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Family Grief and Loss: Healing After Change or Separation

Learning Objectives

1

1. Identify overt and ambiguous grief within family systems following change or separation.

2

2. Assess how grief impacts family roles, communication, and boundaries.

3

3. Apply trauma-informed, family systems-informed interventions to support healing.

4

4. Facilitate meaning-making, resilience, and relational repair within families.

Reframing Grief Beyond Death

Grief: Deep sorrow or anguish experienced after significant loss, usually the death of a beloved person. Grief can accompany any event that disrupts or challenges our sense of normalcy or ourselves.

Loss: the fact or process of losing something or someone or the state of feeling grief when deprived of someone or something of value.

Families Grieve:



Relationships



Expectations



Roles



Dreams



Identity



Status/Prestige



Security

Common Family Losses:

Divorce

Separation

Addiction

Estrangement

Chronic Illness

Relocation

Empty Ness

Job Loss

Ambiguous Loss: Loss without Closure

Addiction

Estrangement

Emotional
absence

Dementia

Family Systems and Grief

Family Systems Theory

Bowen Family Systems Theory

Grief Responses Across Family Members

Anger

Withdrawal

Anxiety

Control

Caretaking

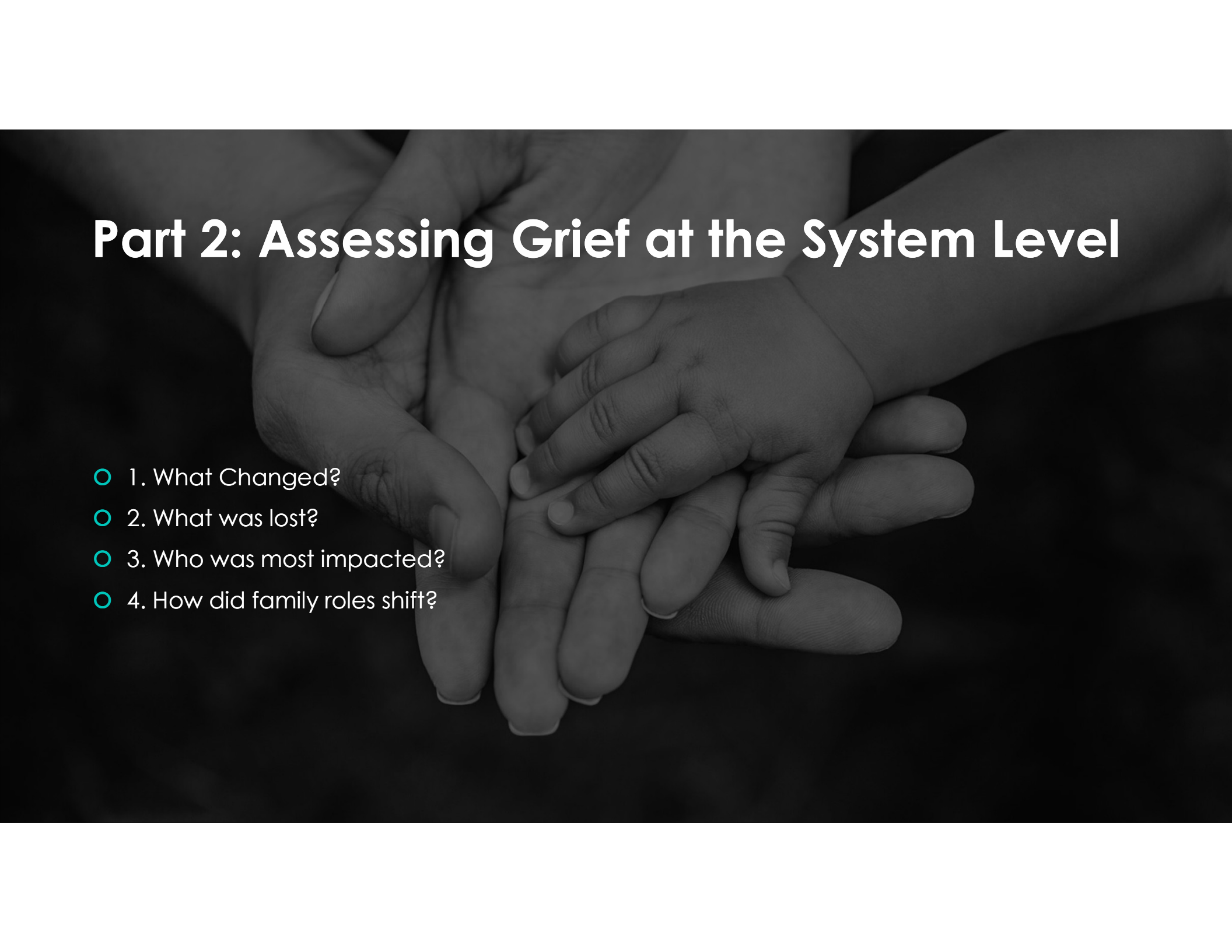
Reflection Activity

A hand holding a compass over a desert landscape with a winding road.

A family struggling with conflict.

A family experiencing emotional distance.

A family experiencing anxiety.



Part 2: Assessing Grief at the System Level

- 1. What Changed?
- 2. What was lost?
- 3. Who was most impacted?
- 4. How did family roles shift?



Signs Grief is Present

Above:

Conflict

Anxiety

Defiance

Withdrawal

Below:

Loss

Sadness

Fear

Longing

Family Roles During Loss

Hero

Caretaker

Peacemaker.

Scapegoat

Withdrawn
Member.

Attachment and Grief

- Secure Attachment
- Anxious Attachment
- Avoidant Attachment



Trauma and Grief

Traumatic Losses can increase:



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graph TD; A[Traumatic Losses can increase:] --> B[Hypervigilance]; B --> C[Emotional dysregulation]; C --> D[Avoidance];
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The diagram consists of four teal-colored rectangular boxes with rounded corners, arranged in a descending staircase pattern from top-left to bottom-right. Each box contains white text. The first box at the top left says 'Traumatic Losses can increase:'. A small grey arrow points down from the right side of this box to the second box, which says 'Hypervigilance'. Another grey arrow points down from the right side of the second box to the third box, which says 'Emotional dysregulation'. A final grey arrow points down from the right side of the third box to the fourth box, which says 'Avoidance'.

Hypervigilance

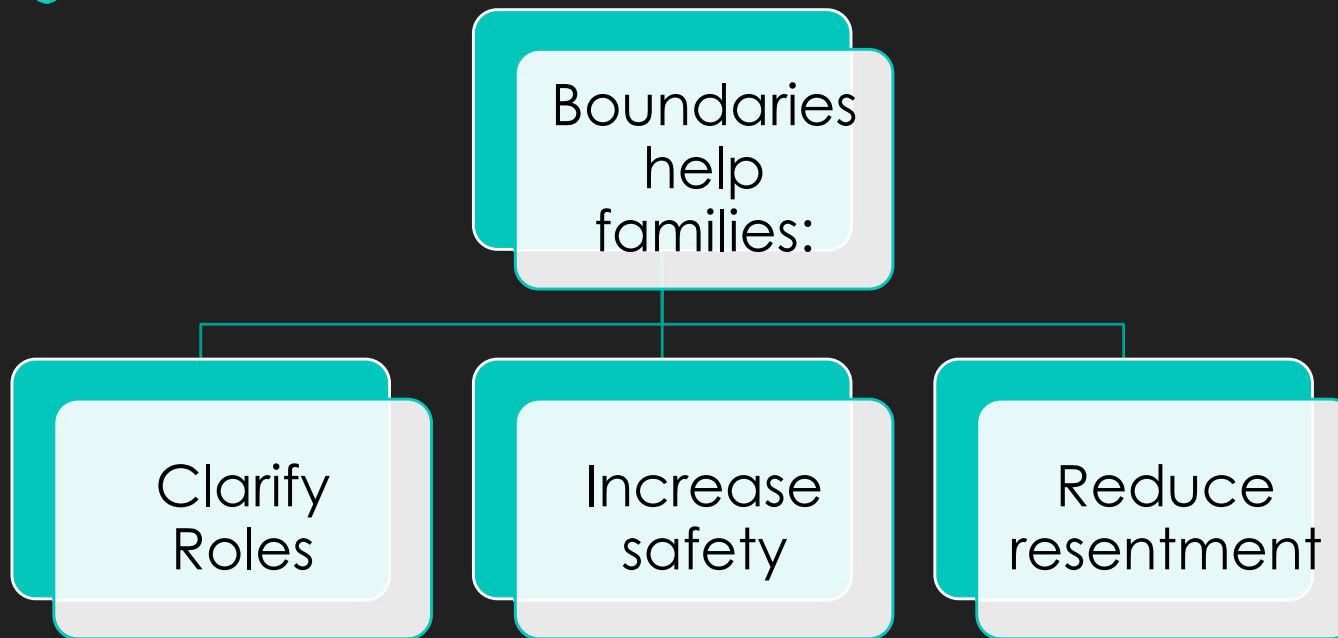
Emotional dysregulation

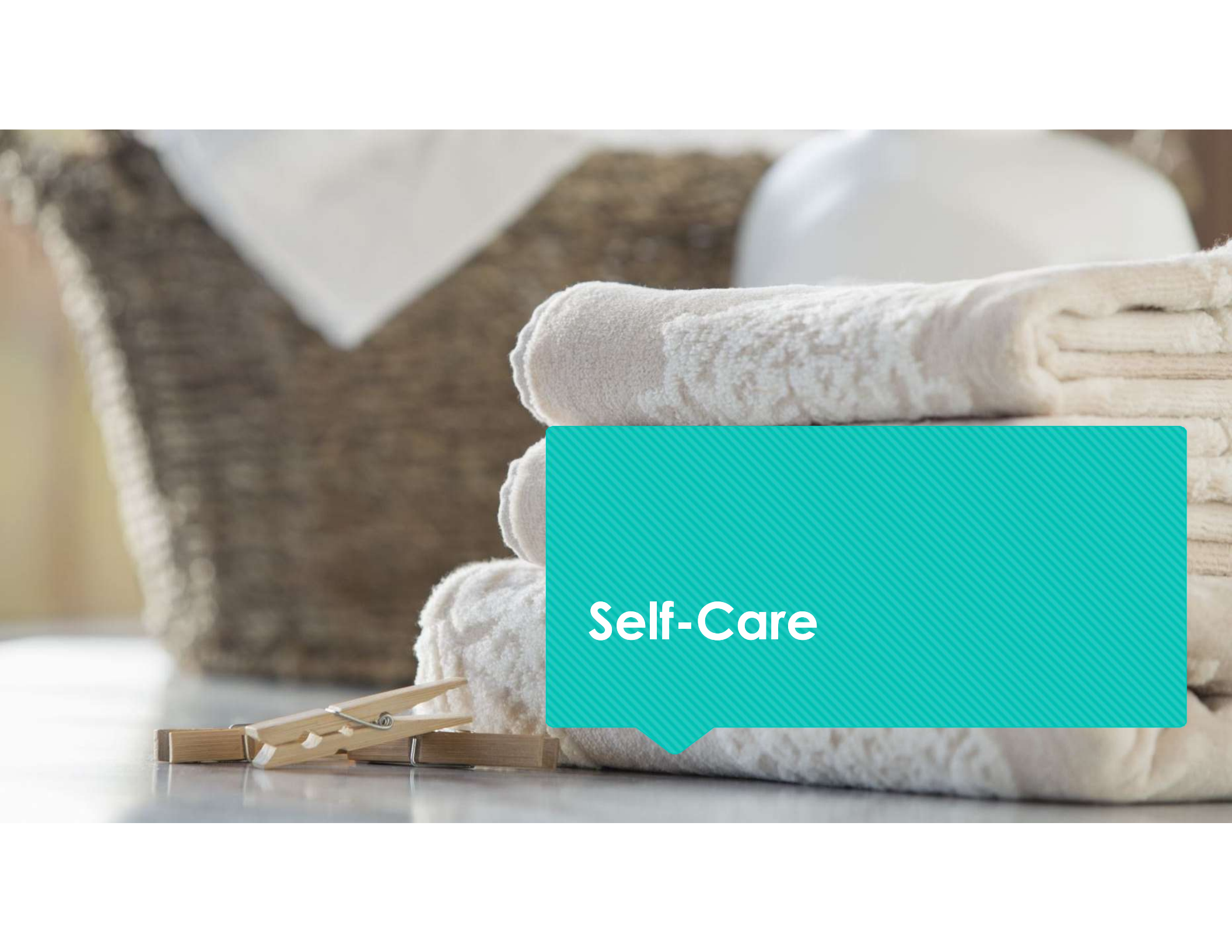
Avoidance

Intervention Strategies

Naming	Naming the loss
Validating	Validating grief
Increasing	Increasing emotional literacy
Improving	Improving communication
Building	Building tolerance for difficult emotions

Boundaries as Relational Care



A photograph of a stack of folded white towels on a reflective surface. A wooden clothespin is clipped to the bottom towel. A teal speech bubble with a diagonal line pattern is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Self-Care

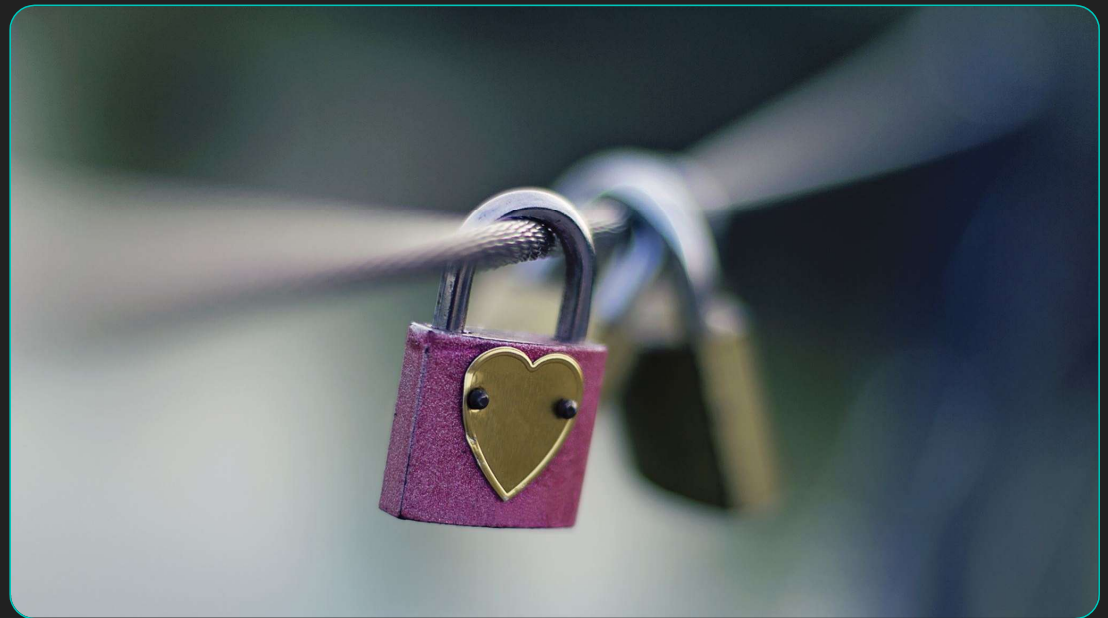
Self-Compassion

Gratitude

Positive affirmations

Emotional Self-Care

- Forgiveness
- Non-Judgmental Stance (feel your feelings)
- Journaling/Brain Dump



Social Self-Care



STAY CONNECTED



UNPLUG AND
DISCONNECT



SCHEDULE TIME

Physical Self-Care



Rest



Move your Body



Eat well and Stay
Hydrated

Part 3: Healing After Loss

Integration

Acceptance

Adjustment

Meaning Making

- What Changed?
- What remains?
- What matters now?

Faith, Culture, and Family Narratives

Culture
Influences:

Expression of
Grief

Roles

Expectations

Faith
influences:

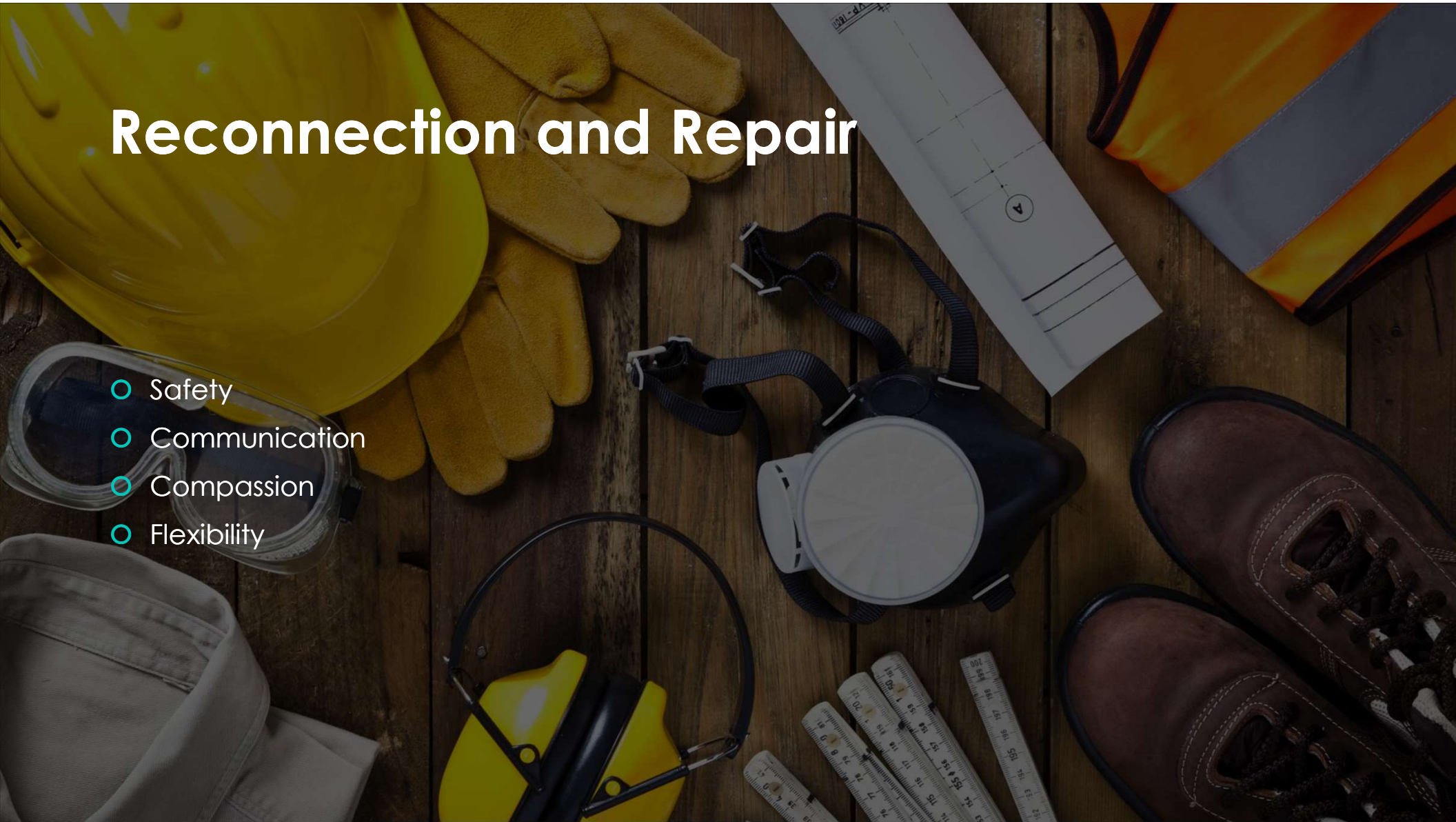
Meaning

Hope

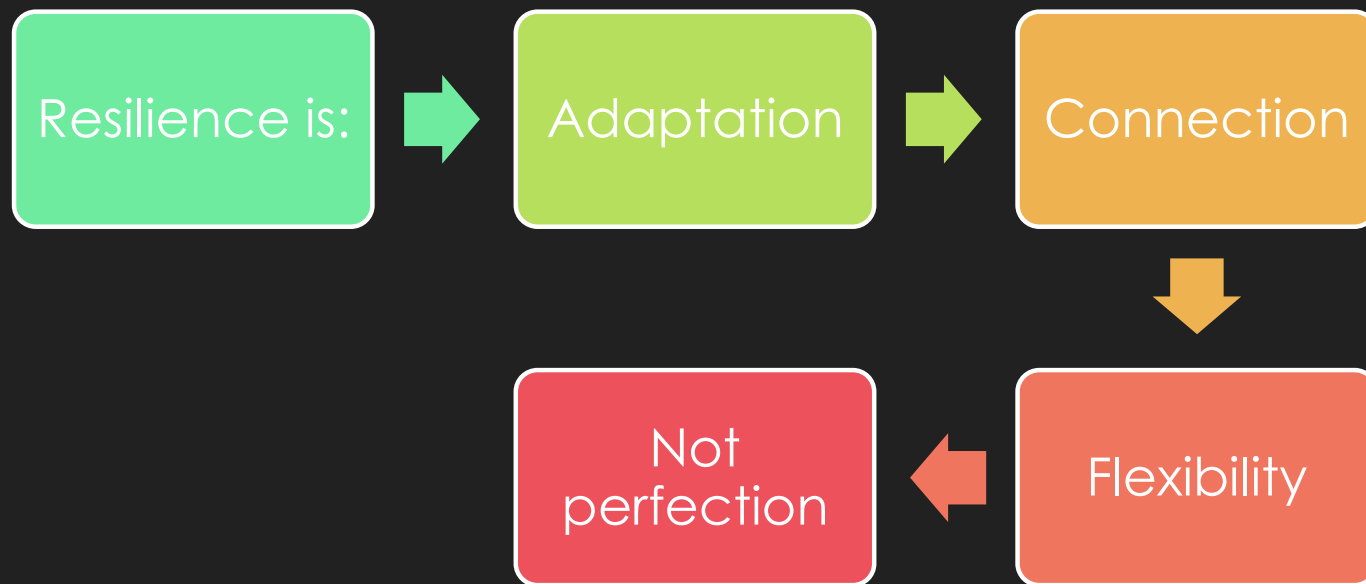
Coping

Reconnection and Repair

- Safety
- Communication
- Compassion
- Flexibility



Building Family Resilience





Practical Tools for Clinicians

Final Thoughts and Conclusion:

WHAT IS ONE WAY
THIS TRAINING
WILL IMPACT
YOUR WORK WITH
FAMILIES?

QUESTIONS