PART A

Self
In this program, you will explore four different levels of your life, starting with the individual level, the self. Your risk for becoming a victim or victimizer (perpetrator of violence) is influenced by your personal history, including your family background, level of education, race, socioeconomic status, how you behave, and how others behave toward you. Things that contribute to risk are being abused in childhood or adulthood, mental health issues, alcohol and substance abuse, and a history of behaving aggressively (World Health Organization, 2004).

In Part A, you will be examining how your individual thoughts and feelings influence your behaviors. This will provide you with an opportunity to get to know yourself better.

**The goals for Session One are**

- To examine typical habits in thinking, and
- To understand how our thoughts influence our feelings and behaviors.
The Spiral of Violence and Nonviolence

This spiral illustrates violence and nonviolence. The downward part on the left is the spiral of violence. The line in the middle represents aggression, violence, or use of force. As anger and aggression (which can lead to violence) become more a part of your life, they constrict and limit your life. For victims, this may mean being shut off from contact with family members, friends, and social services—feeling isolated and alone. A victim also may be afraid to go to places and people that can help. For victimizers (perpetrators), this may mean trying to keep the aggression and violence a secret and hiding from law enforcement agencies. For both, the inner self (thoughts, feelings, and values) becomes more limited and hidden, and the outer self (behavior and relationships) becomes more isolated.

The upward part of the spiral on the right is the spiral of nonviolence. The center line still represents violence, because if you have experienced violence, even if you are in the process of recovery or healing, the experience of violence does not go away. However, in the upward spiral, there is increasing room for growth and healing and many other life experiences. As you stop participating in aggressive or violent behavior and you begin to heal from the violence, the possibility of experiencing meaningful change in your life is created. The goal is to become whole: to have your inner self connected to your outer self. Then there can be truth and integrity in your life.

Spiral of Violence and Nonviolence

(Transformation)
Cognitive Distortion

When your mind convinces you of something that isn’t really true, it is called a cognitive distortion. Such thoughts also are called thinking errors, negative self-talk, twisted thinking, and distorted information processing. Such distortions or inaccurate thoughts are usually used to reinforce negative thinking or emotions. Here are some examples of this type of thinking:

- **Overgeneralizing.** You tend to speak in terms of something “always” or “never” happening. For example, if you fail to do something, you may say, “I never remember things I’m supposed to.” You may also interpret events this way and say things like, “Why does this stuff always happen to me?”

- **All-or-nothing thinking.** Things are either right or wrong, black or white, great or horrible. There are only either/or categories; there is no middle ground or gray area. For example, if something doesn’t live up to your expectations in some area, you may see it as a total failure.

- **Mental filtering.** You may let one fact or situation or event color your view of things so that you see everything through a darkened lens. For example, if you have been abused by a male, you may think that all men are rotten or dangerous.

- **Disqualifying the positive.** You may ignore or explain away any positive facts or experiences. If you can rationalize that something good “doesn’t count” for some reason, you can maintain a negative belief system.

- **Personalizing.** You may take responsibility or blame for something bad that you had no control over. You may tell yourself, “It must be my fault somehow.”

- **Mind reading.** You may decide that someone doesn’t like you or thinks she is better than you without getting to know the person or without checking your assumptions if you do know her. When you interpret someone’s facial expressions or nonverbal communication with no other input than your own thoughts, you are projecting what is in your mind, not in the other person’s.

- **Magnifying or minimizing.** You may give something more credit or more importance than it deserves or you may do the opposite and give it less credit or less importance than is actually called for. Sometimes this is called “making a mountain out of a molehill” or the reverse.
• **Jumping to conclusions.** You may decide early on that something is bad or will turn out badly, even without evidence to support that belief. You may make assumptions about things without waiting for more information. For example, if something is missing, you may assume that a particular person has stolen it before you have searched thoroughly for it.

• **Fortune-telling.** When you assume that you know how things will turn out before they happen, you are fortune-telling. If you are looking at things through a darkened lens, you probably will predict a doom-and-gloom scenario.

• **Emotional reasoning.** You may let your feelings direct your interpretation of things. For example, if you are feeling “down,” you may interpret things people do or say in a negative way. If you are feeling “up,” you may see things through “rose-colored glasses.” In short, you assume, “I feel it, therefore it must be true.”

• **Using “should” and “must” statements.** Your expectations may be directed by a rigid list of rules you have about how you and others should behave. If you think that you “should” or “should not” be a certain way, you may feel guilt when you don’t think you live up to that expectation. Similarly, you may frequently be disappointed when others do not live up to the rules. If you use “should,” “must,” and “ought” often in your thinking or conversation, you may be setting yourself up for feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment.

• **Labeling and mislabeling.** This is a mental and verbal way of doing the types of thinking described here. Instead of seeing a person or a behavior or an event as it is, you give it a label that allows you to dismiss or degrade it, in order to reinforce your negative outlook or interpretation. For example, if a person makes a mistake, you may label that person as “stupid.”

What are the three types of cognitive distortion that you have used most often?
My Typical Distorted Thinking

When we have thoughts about a situation, we usually have feelings about it too. Both thoughts and feelings affect our behaviors. This table shows some examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A relationship</td>
<td>No one will ever love me again.</td>
<td>Sad, lonely</td>
<td>Isolated myself so I didn’t meet anyone new.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ended.</td>
<td><em>(All-or-nothing thinking)</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I started</td>
<td>I will never be sober.</td>
<td>Guilty, discouraged</td>
<td>Kept drinking or using.</td>
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<tr>
<td>drinking or</td>
<td><em>(Magnifying)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>using again.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My boss told me</td>
<td>He thinks he knows it all.</td>
<td>Angry and frustrated with myself</td>
<td>I didn’t listen to him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>to do something</td>
<td><em>(Jumping to conclusions)</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a certain way.</td>
<td>He thinks I am stupid.</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>I started to cry.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>(Mind reading)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He’s an overcontrolling jerk.</td>
<td>Angry with the boss, resentful</td>
<td>I did it my way.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(Labeling and mislabeling)</em></td>
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</table>
In the empty boxes write in some typical situations and behaviors in your own life. Fill in all the columns for each of the examples you provide. These can be situations at home, at work, in the community, or even in this program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What happened?</td>
<td>What did you think?</td>
<td>How did you feel?</td>
<td>What did you do?</td>
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</tbody>
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<p>| | | | |</p>
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Feelings Inside and Outside

Sometimes we don’t show on the outside how we are feeling on the inside. For example, you may smile at others when you are really feeling sad or scared. Or you may act angry when you are actually feeling vulnerable or scared. Getting your outside self to match your inside self is one way to feel more whole.

Can you recall a time when you felt one way inside but looked different to those around you? Draw or write about your experience below.

Feelings inside:

What you show others:
The DVD of *What I Want My Words To Do To You*

This film was made at the Bedford Hills Prison in the state of New York. A famous writer named Eve Ensler, who wrote the play called *The Vagina Monologues*, ran a writing group for women at Bedford. Although the women in the film are in a prison, their experiences provide us with examples of what can happen when anger escalates or explodes or when anger is misplaced onto another person, and also show us how women can change their lives regardless of the circumstances. Your group will watch parts of the film in various sessions. By the time you complete this program, you will have seen the entire film.

**Understanding Keila**

In the session, the group used some of the ideas about the inner and outer selves and also about the ways thoughts and feelings can affect behavior, and applied them to Keila’s situation. What are your answers to the following questions?

- What were Keila’s thoughts that day?

  

- What was she feeling?

  

- What did she do?
• We know that values and beliefs, as well as thoughts and feelings, create the inner self. Do we know any more about the values and beliefs in Keila’s life?

• How did her inner self—her thoughts, feelings values, and beliefs—affect her behavior?

• What might have been different if she had had a “container” for her feelings?

• How could she have handled the situation differently?
Understanding Me

Think about a time in your life when your anger caused a problem for you. You will realize that your ways of thinking, your assumptions, your values, and your feelings all influenced your behavior. Then begin to fill in the answers to the questions that follow.

• What were your thoughts that day?

• What were some of your beliefs?

• What were you feeling?
• What were your actions?

• How could you have handled the situation differently?
 Assignment

1. As you go through the week, focus your awareness on your thinking to see if any of the cognitive distortions the group has discussed occur for you. Keep a record of them here. Try to find one, two, or three occurrences to add to the examples you gave on page 26. Record what you thought, how you felt, and what you did.

2. Think about ways in which you might use the container activity.
3. Finish writing the information about your feelings, beliefs, and actions on pages 30 and 31.

4. What is one thing you will leave this group with: something you have learned or realized?