical Application - Huge Impacts

- Supporting cycle breakers by setting them up for therapy: Empowering them to break dysfunctional patterns
- Understanding the internal and external factors – educating them
- Showing empathy and understanding with matter-of-factness (Strong back – soft front)

THE RESULTS



Cycle breakers courageously and intentionally disrupt negative generational cycles. They accept their roots and represent transformation, resilience, and the capacity to redefine family legacies.



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Accepting
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Roots

