

# HOW DO YOU WANT YOUR KIDS TO REMEMBER YOU?

A workbook for fathers  
who have harmed their  
partners and families  
**and want to change**



## Acknowledgments

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# HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

*If you stick with the work of real transformation, it will pay off in the long run. You certainly will be happier. Changing of behavior does not guarantee that you will improve your relationship with your family. But staying the same will surely close the door to any possibility of healing and reconciliation.*

The exercises in this workbook are designed to help you take the first steps towards change. They are partly based on interviews with children whose fathers have been abusive, and mothers who experienced abuse. Also, fathers who caused harm, renounced their abuse, and repaired their relationships with their children.

Even though you can do the exercises by yourself, we encourage you to seek support. The process of change is difficult, and it is helpful to have someone else assist you to stay on course. This should be someone you trust, as you must be as honest as you can about your behavior. It would be best to find someone who can listen to you without shaming you but who could still be frank about what you need to do to really change. It could be a good friend or a special relative. It could even be a trusted faith leader or a fellow member of your congregation (if you are part of one), or a community or cultural elder.



**It should not be your intimate partner or ex-partner or the other parent of your children. And please, do not use your children for this either. It would just make things worse.**

You can do most of the exercises even if you don't have contact with your children or partner/ex-partner. In fact, we strongly recommend that you do the exercises on your own even if you have contact with your family. You have to work on your own healing before you attempt to mend your relationship with others who you might have harmed. Trying to make amends prematurely can further hurt your relationships with your loved ones.

Most of the exercises apply to children of all ages. In some cases, we note possible variations depending on the age of your children.

If you are reading this workbook, you have taken the first step in the process of making positive changes in your life. You are opening the door to the possibility of healing your relationships. We are not going to lie. This is hard work and it takes perseverance and patience. People who harm their partners and families can and do change, but it takes time and effort.



Remember, there is professional support. There are programs for abusive partners in many parts of the United States. To help locate one, you can call the

**National Hotline on Domestic Violence at 800-799-SAFE (7233).**

You could also find a fatherhood program, a men's support group, or a therapist with expertise in domestic violence. If you see your children under supervised visitation, possibly you could seek support from the staff. If at any point you feel you might hurt yourself or others, please call one of the numbers listed on page 50 of this workbook.

### THROUGHOUT THE WORKBOOK WE USE CERTAIN SYMBOLS TO MAKE IT MORE USER FRIENDLY:

This is an important symbol. Every chapter has tips to remind you to take care of yourself. This is hard work, and it is important to pay attention to your own wellbeing.



Honesty is required for every exercise in this workbook. Sometimes, we will remind you to pay special attention to your level of honesty by using this symbol.

This symbol means that an exercise involves writing, but all exercises can also be recorded on your phone or other devices. You might want to write in pencil, in case you need to make corrections.



A few exercises involve recording your answers on your phone or another device (when you see this symbol). Make sure you know how to record and listen to the recording. If you don't have a recording device, you can write your answers instead.

One exercise involves drawing (indicated by this symbol). It'd be best if you have access to crayons or colored pencils, but you can also use a pencil or even a pen.



This symbol means that the exercise requires you to mark or circle your responses.

When you see this symbol, you will be asked to watch a video online. You can do this on a computer, tablet, or phone.



This is a crucial symbol! (We already used it on the previous page). It means that you have to pay extra attention to the text written in red. If you don't, you might be putting your family and yourself in danger.



★★★  
If at any point you feel  
you might hurt yourself or  
others, please call one of the  
numbers listed on page 50  
of this workbook.

★★★

This workbook is a beginning, not an end. The work of improving your behavior and possibly mending your relationships is a long-term, possibly life-long project. After you finish this workbook (or even as you are doing it), there will surely be other steps. We have listed some resources on page 50 that might be helpful as you continue this journey.

#### A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

When we say “your children,” we are not only referring to your biological children but all children in your life, including adopted children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, and so on. Also, we understand that some readers might have only one child in their lives. Still, for easier reading, we write “children” throughout this workbook.

Likewise, this book is written for all fathers, stepfathers, and father figures, regardless of how they identify. To avoid using multiple terms for intimate partner (such as wife, husband, girlfriend, or boyfriend), we write “partner or ex-partner” or “the other parent of your children.”

## CHAPTER 1

# What are your hopes for your children?

You probably picked up this workbook because you value being a good father, so let's start there. In some ways, you may already be a good father, but there's always room for improvement. All parents can learn new ways to positively interact with their children.

Our first exercise involves writing a letter to each of your children. You can also record them on your phone if it's easier for you.



These are letters that you will not give to your children or the other parent.

They are messages for you to remind you of what you really want for yourself and your children.

Write or record one letter for each child. Start by writing or saying "Dear (and the name of the child)." Then complete the following sentences. Take your time and make sure that you complete each section thoroughly. You can take breaks as you need them and rewrite or re-record any part of them.



Dear (name):

I love being your father because...

I know that your dreams are to...

When you grow up, I hope that you...

I want you to remember this about our family...

I want you to remember this about our culture...

**After you have said all you wanted to say about each child, complete the following sentences. Again you can write in the workbook or record on your phone:**

Writing these letters made me feel... (it might be helpful to choose from primary feelings, such as happy, sad, scared, or angry)

These are some actions or strategies I can use to advance my hopes for my children:

These are some actions or strategies I can use to support my children's dreams:

These are some of the barriers to achieving my goals for my children:

These are some of the things I do that can get in the way of my hopes for my children  
(make sure that you focus on your actions and not other people's actions):

These are some actions or strategies I can use to overcome the barriers and obstacles  
that get in the way of my hopes for my children:



## SELF-CARE TIP

**Square Breathing Exercise** After finishing this activity or at any moment when you are feeling upset, try this breathing exercise:

*Sit down comfortably, relax, place your feet on the ground; if you wish, you can close your eyes. Breathe in, counting four seconds. Hold your breath for four seconds. Breathe out for four seconds. Hold your breath for four seconds. Repeat at least 3 times or as many times as you wish.*

This kind of breathing is called **square breathing**, and it helps most people feel calmer. Of course, if this exercise doesn't feel good, don't do it. Instead, you can try to just breathe in and out for four seconds each without holding your breath. You can practice square breathing anytime; you don't need to sit down or close your eyes. Try it!

We will reference square breathing throughout the workbook, you can always return here for the instructions.

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**Here is another blank letter. You can make copies or write it down to use with more than one child:**

Dear (name):

I love being your father because...

I know that your dreams are to...

When you grow up, I hope that you...

I want you to remember this about our family...

I want you to remember this about our culture...

## CHAPTER 2

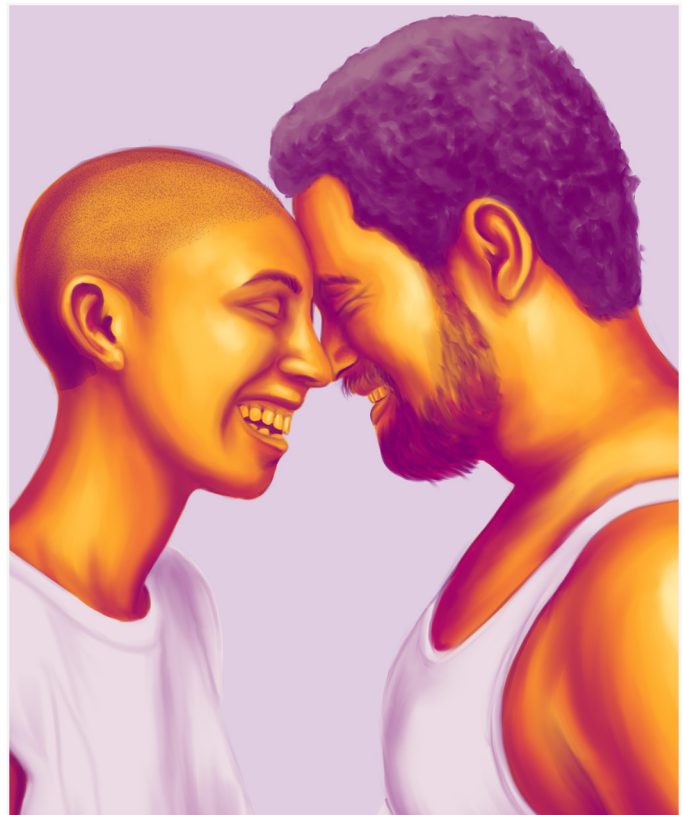
# How do your children see you?

Have you ever wondered how your children see you as a father? If you are like most parents, you probably hope

that your children

have a positive image of you, that they like you in addition to loving you. The fact is that most children have both positive and negative images of their parents. Depending on their age and experiences with the parent, sometimes their images are more positive and sometimes more negative.

We can never know for sure how our children see us (unless we ask them, and it is not a good idea to do so at this point). But if we are honest, we can imagine how they see us. The following exercise is designed to help you picture how your children see you.



**This exercise has 2 parts.** The first one involves looking at a series of five pictures drawn by children. The children were given colored pencils and crayons and asked to do a drawing titled “How do I see my father?” They were told that they could draw and also write. The writing is in Spanish because the children were from Mexico. We are providing a translation, along with the age and gender of each child.

Take your time to really observe each drawing. You might want to write or record your reaction to each one of the images.



## PART ONE



This drawing was made by an 8-year-old boy. The text reads:

"This is how I see my father because he often gets angry and drunk, and his eyes turn red."

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This drawing was made by a 13-year-old boy. He didn't write any words.

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This 13-year-old boy chose to do 2 drawings. The one on the left says "Inside." The one on the right, "Outside." He also wrote: "I shouldn't judge him because he gave me life, but he is irresponsible."

notes \_\_\_\_\_

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This drawing was made by an 11-year-old girl. The text reads: "Like a superhero."

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The last drawing was made by a 13-year-old boy. He wrote: "If I slip from life's mountain, my father gives me his hand, which gives me the strength to keep on climbing."

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**Once you have finished looking at each drawing and noticing your feelings,  
take a deep breath or do 3 rounds of square breathing.**

**Then complete the following sentences by writing or recording.**



Looking at these drawings made me feel... (happy, sad, angry, or scared)

I identify the most with the following drawing(s) (you can describe it):

This is why I identified with the drawing(s):

## PART TWO

The second part of the exercise involves you drawing. It doesn't matter if you think you are good or bad at art; the important part is that you give it a try. If you have crayons or colored pencils, that would be great. If not, you can use a pencil or even a pen. You can use the blank pages we provide here or use 2 sheets of blank paper.



You will have to pretend that you are one of your children and that you were asked to make a drawing, like the ones you just saw. The title should be "This is how I see my father." In addition to drawing, you can also use words.

You will make 2 drawings, one positive and one negative. For the second one, try to imagine how your child sees you after a harmful fight with the other parent. Be as honest as you can.



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### DRAWING ONE

**Pretend you are drawing from the perspective of your child.**

**"This is how I see my father"**

*Positive*



## **DRAWING TWO**

**Pretend you are drawing from the perspective of your child.**

**"This is how I see my father"**

*Negative*

Once you are finished making both drawings, take a deep breath or do a few rounds of square breathing and complete the following sentences, writing or recording on your phone:



Making these drawings made me feel... (happy, sad, scared, or angry)

I think my children see me like this because I have done these things to the other parent:

I think my children see me like this because I have done these things to them:



#### SELF-CARE TIP

**Self Talk** After finishing this exercise, try to pay attention to your “self-talk,” meaning the tapes we all play inside our heads, especially when upset. For example, you might be telling yourself: “I am such a screw up,” or “my child hates me,” or “I’m such a bad father.” Those thoughts usually just make us feel worse about ourselves. It is essential to recognize them and try to release them. And use positive thoughts instead, such as “I can become a better father,” or “If I work hard, my relationship with my kid can change.” The more you are aware of your negative self-talk, the better you can get at contradicting it and moving in the right direction. If you are really struggling with this, reach out to your support person, if you have one.

## CHAPTER 3

# Getting Real

As we move forward, the exercises might be getting more challenging. But if you are reading this, you have already done some difficult work! Yes, there is more to do, but you need to take it one step at a time. The key is not giving up and continuing to be as honest as possible. The following exercise can help you to get there. It has 3 simple parts.

Go back to page 11 and look at the drawing of the devil from the previous chapter. It might be hard to imagine what a father has done so that his 8-year-old son will draw him like this. For this exercise, imagine that the child is now an adult and does not want to see his father ever again.

**For the first part of the exercise, write down or record on your phone a list of all the possible things the father could have done to create this situation. Write or record as many items as you can come up with. Try to include at least 15 items. Examples could be:**



- The father frequently got drunk.
- The father regularly insulted and put down his partner.
- The father often hit his partner.

• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____



Once you have written as many items as you can, you can move to the second part of the exercise: Being brutally honest, go back to the list and **circle any items that – in any way, shape, or form- resemble something you might have done to your family.**

If you are recording your answers, listen to the recording 2 or 3 times and remember what items you have chosen. Take your time to do this. If you find yourself thinking, “I have not done any of these things,” think harder. Maybe you have never hit the other parent of your children, but have you been abusive in any other way? Have you pushed them? Have you called them names? Have you scared them in any way? This is what we are talking about when we suggest being brutally honest. If you are, you should end up circling a few of those behaviors.



**Before moving to the last part of the exercise, take a deep breath or do some square breathing. Check your self-talk and contradict any negative tapes you might be playing. When you are ready, rewrite in the space below or record on your phone each circled item in a way that reflects what you have done. Start each sentence with “I.” For example:**

I sometimes get really drunk.

I have insulted or put down my partner.

I have pushed my partner/parent of my children.

**Then under each item, list the immediate steps you will take to make sure it does not happen again. For example:**

I sometimes get really drunk.

*I will stop drinking. If necessary, I will go to AA.*

I have pushed my partner/parent of my children.

*I will never put my hands on them, even if I’m furious.*



Continue here  
(use more paper as needed):



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If you were honest, this probably was a challenging exercise. It might also seem overwhelming to commit to changing behaviors that you've done for a long time. Nobody changes overnight. Real change takes time and effort, but the first step is to have the will to do it and to commit to doing it. In this exercise, you commit to changing some behaviors that might have harmed your children or their other parent. In other chapters, we will explore different tools that may help you in your commitment to becoming a better father.



#### SELF-CARE TIP

**Quiet Time** It is important to find quiet times in our day when we create a little space for ourselves. This might be difficult if you have a demanding job and a busy family life. But even 10 minutes of quiet can make a difference. If you live with your partner and/or children, you can tell them that you have learned about the importance of taking quiet time. You can say to them in advance that you would like to take a few minutes every day to be on your own and encourage them to do the same. You can find a quiet corner of your house, or you could even go for a short walk. Don't use your quiet time to watch TV or use alcohol or drugs or talk to others. Instead, try to be present, practice square or deep breathing, and contradict any negative self-talk you have. Don't stay out longer than you agreed with your family and when you come back, try to be totally present with them.



Hundreds of scientific studies show that children are deeply affected when there is abuse in their families, even when the abuse is not directed at them. It is very harmful to children to see one of their parents hurt the other physically, emotionally, and of course, sexually. In fact, children don't need to see it with their own eyes. Children are almost always aware when their parents fight. This is true even if they are in another room or out of the house. Children hear the fighting and see the consequences of the abuse afterward. They see things that have been broken, holes in the walls, and bruises in their parent's bodies. They can sense the tension in the environment and in their parents.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**When you harm  
your partner,  
you hurt  
your children**

When children live in a house where there is continued abuse, they often start showing behaviors that can be symptoms of emotional pain. These behaviors vary depending on the child's age. Still, they are similar to the symptoms displayed by children who are directly abused by their parents.

**For the next exercise, read the following lists of behaviors (divided by age)  
and circle or mark the ones you observed in your children when  
they were that age. Be as honest as you can.**



### **INFANTS**

Fussiness and crying a lot | Frequent sickness | Difficulty sleeping

### **TODDLERS/ PRESCHOOL-AGE**

Aggressive to others | Withdrawn and sad | Delayed development | Poor motor skills  
Anxiety/general fearfulness | Stomach aches | Nightmares  
Lack of bladder/bowel control

### **SCHOOL-AGE**

Aggressive/bullying | Anxiety | Stomach aches | Nightmares  
Lack of bowel/bladder control | Poor grades/failure of one or more grades  
Low self-esteem/poor social skills | Digestive problems | Headaches  
Fear of abandonment | Grief and guilt

### **TEENAGER**

Withdrawn | Nightmares | Poor grades/fails or quits school | Headaches/ulcers  
Violent outbursts | Property destruction | Running away from home  
Unable to express feelings | Refusing to bring friends home | Low self-esteem  
Feeling responsible for home keeping and caring for the adult victim  
Joining in on the abuse of the adult victim | Lack of confidence to begin new tasks



**Before you go on, take a deep  
breath or practice square breathing.  
Take a break if you need it.**

**Complete the following sentences**  
**by writing or recording:**



Doing this exercise made me feel...  
(happy, sad, scared, or angry)

I feel this way because...

This can be a challenging exercise, especially if you honestly acknowledge how your behavior has affected your children. You might even be feeling despair and hopelessness. This is natural, but it is not helpful for you to dwell on these feelings. Besides, there is some good news. Children are strong and often can recover from harm. Their emotions can mend the way a broken bone mends, except that it usually takes much longer. Of course, an emotional or physical wound cannot heal unless the harm stops. If you continue to hit a broken bone, it will never mend; in fact, it will get worse. It is the same with emotional wounds. They can heal, but you have to stop damaging them. We'll start to explore how in the next chapter.

You might ask: What about my partner/ex-partner harming me? Doesn't that also hurt the children? The answer is yes, and the fact is that you cannot control your partner's behavior. The best thing you can do is not to engage in back-and-forth arguments with your partner. Often, if you calm down, the other person will too. If not, you can always take a break (see next chapter).

Regardless of your partner's behavior, you can still be a comfort and support for your children. Research shows that a parent's love can protect children so that they don't develop many of the behaviors discussed earlier in this chapter. You can play that role, but you mustn't blame, badmouth or criticize your partner or ex-partner in front of your children. That will just make things worse. If you cannot say anything positive about your partner, it is better that you don't say anything. Instead, you can express your love and support for your children. That will help them in the long run.



#### SELF-CARE TIP

**Getting Support** At the beginning of this workbook, we suggested that you find a trusted friend or family member to help you do the exercises. Even if you have decided to do the workbook by yourself, we recommend that you approach someone you know and respect to support you in the change process as you need it. Someone similar to an AA sponsor, a person you can call when you feel you might harm yourself or someone else or when you are feeling upset or distressed. You must talk to that person in advance when you are calm and explain how they can be helpful.



Again, this person should not be your partner or ex-partner or your children, even if they are grownups.

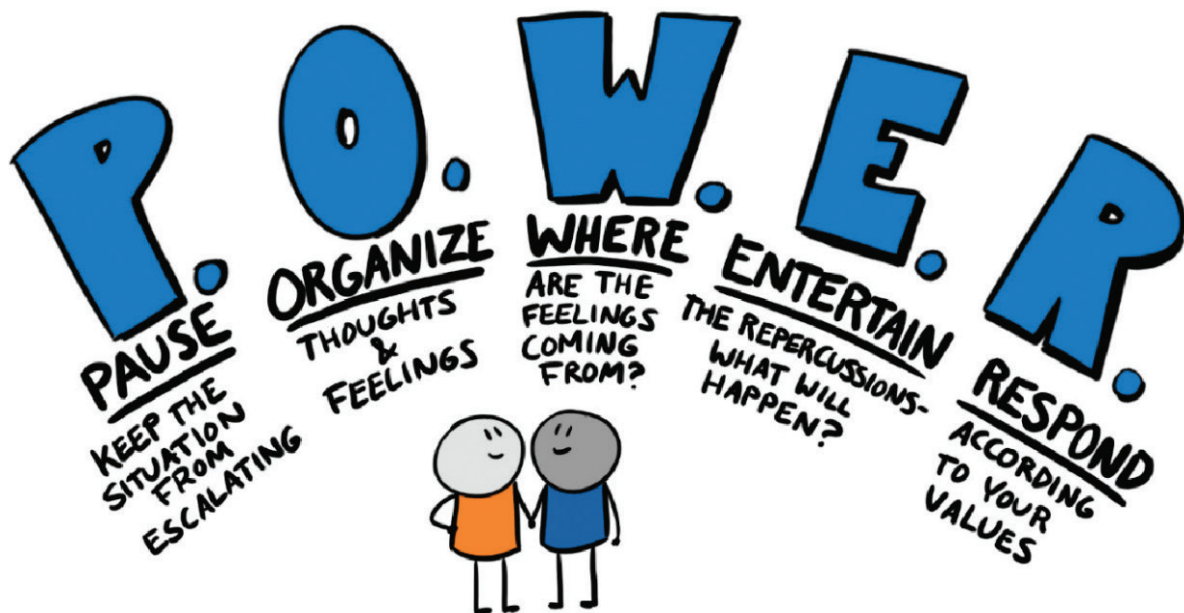
By now, it should be evident to you that you must commit to stopping your abusive behavior. You don't want to continue harming your children, and hopefully, you don't want to hurt the other parent either.

It is important to remember that abuse is not only physical. It can also be emotional, financial, or sexual. Anything that someone does to create fear and to control the other parent or the children is abusive. Examples of physical abuse include hitting, kicking, or shoving someone. Emotional abuse is calling someone names or constantly putting them down. Financial abuse is less known. It involves controlling all the family money or not letting your partner work (or forcing them to work). Sexual abuse is any sexual activity in which a person is forced to participate.

In some ways, physical abuse is the easiest to stop (although it is not easy). You might be less aware of other ways in which you harm your partner emotionally, financially, and even sexually. Stopping abusive behavior doesn't happen overnight; it takes time and effort. And sometimes, it requires help from someone, a family member, a friend, or a professional.

This workbook cannot give you all the information you need to stop your abusive behavior and turn your life around. However, it can provide a starting point.

There are many ways to go about changing destructive behaviors. We would like to propose one called the POWER approach. The following illustration summarizes the approach:



## CHAPTER 5

**First, you have to stop harming your partner and your children**



**This is how the POWER approach works.**  
**When you find yourself in a stressful situation, and you could possibly become abusive, go through the following steps:**

**PAUSE**

Stop what you are doing. Take a deep breath or practice square breathing. Move away from the situation physically or, if not possible, mentally.

You can take a break or a walk, but make sure you tell the other person you are doing so and that you will be back in a certain amount of time and be back on time! The length of the break depends on how long it will take you to calm down. It should not be more than an hour, especially if you follow the rest of the steps described below.

**ORGANIZE**

Organize your thoughts and feelings and what physical reactions you might be experiencing. Check in with yourself: Am I hungry, am I tired, am I angry about something else? When you start getting angry, how does your body react? Do you get tense, do you start sweating, do you pace back and forth?

What are you feeling besides anger? Are you sad, scared, or depressed?

What negative "self-talk" is going on? Are you having jealous thoughts? Are you recycling your usual negative beliefs about your partner (such as "they never give me credit," or "they are so stupid")? Are you jumping to conclusions (such as "there they go again") or having blaming thoughts (such as "they make me so angry")? Or are you espousing destructive attitudes ("I am the man of the house and I should be in charge")?

Try to replace your negative thoughts with positive ones or more constructive ways of thinking.

**WHERE?**

Where are these thoughts and feelings coming from? Sometimes strong emotions are not coming from the present situation. The situation might remind us of something hurtful from our childhood, especially from our parents. Ask yourself: What does this remind me of? When was the first time I felt this way?

**ENTERTAIN**

Entertain the repercussions. What are the possible consequences of different actions, and what has happened in the past in similar circumstances? What will happen if I hurt my partner or ex-partner physically, emotionally, financially, or sexually? How will these actions affect my partner and children?



## RESPOND

Respond in a way that takes you closer to the kind of father, partner, and person you want to be. Remind yourself of your goals as a father and the dreams you have for your children (from Chapter 1). Ask yourself: Is this moving towards accomplishing those goals and dreams or taking me away from them? If you think you are moving away from your goals and dreams, take action to move you closer to them.

You can print several copies of the POWER chart at the end of this chapter and use them when you are taking a pause. It is important that when you feel calmer, you go back and talk to your partner or ex-partner about the issue you were discussing before you took a pause. If you need it, take another pause and go through the process again!

The POWER approach is only one technique that you can use to stop your abusive behavior, but it is harder to do than it looks. Like everything else, it requires practice. You have to go through every step many times before you master the approach, and even after that, you have to keep using it.

If you feel this approach is not working, you might want to reach out for help. If you have established a relationship of trust with a family member, a friend, or a faith or community leader, call them when you are taking the pause. Share with them the POWER approach and ask them to help you with each step. At least initially, it might be easier to practice it with someone else who cares about you.

If you cannot stop your abusive behavior on your own or with the support of a friend, it may be time to get professional help. There are programs around the US designed to help people who are abusive with their partners. You can also seek help from a therapist who is well trained in domestic violence treatment. For professional resources, see page 50.



### SELF-CARE TIP

**Positive Thoughts** Sometimes, it is hard to find the proper positive self-talk when we are in the middle of an argument or feeling bad about ourselves. Try this idea: In a jar, regularly put in slips of paper that you have written (or read) with positive self-talk, personal goals, inspirational thoughts, etc. You can pick one out when you feel down and remember why you are doing this work. You can have a second jar with slips of paper written with positive statements about your partner and your relationship. You can use this jar when you are trying to calm down from arguing with your partner.

# POWER Approach Chart

(to be used when you are taking a Pause)

## PAUSE

What did you say to your partner or ex-partner before taking the Pause?

Did you tell them when you would be back? If not, can you text them? (it should be under an hour).

Try not to drive for a long distance and certainly, do not drink alcohol or use drugs.

Do you have a trusted person you can call and who can help you calm down?

## ORGANIZE

Organize your thoughts and feelings and be aware of your physical reactions.

Are you hungry, tired, or angry about something else?

When you started getting angry, how did your body react?

Are you getting tense, sweating, or pacing back and forth?

What are you feeling besides anger? Are you sad, scared, or depressed?

What is your negative self-talk? How can you change it to positive self-talk?

## WHERE?

Where are these thoughts and feelings coming from?

What does this remind you of?

When was the first time you felt this way?

## ENTERTAIN

Entertain the repercussions.

What are the possible consequences of different actions, and what has happened in the past in similar circumstances?

What will happen if you hurt your partner or ex-partner physically, emotionally, financially, or sexually?

How will these actions affect your partner and children?

## RESPOND

Respond in a way that takes you closer to the father, partner, and person you want to be.

What are your goals as a father and the dreams you have for your children?

Are your actions moving you towards accomplishing those goals and dreams or taking you away from them?

If you think you are moving away from your goals and dreams, take an action that will move you closer to them!

**When you feel calmer, come back and try to talk to your partner about the issue you discussed before you left. If you need it, take another Pause and go through the process again!**

As we said in the previous chapter, the first step for changing your life is to stop the abusive behavior, but that is not enough. You also have to start showing your family that you are changing by displaying positive behaviors. You will be giving your children a good example to follow. After all, that's how children learn, by example. Not by what they are told to do, but by what they see you doing. You will also be teaching your children a fundamental lesson: That people can change and learn from their mistakes. It is also crucial that you teach your children that some men are respectful to women no matter what culture they come from. And that some men are abusive with women in every society. You can become a good example of what respectful men look like in your culture. This is important because sometimes children perceive that men from certain cultures are more disrespectful to women than others (which is not true).

## CHAPTER 6

**Next, you have to start modeling positive behavior**

**The exercise for this chapter has 3 sections. We will ask you to record the first 2 sections on your phone or another recording device. If you do not have a recording device, you can write them down.**

The first section involves remembering your father. If you didn't know your father, you could think of a stepfather or other father figure, such as an uncle.



First, think of a time when your father provided you with a good example of how to treat your mother or a mother figure with respect and love. It might help to remember how old you were. Start recording by talking directly to your father, as if he were next to you. Begin by saying: "Dad (or whatever you called him), I remember a time you were really nice to my mother (or mother figure)." Then tell the story of what you remember. Try to remember and record as many details as possible. Take as much time as you need. If you cannot think of a time your father treated your mother well, spend more time trying to remember. There must be at least one time you witnessed some good behavior. It doesn't need to be a big thing; it could have been just a small gesture you remember.



Pause or stop the recording and take a deep breath. When you are ready, remember a time in which your father (or father figure) provided you with a bad example by being mean or abusive to your mother or a mother figure. This might be difficult, so take your time. Again, try to remember how old you were. Start recording once more as if you were talking to your father. Start by saying: "Dad (or whatever you called him), I remember a time you really hurt my mother (or mother figure)." The harm can be physical or emotional. Then tell the story of what you remember. Try to remember and record as many details as possible. Take as much time as you need and stop as many times as you need to. Remember to keep on breathing deeply. Again, if you cannot think of a time when your father hurt your mother or mother figure, try harder. It doesn't need to be a terrible incident; it could have been just something mean he said.

**When you are done, check in with yourself to see how you are feeling. If you are upset, you might want to take a break, maybe go for a walk, or call your support person.**

**When you are ready, complete the following sentences by writing or recording:**



Doing this exercise made me feel... (happy, sad, scared, or angry)

This is a positive thing I learned from my father about  
how to treat women and/or intimate partners:

This is a negative thing I learned from my father about  
how to treat women/intimate partners:

This is a positive thing I learned from my father about  
how women or intimate partners are treated in my culture:

This is a negative thing I learned from my father  
about how women or intimate partners are treated in my culture:

2

That is the first section of the exercise. You can continue with the second section right away or wait for a different time or day. The second section of the activity is very similar to the first.

You should start by listening to the recordings you have made so far. Then, you will choose one of your children and make similar recordings pretending you are that child who is talking to you as a father. Consider the age of the child you chose. Again, you will make 2 recordings.



Start the first one by saying: "Dad (or whatever they call you), this is (say their name). I remember a time you were really nice to my mother or mother figure." Then tell the story of what you remember from the child's perspective. Try to remember

and record as many details as possible. This part of the exercise shouldn't be too hard.

The second part is the hard one. As always, this will work better if you are completely honest. By now, you should know the drill. Start the recorder and talk as if your child were speaking: "Dad (or whatever they call you), this is (say their name). I remember a time you were really abusive to my mother or mother figure." Once more, tell the story of what you remember from the child's perspective. Take your time as you try to



remember and record as many details as possible. Take breaks if you need to. Again, check in with yourself and practice as much self-care as you need to when you are done.

### **When you are ready, complete the following sentences:**

Doing this exercise made me feel... (happy, sad, scared, or angry)

This is a positive thing I have taught my children about how to treat women/ intimate partners:


This is a negative thing I have taught my children about how to treat women/intimate partners:

This is a positive thing I have taught my children about how women/intimate partners are treated in my culture:

This is a negative thing I have taught my children about how women/intimate partners are treated in my culture:

Do you see a connection between your behaviors and those of your father? Our parents are our first and most influential teachers. They passed on positive and negative behaviors they probably learned themselves from their parents. Maybe you learned how to be abusive with your partner from your father or another adult. Perhaps you learned it somewhere else. It can be helpful to know where these behaviors come from; however, they should never be used to excuse or justify your behavior. That will not be helpful to anyone. You are not responsible for what happened to you, but you are responsible for your own behaviors as an adult. You cannot truly engage in a change process if you don't take full responsibility for your actions (more on this in Chapter 9).

The third section of this exercise is more like homework. At some point in the next few days, you should listen to the second recording you made. Then, come up with an action that will help you be a better role model for your children. Think of one way to be more respectful to your children's mother or mother figure. This must be a positive action that you don't usually do or have never done and think will make you a better example for your children. Keep in mind that you will be committing to doing these actions in the next few weeks. Make sure that you pick things you can realistically do in the short term.

 **If your children's mother has a no-contact court order against you, under no circumstances should you attempt to reach her. The same thing applies if they have expressed that they do not want to have contact with you.**

If you have limited or no access to your children or their mother, it doesn't necessarily mean that you cannot complete this exercise. You could find ways to model a more respectful relationship with your children's mother. For instance, you can speak more respectfully about her, even if there is a

non-contact order. Other examples may include: strictly obeying the no-contact order, not talking badly about your children's mother to other people, or paying child support on time. Suppose you don't have any contact with your children or their mother. In that case, you can still practice being respectful with another person in your life.

**Write down here or record at least one respectful action you are planning to do in the next few weeks:**



If you have a trusted friend or family member helping you with these exercises, share your chosen action and ask them to help you make sure you do it. Once you have completed that action, you can select a new one every week.





## SELF-CARE TIP

**Grounding** Another way to calm down when you are feeling upset or down is called grounding. There are simple ways of grounding, such as drinking a glass of water. You can also sit down with your feet on the ground, close your eyes if you wish, and imagine you are a strong, beautiful tree. Imagine that your hair is the leaves moving in the wind; pretend that your arms are the branches of the tree (you don't have to move them); see your body as the trunk (that is what it's called literally); and imagine your legs and feet are the roots of the tree. While taking deep breaths, you can even pretend that the roots are much longer. You can imagine they go all the way to the bottom of the earth, as you feel you are both flexible and unmovable.





## CHAPTER 7

### Can people change?

A lot of folks ask this question. The answer is yes! But only if they choose to change. Nobody can make you change. Only you can do it. It's not easy, but it is possible if you try hard. We would like to share some real stories of men and fathers who have chosen to change. The men tell their stories in a 15-minute documentary called *Something My Father Would Do*. As you will see, all three men in the film grew up with abusive fathers and had to make some critical decisions to better their lives.



**Go ahead and watch the video. You can find it on YouTube:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMuBBdwlhg4>

**After you have watched the video, complete the following sentences in writing or by recording them:**



Doing this exercise made me feel... (happy, sad, scared, or angry)

I identify the most with (circle one: Duane, Scott, or Moné) because...

I learned the following about the impact of abuse on children:

I learned the following about the possibility of changing abusive behavior:

All of the men in the film talk about painful childhood memories of their fathers, not unlike the recording you made in the previous chapter. It is clear how, even as adults, they have been deeply affected by their father's abuse. At some point, all of them made a choice not to become, or to stop being abusive.

Moné (the third story) decided to never be like his father. Duane (the first story) caught himself becoming like his father and chose to stop when he was young. Scott (the middle story) followed his father's steps and became abusive with his wife Nancy and children. Still, in the long run, he decided he had had enough and sought help to stop his violence. With hard work, he was able to mend his relationship with Nancy and the children. We will talk more about this process in the next chapter.

If these three men were able to break generational cycles of abuse, you could do it too. It will take effort and grit, but it is within your reach. Nobody can make this decision, but you!



#### SELF-CARE TIP

**Cultivating Joy** Next time you take quiet time, try this: Close your eyes if you wish and think of a time when you felt really happy. Try to remember as many details as possible. How old were you? Who was with you? What were you doing and saying? Where were you? What time of the day was it? As pleasant memories flow through your mind, pay attention to your body. Are you feeling tense or relaxed? Are you clenching your jaw or your fists? Are your shoulders and other parts of your body soft? Is your heart beating fast or slow? As you breathe deeply and slowly and continue to remember your moment of joy, try to relax more and more.



This is a complicated question. The short answer is yes, but not always. Sometimes, relationships have been so damaged that the injured individual decides not to see the abusive person again. This is common with intimate partners who have been abused and sometimes with children. However, many children do want to have a relationship with their fathers, as long as they have really changed their abusive behaviors and attitudes. Some of these behaviors and attitudes include: acting as if you are the “king of the castle,” treating your partner or ex-partner as if she is less worthy than you, or expressing that men are superior to women.

The most important thing to remember is that it is up to your children to decide whether they want to have contact with you or not. This might seem harsh, but it’s part of the process of healing. You might want to force younger children to see you against their will, but at some point, they will be old enough to make their own decisions and might choose to break contact with you. Forcing them to see you will only make things worse. While it is painful not to see your kids, the situation might change in the future if you follow the proper steps (although there are no guarantees).

## CHAPTER 8

### Can harmed relationships be healed?

In the video **Something My Father Would Do**, you saw the example of Scott (second story). He renounced his violence and repaired his relationship with his family.



**Watch it again and write down or record some of the things that Scott had to do to start rebuilding his relationships. His story begins at 4:43.**



This is what Scott had to do to start repairing his relationships with his children and wife Nancy:

As we mentioned before, Scott had to stop his emotional and physical abuse of Nancy and the kids. He also had to model positive behavior. One way that he shows this in the film is by taking over responsibility for cooking dinner for the family and supporting Nancy in her new job.

Other things that Scott did were take full responsibility for his abuse and stop blaming Nancy. He had to stop denying that he was abusive and coming up with

excuses for his behavior. He had to acknowledge the harm that he did to his family and accept the consequences of his behavior.

The story of Scott and his family is not unique. Other children and young people who have grown up with abusive fathers have identified similar actions as necessary steps to repair the broken relationships with their fathers. Like Scott, other fathers who were abusive have worked on rebuilding their relations with their children. And they described taking the same exact steps.

Suppose you want to repair your relationships with your children. In that case, you can start by listening to the advice of other fathers and, more importantly, children and young people who have been in this situation. This will not guarantee that you will heal all your family relationships, but at least, it will give you a chance to do so. All you can do is your part; you cannot control what others choose to do.

We have already mentioned that the first two actions needed for healing relationships are to stop your abusive behavior and engage in positive behavior. The next actions are described in the following three chapters. Please note that this is not an orderly, step-by-step process to follow. While all the steps are essential, you will probably go back and forth among them. Each of the actions takes time and effort, and they sometimes happen at the same time.



#### SELF-CARE TIP

**Letting Go** A proven way to feel happier in our lives is to learn how to let go of what we no longer need. This applies to material objects, ideas, emotions, and even people. If your home is really cluttered and disorganized, try to get rid of some things you no longer need and/or try to put them away in an orderly fashion. If you live with your partner or someone else, check with them first; we don't want you to get in a fight with them over this. You will probably feel happier when you start getting rid of things that just take space in your home. Getting rid of negative self-talk is also a way to declutter your mind of "things" you no longer need. If you have trouble doing so, you can ask yourself: Do I want to be right or happy? Hopefully, you will choose the latter. Sometimes, you have to let go of people. It might be old friends and acquaintances that might not be helpful for your process of change and healing. The most difficult thing to let go of is people we love, but occasionally we have to do that too, especially if we have hurt them. For example, you might need to let go of an ex-partner who is moving on with their life. Or even you might need to release your relationship with your children if that is what they want. Sometimes –though not always– we let the people we love go, and they eventually return to our lives when they are ready to re-establish a relationship.



## CHAPTER 9

### Time to stop lying to yourself and others

We all have done things that we are not proud of. When someone confronts us about our bad behaviors, we usually deny it ("I didn't do it"). Or we try to make them less harmful, minimize them ("it wasn't a big deal"), make up excuses ("I wasn't paying attention"), and/or blame someone else ("he made me do it"). Many of us learned from childhood that it is easier to hide the truth about our destructive behaviors than to own them. The problem is that this might be true in the short term, but not in the long run. Lies and deceptions almost always catch up with us and create more damage than if we had taken responsibility in the first place.

In order to really change a behavior, it's essential to be truthful and take full responsibility. How can we change a behavior that we refuse to recognize? In fact, taking full responsibility for our actions can be very powerful. It is often scary, but it can give us hope for the future, as we can start changing things for the better.

The following exercise will help you move towards taking full responsibility for your actions. As with other activities in this workbook, this is a process you probably won't master the first time. You will need to practice frequently.



Following the given examples, choose 3 harmful things you have done to your partner or children and write them in the first column (Behavior). (You can go back and use some of what you wrote in chapters 1, 2, or 3). Then fill out a row in the table for each behavior, as we did in the examples:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Behavior	Denial	Minimization	Excuses	Blaming	Full Responsibility
I was going 60 mph in a 40 mph zone.	I was not speeding. I was going 40 mph.	OK. I was going a few miles over the speed limit. Maybe 5?	OK. I was speeding, but only because I was not paying attention.	I was speeding because my friend told me he was in a hurry.	I was speeding. I was going 20 miles over the speed limit, and I was aware of it.
I punched my wife in the arm very hard.	I didn't punch her. I wasn't even close to her.	I was next to her but barely grazed her arm.	I punched her arm lightly; I was just playing.	I punched her arm because she would not stop talking.	I was angry and punched my wife in the arm very hard.



**After finishing the exercise, complete the following sentences in writing or by recording them:**



Doing this exercise made me feel... (happy, sad, scared, or angry)

In your own words, describe why taking full responsibility for your actions is important:

Of course, taking full responsibility for your behaviors gives an excellent example to your children, even if you have avoided doing it in the past. Denying, minimizing, blaming, and making excuses for your behavior is not only lousy modeling; it can also further damage your children emotionally. Your children are aware of your abusive behavior, especially as they get older. If you pretend that it's not happening or that it's not that bad, or that it's not your fault, it can make them feel crazy and hurt. Part of the healing process is affirming to your children that the abuse they saw is real and that you acknowledge how damaging it has been. We'll talk about that more in the next chapter.

We are including a blank chart at the end of this chapter to continue practicing this exercise. You can make photocopies, make the chart yourself, or record the information. It might even be interesting to do it again with some of the behaviors you listed before to see if you come up with deeper insights.



#### SELF-CARE TIP

**Cold Shower** This might not seem like a self-care tip, but it is a way to help you calm down when you are feeling upset: Take a cold shower. This is an old remedy, but it has been studied, and it is effective! If you cannot take a shower, wash your face with ice-cold water or walk outside without a jacket if it's wintertime. You can even practice ending your regular shower with cold water. It works!

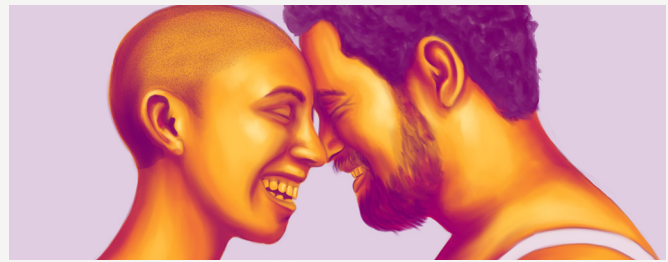
1 Behavior	2 Denial	3 Minimization	4 Excuses	5 Blaming	6 Full Responsibility

## CHAPTER 10

# Accepting what you have done

Children who grew up with abusive fathers and fathers who have repaired with their children agree on other points.

In addition to taking full responsibility, abusive fathers need to acknowledge the harm they have done to the family. As we have seen, abuse can create long-lasting damage, and people who have been harmed want to see that the abusive person understands this damage. It is part of the healing process. You might not know all the ways in which you have hurt your loved ones, but you certainly know some of them.



According to these children and fathers, there is another key element for healing and repairing their relationships. The abusive person must accept all the consequences of their behavior. This is seen by some as part of a reparation process. This means accepting legal consequences, such as paying fines, obeying non-contact orders, being monitored during visitation, and even doing jail time, and non-legal consequences, like accepting the loss of trust, love, and even contact with their children and the other parent. This might be the most challenging part of the process, but it is a critical one. Accepting all consequences can send the message to your children that you are serious about changing. It is also setting a good example.

The following exercise is an extension of the previous one.

It involves taking the statements you wrote in the "Full Responsibility" box before and copying them in the column of the following chart. Next, list as many items as you can under "Acknowledge Harm" and "Accept Consequences."

In our first example, we added one fact: The person got in a severe accident.



1 Full Responsibility	2 Acknowledge Harm	3 Accept Consequences
<p>I was going 60 mph in a 40 mph zone and got in a severe accident.</p>	<p>I wrecked the family car. I hurt my neck. I scared my family. I lost money that could have been used by my family.</p>	<p>I got a hefty fine. My insurance premium went up. I had to miss work to go to physical therapy. I had to deal with my partner's anger. I had to work extra hours to pay for a new car and the other expenses.</p>
<p>I was angry and punched my wife in the arm very hard.</p>	<p>My wife is in pain and has a big bruise. My wife and my children are distraught. My wife and my children are afraid of me. My wife had to miss work because she was embarrassed to be seen with the bruise.</p>	<p>The neighbors called the police, and I was arrested. I had to miss work to go to court and had to pay a fine. My wife got a non-contact order, and I have to stay with my parents. I am not allowed to see my children.</p>



## SELF-CARE TIP

**Guilt and Shame** It is essential to understand the difference between two feelings that often are mixed up, shame and guilt. The easiest way to think about it is that guilt is feeling bad about something wrong we have done, and shame is feeling bad about who we are. Shame is a feeling that can trap us in a vicious circle. The worse we feel about ourselves, the more we repeat negative behaviors. On the other hand, guilt can be a useful feeling that encourages us to change our behaviors so that we don't harm ourselves or others anymore. You can use positive self-talk to work with these feelings. For example, when you feel shame or guilt or both, you can say to yourself: "I am a good person, who has made some bad decisions. I can start making different decisions and change who I am as a person, a father, and a partner."



**We have included a blank chart  
so that you can continue working on  
these and other behaviors.**

1 Full Responsibility	2 Acknowledge Harm	3 Accept Consequences



In some way, this whole workbook is about what your children need and want from you. We have talked about supporting their dreams and hopes (and yours), understanding how they see you (both positively and negatively), stopping your abusive behaviors and damaging attitudes and modeling healthy behaviors, understanding how your abuse has affected them and the other parent, taking full responsibility for the harm you have caused and letting go of denial, minimization, excuses, and blaming, and accepting the consequences of your past actions. All of these are things that children who grew up in abusive households say they want and need. And there's more.

## CHAPTER 11

### What do your children need and want from you?

All children want to feel safe, wanted, and loved by their parents. If you have access to your children, you have the opportunity to make them feel special. You can listen to them, become genuinely interested in their lives, and support them in their hopes and dreams. In other words, fully show up as a father. This looks different depending on your children's ages.

In a study that asked children what they wanted from their fathers, all children said that showing respect for the other parent was essential in the healing journey. Many said that if their fathers continued to be mean to their mothers or treated them as inferior, they didn't want to see them anymore.

The children also wanted the fathers to step up and be good co-parents and devote time and effort to their relationship with their children. They expressed that fathers should not only be respectful but supportive of the other parent and take responsibility for their fair share in all parenting tasks. Not only the fun activities, like going to the park or out to eat, but also the harder ones like cleaning the house, doing the dishes, changing diapers (in the case of babies), taking the kids to school, participating in school functions, and so

on. The children wanted their fathers to demonstrate equitable relationships with their mothers.

When discussing repairing their relationships with their fathers, these children wanted to be in charge of the process. They felt that their fathers often wanted to rush the healing process and turn the page. Still, despite their youth, they were clear that emotional healing takes time, and the people who have been harmed should set the pace of the process.

Former abusive fathers who were interviewed described how they needed to listen to their children about how they were impacted by their abuse as many times as necessary. This is an arduous process, but it is essential for healing broken relationships. People who have been harmed need to feel that their perspective is understood and validated. Often, children need to express anger when they communicate with their fathers about how it felt to witness the other parent being abused. For fathers, receiving this anger is part of accepting the consequences for their behavior and embarking on a healing journey with their children.

We have not talked about apologies because it is a complicated subject in cases of domestic violence. All of the interviewed children said they wished for their fathers to apologize to them and their mothers. But they were also very clear that they wanted a genuine and authentic apology. Some mentioned that their fathers did apologize after abusive incidents. Still, they didn't change their behavior, so the apology

was meaningless. These children want more than words, more than just saying, "I'm sorry." They thought honest apologies should include many of the actions that we have spelled out in previous chapters: Changing behaviors and attitudes, taking full responsibility and accepting all the consequences for the abuse, and showing remorse with actions, not only words.

The exercise in this chapter is about healthy co-parenting since it is at the center of what children need and want. Co-parenting often refers to couples that are separated or divorced. However, this exercise also applies to couples who are still together. As with other activities, **you should not take any action that would violate a court order or go against the wishes of your children and the other parent.**



**Complete the following sentences by writing or recording:**



Healthy co-parenting is important because:

These are some of the things I do well when I co-parent:

These are some things I don't do so well when I co-parent:

I commit to doing the following 3 things to become a better co-parent:

As with the modeling exercise in chapter 3, the actions you are choosing to do should be realistic and concrete. For instance, picking up the kids from school three times a week or preparing lunches for them every morning. The actions will depend on your circumstances: whether or not you live with them full time or have ongoing contact with them. Whatever steps you choose, they are just a beginning, and you can keep on adding more actions to the list as you complete the first three. If you have a support person, you can ask them to check with you regularly and make sure you are doing what you said you would do.



#### SELF-CARE TIP

**Gratitude** You are almost done with this workbook and hopefully have learned a lot about yourself along the way. Research has shown that one way to live a more positive life is to practice gratitude every day. You can start now by closing your eyes and thinking of one thing you learned from this workbook that you are grateful for. Focus on that for a minute or two. You can repeat this exercise every morning, maybe just as you wake up, and think about one –or more– things for which you are thankful. They might be connected to your children, partner, work, or other aspects of your life. There’s always something to be grateful for!

## CHAPTER 12

### How do you want your children to remember you?

You have come to the end of the workbook, which is really the beginning of your transformation journey. Changing

your attitudes and

behaviors and becoming a better father is a life-long project for most people.

We hope that you have found some of the exercises practical and helpful.

And that they have motivated you to continue on the path of healing and wholeness for yourself and your loved ones. Once again, remember that this is hard work and it is helpful to have others to support you. Suppose you chose a friend, family member, a faith leader, or a member of your community to walk with you on this journey. In that case, you can ask them to continue supporting you as you go along. After some time, you might want to go back and redo some of the exercises. They are the same, but hopefully, you are not. And don't forget that you can always seek professional help if you need it. Many devoted people are committed to helping fathers.

We want to end by sharing with you one more thing that some of the interviewed children said: They wanted their fathers to change not only for their families but also for themselves. These children could tell that their fathers were deeply unhappy and didn't like that. Your children love you and want you to be happy.

Some people who work in nursing homes report that one of the saddest things they have witnessed is when someone grows old alone. There are people –usually men- who never get a visit from family and friends and feel profoundly lonely in their last days of life. Some share their regrets with the staff. They talk about how their families broke contact with them because of years of abuse or neglect. We don't want you to be one of those men. It might not be too late to change course.



The last exercise may be challenging as it involves thinking about your old age and your legacy for your children. Pretend that you are at your 80th birthday party, and one of your children is giving a speech about you. Imagine this has happened after you changed your abusive behaviors and healed the relationships with your children. This is an opportunity to think of you in the future, being the best father and co-parent you can be. Take your time and when you are ready, write or record the speech as if it was offered by your child.

Once you have finished, complete the following sentences by writing or recording them:



Doing this exercise made me feel... (happy, sad, scared, or angry)

Make a list of the things that you would need to change in your life to become the person described in the speech.

Make a list of the barriers and obstacles that might be on your path to becoming the person in the speech.

Write down some actions or strategies you can use to overcome the barriers and obstacles that might stop you from becoming the person in the speech.

This list might offer you the next steps in your journey of transformation and healing. Make a plan on how you are going to change to become the father your children need. Get support and seek help. Other fathers have been able to change. You can do it too; if you really want to.



#### SELF-CARE TIP

**Celebration** You have finished the workbook! Even though this is not the end of your journey (it's really the beginning), it is important to celebrate every victory, no matter how small. Treat yourself by doing something you love as a celebration. If you can afford it, you might want to go out and have a favorite meal or go see a movie. You can also do something special that is free, such as going for a walk with a good friend (maybe your support person) or even taking a long nap. This celebration is for yourself; nobody else needs to be involved unless you want them to be part of it, and they accept. Enjoy!



## RESOURCES

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To find programs in the US to help you stop your abuse, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline - 800-799-SAFE (7233).

If you are in crisis or feeling you want to hurt yourself, call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline - 1-800-273-8255 or text Hello to 741741.

If you are afraid you might hurt your children, call the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline - 1-800-422-4453.

If you want to continue working on your abusive behaviors on your own, check out Dr. Chris Huffine's book "Becoming Allies..."

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## CREDITS

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| Chapter 1 | The letter writing exercise was based on the restorative parenting work of Dr. Dave Mathews. Some of the questions were based on the Dignity and Respect Curriculum, developed by the Center for Justice Innovation in New York City for the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. |
| Chapter 2 | The children's drawings were originally developed by the Colectivo de Hombres por Relaciones Igualitarias in Mexico City and were adapted by Futures Without Violence as part of Breaking the Cycle: Fathering After Violence.   |
| Chapter 3 | The TRIZ exercise is part of Liberating Structures.  |
| Chapter 4 | The behavior list was adapted from Warning Signs of Children Living with Domestic Violence, produced by the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence.   |
| Chapter 5 | The POWER approach was originally developed by Futures Without Violence and is based on Dialectical Behavioral Therapy techniques.   |
| Chapter 6 | The exercise was adapted from Futures Without Violence's Breaking the Cycle: Fathering After Violence.   |
| Chapter 7 | The video Something My Father Would Do was produced by Futures Without Violence.   |
| Chapter 8 | The children's interviews can be found in the article "Your behaviour has consequences": Children and young people's perspectives on reparation with their fathers after domestic violence by Katie Lamb, Cathy Humphreys, and Kelsey Hegarty (Children and Youth Services Review 88, 2018).   |



## CREDITS

**Chapters 9 and 10** The exercises were adapted from the Reparative Framework developed by Futures Without Violence.

**Chapter 12** The birthday exercise was adapted from the Dignity and Respect Curriculum, developed by the Center for Justice Innovation in New York City for the New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, and from the work of James Henderson of Accountable Choices in Detroit, Michigan.

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