

# The Moral Injury Experience Wheel HANDOUTS

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For more information go to  
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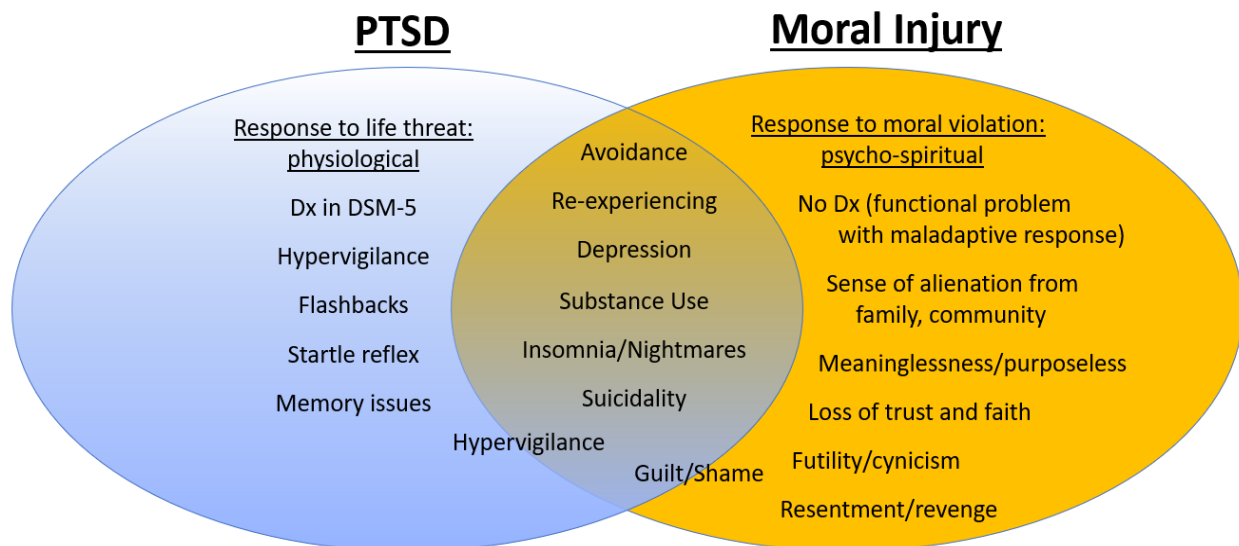
## Hand outs: Moral Injury Experience Wheel

### WHAT IS MORAL INJURY?

While performing your responsibilities at work, did you ever feel like your ethical values or moral beliefs were violated? Perhaps you felt betrayed by your leadership or institution, or forced to agree with something that you believed was wrong? Maybe you did something that crossed the line and personally transgressed? Maybe things just went sideways, and no person was to blame but your belief in a moral and just world was shattered? If so, you may have experienced moral injury. Moral injury is a wound to your deepest sense of right and wrong. It leaves you feeling disconnected and alienated from others, often feeling guilty, ashamed, and angry.

Moral injury is related to but different from PTSD. PTSD is a response to a life-threatening experience—it's a fear response. Moral injury is a response to a threat against one's ethical values and moral beliefs—it's a reaction to moral violation. It may not always involve trauma, although it often shares features with PTSD like problems sleeping, nightmares, and troubling avoidance behavior like drinking too much and self-harm. Mostly, moral injury is experienced as guilt, shame, resentment, anger, despair, cynicism, confusion, loss of faith, and an inability to trust again.

### FEATURE OVERLAP



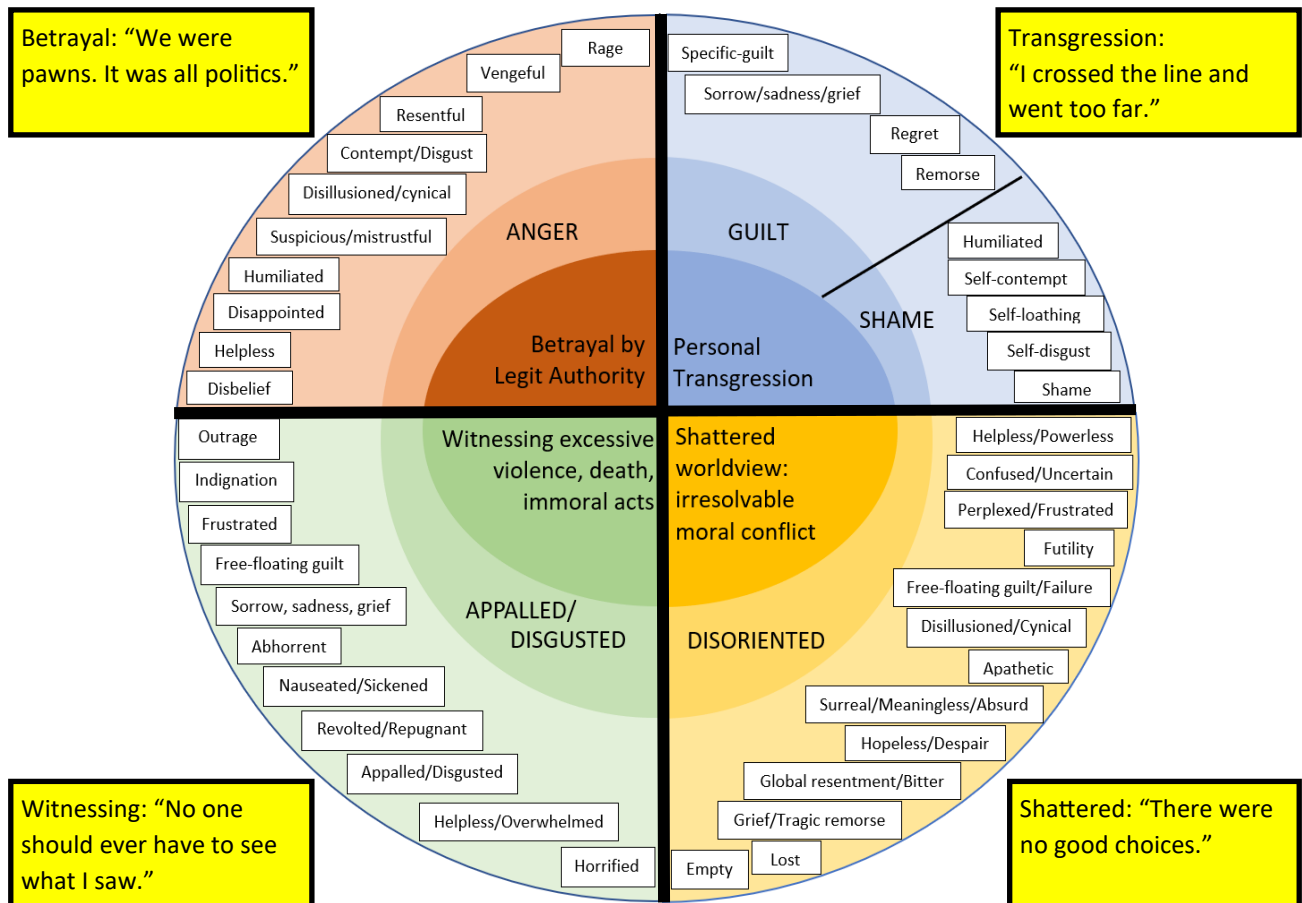
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## Hand outs: Moral Injury Experience Wheel

### WHAT CAUSES MORAL INJURY?

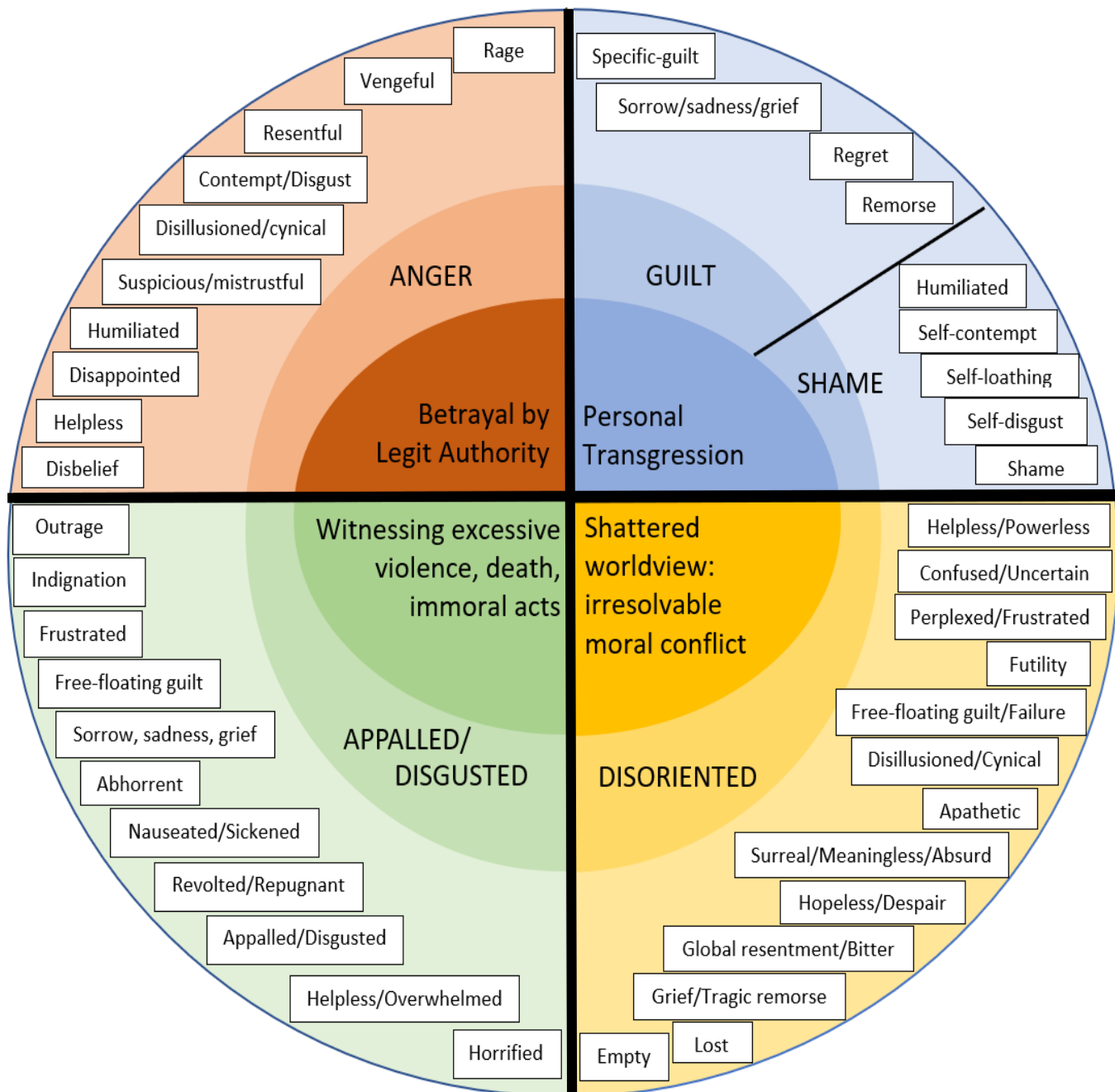
Moral injury is typically triggered by four broad categories of moral conflict. See the diagram below. Notice at the center of the wheel the following morally injurious events:

- 1) Instances of betrayal by those in authority. Like when someone in charge (maybe a person or an institution) told you to do something you didn't feel was right, but you had to do it "or else."
- 2) Acts of personal transgression (by commission or omission). That is, when you did something that crossed the line, or you felt like you should have done something but didn't.
- 3) Witnessing acts of violence, death, brutality, or immorality in which you felt appalled and/or disgusted.
- 4) Times when you were put in a position where there were no good choices—an event in which, for example, you were "damned if you did and damned if you didn't" or when things turned out badly despite everyone's best efforts--instances when "this just shouldn't have happened." These unavoidable moral calamities shatter what you always relied upon to be true and right. Examples: competing expectations, clash of values, "dirty hands," absurd events and senseless tragedy.



# Hand outs: Moral Injury Experience Wheel

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*The Moral Injury Experience Wheel is not a statement of fact about moral emotions and their relationship to specific injurious events. It is an infographic tool for stimulating discussion and insight.*

## Hand outs: Moral Injury Experience Wheel

### Putting your Moral Injury into words

1. Something to remember, the pain and confusion of moral injury may ease through treatment, but it will never completely go away. The event you experienced will always be remembered as a violation of what was good and right. While there are no magic pills or silver bullets, growing in understanding and acceptance will help you make sense of your moral injury and find greater peace.
2. Our goal here today is to comprehend the origin, effects and function of moral injury in your life. Putting your experience into words may give you the insight and perspective you need to move forward with less distress.
3. Moral injury is a part of human functioning—it is the result of an active conscience and limited power to control or change the outcome of morally critical events.
4. Handling the distress of moral injury with behaviors that end up hurting more than helping (e.g., drinking to excess, substance use, isolating, difficulty trusting, angry outbursts, and self-harm) is the real problem.

### INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE OPTION #1

#### From the Inside Out: identify the event first and then explore emotions

1. Now that we have a basic understanding of moral injury, if you feel comfortable, please share your story.
2. Using the wheel as a guide, what events in the center of the wheel best describe your moral injury? Locate the experience in the representative quadrant(s). Was it a matter of 1) betrayal, 2) personal transgression, 3) witnessing immoral acts or, 4) an unavoidable moral calamity that shattered your worldview?
3. What emotions listed on the outside of the quadrant do you most identify with? Do other emotions come to mind?
4. Does your experience spill over into other quadrants? If so, how does your moral injury involve other types of events/experiences?"
5. What insights have you gained about your experience from using the wheel (if any)?

### INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE OPTION #2

From Outside In: explore moral emotions first then identify events

1. Now that we have a basic understanding of moral injury, if you feel comfortable, please share your story.
2. Using the wheel as a guide, what emotions listed on the outside of the quadrant do you most identify with? Do other emotions come to mind?
3. Trace any grouping of your emotions to the center of the wheel. Does the event in the inner circle represent the origin of your moral injury? Was your experience a matter of 1) betrayal, 2) personal transgression, 3) witnessing immoral acts or 4) an unavoidable moral calamity that shattered your world view?
4. Does your experience spill over into other quadrants? If so, how does your moral injury involve other types of events/experiences?"
5. What insights have you gained about your experience from using the wheel (if any)?

### INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE OPTION #3

Where do you see yourself on the wheel?

1. Now that we have a basic understanding of moral injury, if you feel comfortable, please share your story.
2. Where do you see yourself on the wheel?
3. What emotions do you most identify with?
4. What events triggered your moral injury?
5. What insights have you gained about your experience from using the wheel (if any)?

## Hand outs: Moral Injury Experience Wheel

### GROUP EXERCISE OPTION #1

From the Inside Out: identify the event first and then explore emotions

1. Now that we have a basic understanding of moral injury, if you feel comfortable, would you be willing to share your story with the group? After you've shared, if you permit, I'll invite others to offer some supportive feedback. For example, a group member might say, "I get it" or "I experienced something similar" and share a piece of their story.
2. Thank you for trusting us with your story. Would it be okay if other members of the group shared some words of support? Perhaps they might mention ways they identify with parts of your story.
3. Using the wheel as a guide, what events would you say best describe your moral injury experience. Was the event a matter of 1) betrayal, 2) personal transgression, 3) witnessing immoral acts or 4) an unavoidable moral calamity that shattered your worldview?
4. What emotions do you most identify with on the wheel? Do other emotions come to mind?
5. Does your experience spill over into other quadrants? How does your moral injury involve other types of events/experiences?"
6. What insights have you gained about your experience from using the wheel (if any)?

### GROUP EXERCISE OPTION #2

From Outside In: explore moral emotions first then identify events

1. Now that we have a basic understanding of moral injury, if you feel comfortable, would you be willing to share your story with group? After you've shared, if you are okay with it, I'll invite others to offer some supportive feedback. For example, a group member might say, "I get it," or "I experienced something similar."
2. Thank you for trusting us with your story. Would it be okay if other members of the group shared some words of support? Perhaps they might mention ways they identify with parts of your story.
3. Using the wheel as a guide, what emotions listed on the outside of the quadrant do you most identify with? Do other emotions come to mind?
4. Trace any grouping of your emotions to the center of the wheel. Does the event in the inner circle represent the origin of your moral injury? Was your experience a matter of 1) betrayal, 2) personal transgression, 3) witnessing immoral acts or 4) an unavoidable moral calamity that shattered your worldview?
5. Does your experience spill over into other quadrants? How does your moral injury involve other types of events/experiences?"
6. What insights have you gained about your experience from using the wheel (if any)?



## Hand outs: Moral Injury Experience Wheel

### GROUP EXERCISE OPTION #3

#### Around a circle: process moral emotions together

1. Now that we have a basic understanding of moral injury, please place star stickers next to the emotions that best describe your personal experience.
2. Sit back and look at the diagram together. A lot of pain is represented here. Do you have any thoughts you'd like to share about what you see?
3. If you feel comfortable, would you be willing to share your story with the group? When you are through, would it be okay if group members provided supportive feedback? A group member might say, "I get it," or "I experienced something similar," and share a piece of their story.
4. Thank you for trusting us with your story. Which morally injurious event found in the center of the circle would you say best describes the origin of your moral injury? Perhaps there is more than one experience. Initial all events that relate to your experience if you are comfortable doing so with the group.
5. We'd like to hear some words of support and feedback from the group at this time. Perhaps group members might mention ways they identified with parts of your story.

### ACCEPTANCE EXERCISE

#### Letting Go and Moving Forward

How do I move forward?” For many, moving forward is not an option. After all, the idea that you should simply “let go” and accept what happened feels terribly wrong when what happened was terribly wrong and needs to be addressed. The following exercise is designed to help you honor and better understand what this event means to you.

1. What specifically occurred that was wrong and will never be okay?
2. What needs to happen before you can move on? What does the event ask from you? What does it insist you do?

If the event asks you to set things right, moral repair may be your next step. Moral repair entails efforts to correct a wrongdoing and will be covered in the next exercise. Sometimes, a past event can't be put right, however. In this case, letting go of a demand for justice, as difficult as that is, often relieves underlying stress and makes room for sadness, grief, and ultimately, healing.

3. Accepting the reality that a past event happened and can't be changed is not the same as condoning the transgression and the damage that occurred. What would it be like to no longer feel the pressure to change an unchangeable past? What would it feel like to accept that what happened happened even though it's not okay?

## Hand outs: Moral Injury Experience Wheel

### MORAL REPAIR EXERCISE #1

#### Making wrong right when possible

Accepting the past does not mean a wrong-doing has been put right. Righting a wrong requires moral repair. This process is difficult because it begins with acknowledging the transgression (yours and/or theirs) that lies at the heart of the morally injurious event. Only when blame is accurately assigned is corrective action possible. Importantly, a person must feel ready to engage in moral repair. Some may not even feel like it's necessary. The decision is yours. This exercise is designed to help you explore ways to repair broken relationships and realign your moral values after a moral breach.

The first step in moral repair is to carefully identify the moral actors who participated in the event. You will want to ask: "Who is responsible for the injustice that occurred and what can be done to amend it?" Specifically, "What was my role and that of others in the violation?" If no one is directly to blame for the injurious event, but the experience shook your moral beliefs and left you disoriented nevertheless, you might ask, "How can I accept what happened when what happened was so wrong?" The following questions are structured to guide you through moral repair.

#### **1. In terms of your actions, what do you believe you did wrong? What acts of omission and commission can you identify?**

What do you wish you had done differently?

While not excusing your actions, how has punishing yourself repaired the damage that was done? What would "enough" punishment look like?

How has punishing yourself affected those you care about most?

What would it feel like to let go of your need to punish yourself and experience forgiveness? (Forgiveness does not negate accountability. You can be forgiven and still held responsible for your actions. Forgiveness and accountability go hand in hand to give you the chance change your behavior and make amends.)

Check which action steps you feel ready to take toward moral repair:

☐ I will disclose my transgression to a person I deeply respect, ☐ I will seek forgiveness from those I hurt, ☐ I will give up my desire to punish myself, ☐ I will make amends, ☐ I will (other) \_\_\_\_\_.

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### MORAL REPAIR EXERCISE (continued #2)

#### Making wrong right when possible

**2. In terms of the actions of others (including institutions), what do you believe others did wrong? What acts of omission and commission can you identify?**

What do you wish they had done differently?

While not justifying any wrongdoing, certain beliefs, perceptions and stressors may have influenced their thinking and actions. What factors outside their control may have played a part in their perceptions and behavior?

While not excusing the actions of others, how will punishing them repair the damage that was done?

How has your desire to punish others affected those you care about most?

What would it feel like to let go of the need to punish others for their transgressions? (Forgiveness does not negate accountability. It doesn't imply trust or reconciliation, either. You can forgive someone or an organization and still hold them accountable for their actions so that they don't repeat the violation. In time, if they prove themselves trustworthy, reconciliation is possible. Forgiveness is for you, not for them.)

Check which action steps you feel ready to take toward moral repair:

☐ When feasible and safe, I will respectfully confront those who transgressed about their actions, ☐ I will seek reparation when possible, ☐ I will work to prevent this from happening again by \_\_\_\_\_, ☐ While not excusing their actions, I will give up the need to punish, ☐ I will no longer seek revenge, ☐ I will forgive and let go of my demand for payback, ☐ I will (other): \_\_\_\_\_.

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### MORAL REPAIR EXERCISE (continued #3)

#### Making wrong right when possible

#### **3. If no human agency was to blame, what occurred that you believe was wrong?** (competing moral expectations, morally overwhelmed, absurd events and senseless tragedy)

What should have happened but didn't?

- ☐ I should have had a choice, at least a better one.
- ☐ I should have cared but I had to stop caring to do my job.
- ☐ It should have been a good outcome but it wasn't.
- ☐ It should have made sense, but the result was absurd.

Check the boxes that relate to you:

It makes sense that as a result of this event I feel: ☐ angry/resentful because this was not supposed to happen, ☐ guilty because I couldn't do the right thing, ☐ guilty and like a failure because I couldn't change the outcome, ☐ disoriented because my current moral understanding can't make sense of this event, ☐ bitterly disappointed because things didn't turn out the way they should have, ☐ resentful toward life, ☐ despair because I don't know what to hope in, ☐ disillusioned with life, ☐ cynical because bad things like this might happen again, ☐ a loss of faith in God, ☐ unsafe in this world, ☐ distrustful of humanity, ☐ unsure about what to believe in now, ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_.

While what happened was not right, how has your (very understandable) resentment, guilt, and bitter disappointment helped you cope with the future?

How has it affected those you care about most?

Check which steps you feel ready to take toward moral repair:

☐ I will let go of my need to blame myself, others, and the world/God for the way life does not operate the way I think it should, ☐ I will try to see and accept the world as it is, ☐ I will adjust my expectations to the way life/God's will unfolds, ☐ I will let go of my resentment toward life/God, ☐ I let go of my expectations about the world and my future and learn new ways of seeing this life the way it is, ☐ I will (other): \_\_\_\_\_.

In what ways, if any, has this event helped you to grow in your understanding of how life works? What insights into life would you share with others?

## Hand outs: Moral Injury Experience Wheel

### GRIEF EXERCISE

#### Grieve It to Leave it

Oftentimes, the work of acceptance and moral repair gives rise to a sense of loss as one searches through the wreckage of the past for answers. Recognizing and honoring these losses helps a person heal and move forward. See if you relate to the losses identified below.

#### Loss checklist:

- ☐ A loss of innocence. I was exposed to an event that changed me forever. I lost my youthful innocence and will never see life the same way.
- ☐ A loss of moral identity. I used to think that I was basically a good person but after doing what I did, I'm not sure anymore.
- ☐ Loss of meaning/purpose. I used to have a sense of purpose in my life. I thought that what I stood for was right. But after my experience, I'm less gung-ho.
- ☐ Loss of power/agency. There was nothing I could do to stop it from happening. I've wracked my brain to figure out how things could have ended differently. I feel powerless.
- ☐ Loss of belonging/community. I used to have a strong sense of belonging. Now, I feel disconnected and estranged. I'm not sure where I fit in.
- ☐ Loss of moral certainty. Life was simple. Right was right, and wrong was wrong. Good and evil were clearly defined. But not so much anymore.
- ☐ Loss of trust/confidence in moral authorities/institutions. My trust has been broken. I feel used—like a pawn.
- ☐ Loss of faith in humanity. I used to think people were mostly good but after what I saw, I no longer feel this way. Human beings are capable of terrible things.
- ☐ Loss of hope in the future and for the world in general. After my experience, I don't know what to hope for. What I experienced shook my belief in a safe, orderly, and just world.
- ☐ Loss of religious beliefs. After what I saw and experienced, I wonder if God is still good and in control.
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_.

What bothers you the most about your loss(es)?

How has this loss changed you?

Feeling sad is a part of the healing process. Sadness says you really valued what was lost and long to keep it. It reveals what is most meaningful to you. Knowing what matters to you can help you honor the loss and rebuild a purposeful life when you feel ready. The following exercise, "Value-based Action," is designed to help you hope again in a meaningful future.

## VALUE-BASED ACTION EXERCISE (part 1) -script

### Your Values and Moving Forward

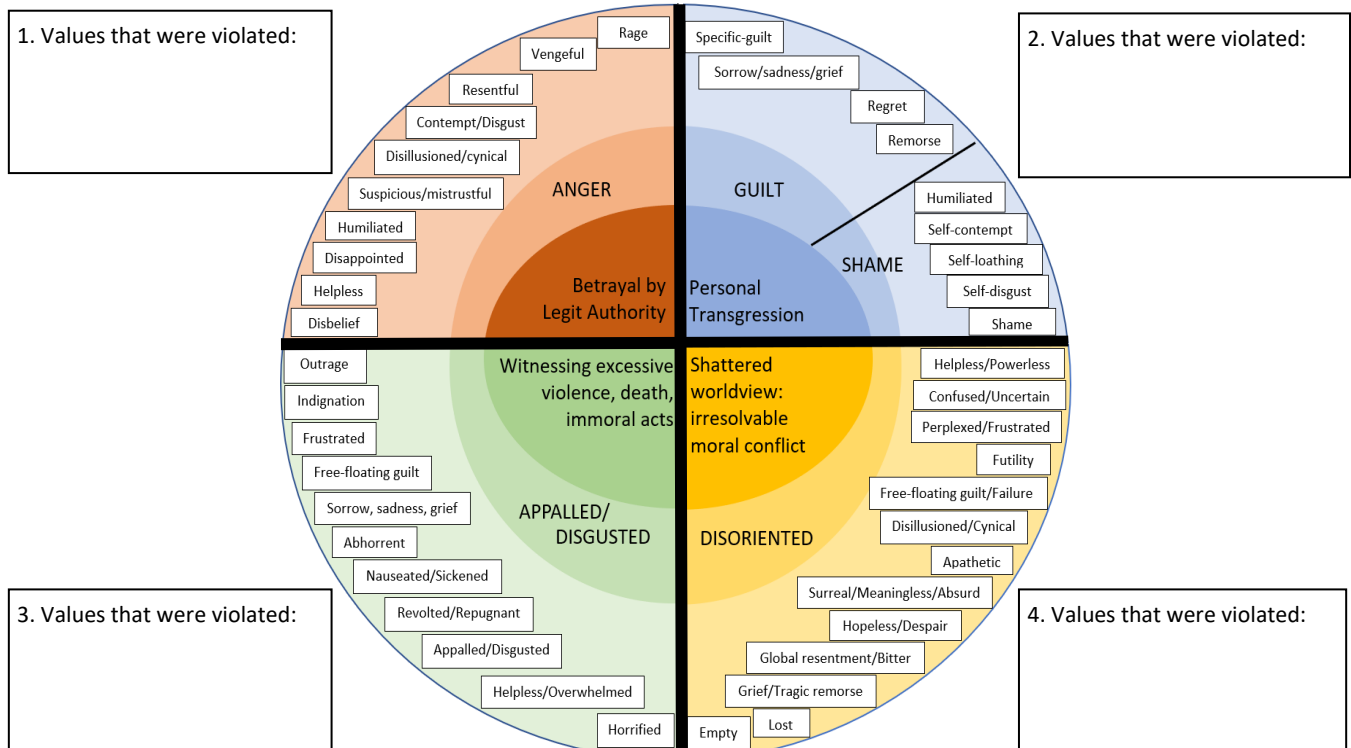
Big questions about the future often arise when you endure moral injury. Questions like: “What should I believe in now? How do I rebuild my life? What remains trustworthy and true?” Carefully addressing these questions with guidance from the MIEW can help clarify values that lead to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose.

Let’s talk about what this event means to you in terms of what you hold to be true and good. Consider the origin or cause of your moral injury. Check which values were violated by the event?

☐ integrity, ☐ courage to act and bring change, ☐ honesty, ☐ transparency, ☐ empowerment, ☐ vision, ☐ accountability, ☐ communication, ☐ trustworthiness, ☐ empathy/compassion, ☐ loyalty, ☐ justice, ☐ fairness, ☐ mercy, ☐ respect, ☐ kindness, ☐ humility, ☐ authenticity, ☐ resilience, ☐ patience, ☐ forethought/carefulness, ☐ discernment, ☐ sobriety, ☐ liberty, ☐ autonomy, ☐ wisdom, ☐ truth, ☐ service to others, ☐ sacrifice (unselfish), ☐ an open mind, ☐ the need for hope, ☐ meaningful life, ☐ passion & commitment, ☐ consistency, ☐ life as predictable, ☐ doing no harm, ☐ faith in God, ☐ trust, ☐ general goodness of people, ☐ other: \_\_\_\_\_

Share why these values are important to you.

Now, place these values in the box on the wheel that corresponds with the event. For example, if honesty was violated because of a betrayal, write “honesty” in box #1. Repeat exercise for other injurious events.



## Hand outs: Moral Injury Experience Wheel

### VALUE-BASED ACTION EXERCISE (part 2)

#### Your Values and Moving Forward

- The values you checked indicate what you care about deeply and point you in the direction of how you want to live. Knowing what is important to you can help you move forward toward actions that bring about a purposeful life. As a way of stimulating thought about your future, check the value-based goals/directions that are most consistent with your values and story.
- As a result of my moral injury experience, I am in touch with values that inspire me to:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> make amends to those wronged <input type="checkbox"/> find meaningful ways to serve those in need <input type="checkbox"/> make restitution and/or engage in acts of reconciliation <input type="checkbox"/> seek reparation and/or find ways to correct the wrong <input type="checkbox"/> engage in efforts that bring social and/or institutional change <input type="checkbox"/> speak up and work to not let it happen again <input type="checkbox"/> assume a leadership role that will bring change	<input type="checkbox"/> find my voice and share my truth with others <input type="checkbox"/> establish and maintain memorials (“never forget”) <input type="checkbox"/> establish a legacy in my family/community that celebrates these important values <input type="checkbox"/> help others recover from what I experienced <input type="checkbox"/> educate others on how to avoid moral injury in this context <input type="checkbox"/> connect more deeply with my spirituality <input type="checkbox"/> other values-based direction: _____
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- Fill in boxes (below) with corresponding directions/goals. Continue onto next page for space.

1. Values that were violated:  Values-based directions:		2. Values that were violated:  Values-based directions:
3. Values that were violated:  Values-based directions:		4. Values that were violated:  Values-based directions:

- What obstacles and barriers do you foresee in pursuing your value-based directions?
- What resources can help you overcome these barriers (e.g., peer support, counseling, education)?
- What insights into life have you gained from your difficulties? What message would you share with others (if any)?



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