

Essential Tools for Support and Stability

Peer Researcher Resource Kit



AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario

Presence. Compassion. Change.

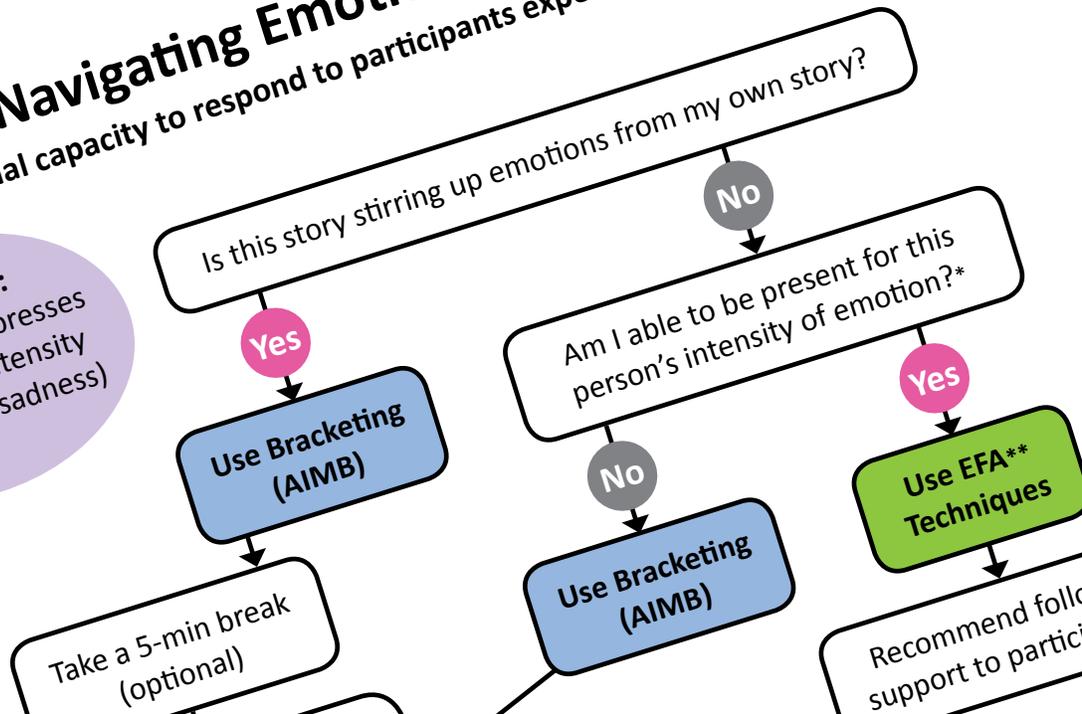
Emotional Wheel



Navigating Emotional Triggers

Assessing personal capacity to respond to participants experiencing emotional distress

Situation:
Participant expresses emotional intensity (fear, anger, sadness)





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Essential Tools for Support and Stability Resource Kit

Introduction

The original resource, *Essential Tools for Support and Stability*, was created by the AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario (ABRPO) as part of its Turning to One Another (TTOA) project. Initiated in 2009, TTOA aims to enhance the capacity of AIDS service organizations to build effective working relationships between their staff and people living with HIV/AIDS fulfilling multiple roles. The ‘Essential Tools’ were identified based on the peer facilitation manual called Presence: Self-awareness and the emotional dimension.

The MSAFIRI Post-Migration Health project, also known as ‘Understanding HIV infection among African, Caribbean and Black people after arrival in Canada’, was initiated by the Dalla Lana School of Public Health and Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre in 2013. The African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO) has supported the MSAFIRI project since its development, and officially became a partner on the project in 2014. In January 2015, the MSAFIRI study coordinator approached the ABRPO to guide the design of appropriate debriefing sessions for the Peer Researchers¹ working with the team as they were expected to engage in a researcher role with people they identified as “peers”. Peers suggested the creation of a more concise and user-friendly resource to support the direct application of Essential Tools practices when facing the immediate pressure of an emotionally charged situation. The ABRPO trainer designed a schematic and initiated collaboration with the MSAFIRI study team to develop a new visual tool.

This Resource Kit is an expansion of the ABRPO’s document, *Essential Tools for Support and Stability*, to include the visual overview tool, Navigating Emotional Triggers (NET). The NET was co-created by ABRPO, ACCHO and the MSAFIRI Post-Migration Health Study team. The *Resource Kit* can be used by people in paid or unpaid roles where they experience a shared aspect of identity with those whom they work with, including in peer support, peer research (with Peer Researchers), and/or group facilitation roles.

This Resource Kit is also available in French. It can be downloaded from ABRPO (www.abrpo.org), ACCHO (www.accho.ca) or SAGE (www.sagecollection.ca). We aim for the NET to be an open access resource for all communities affected by HIV and/or engaging in peer-based support strategies. Please credit ACCHO, ABRPO and the MSAFIRI Study when reprinting this resource kit.

September, 2015

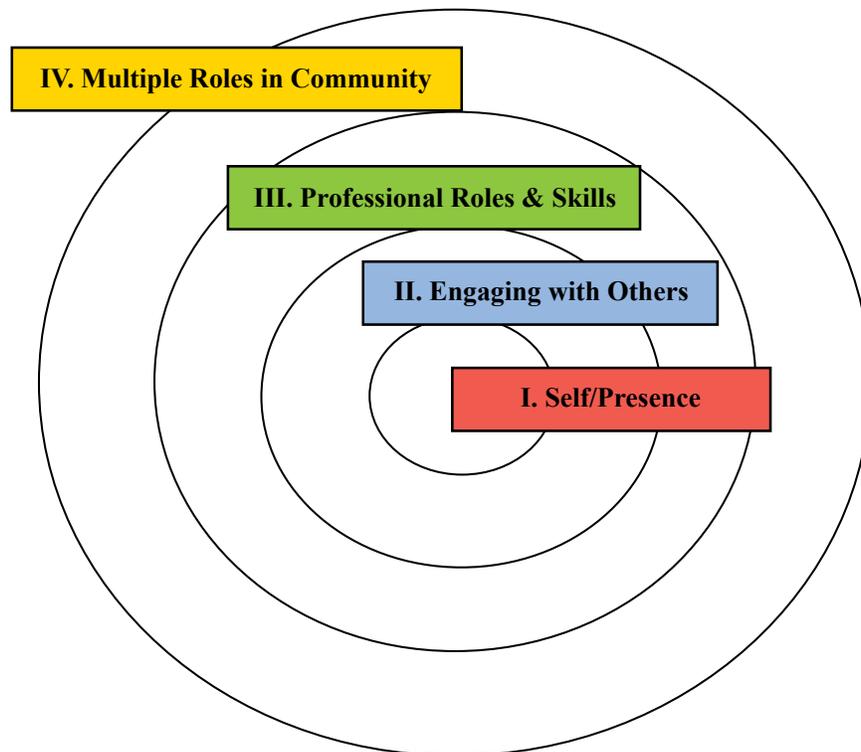
¹MSAFIRI Peer Researchers Training, January, 2015

Relating to Myself at Multiple Levels

Expanded roles in community often mean that through employment or volunteer work, a person is regularly relating with people who share their challenging, and sometimes, painful stories.

This can impact a person's sense of well-being because these relationships can:

- Open a person to other people's stories which include loss, trauma, and ongoing changes.
- Expand their human community to include these individuals in some way.
- Create ripples and/or triggers through a person's own life story.



Assessing the Levels of Impact

Level I: Self/Presence – Noticing what impacts my core sense of self-worth and confidence.

Level II: Engaging with Others – Noticing the quality of my relationships through the presence of honesty, mutual respect, empathy, problem-solving and capacity to manage clearing and conflict resolution.

Level III: Professional Roles & Skills – Noticing my own and others' perception of my role and the various skills that I use to respond to interactions and achieve objectives.

Level IV: Multiple Roles in Community – Noticing what helps me to respond appropriately to acknowledge and affirm my multiple roles in community.

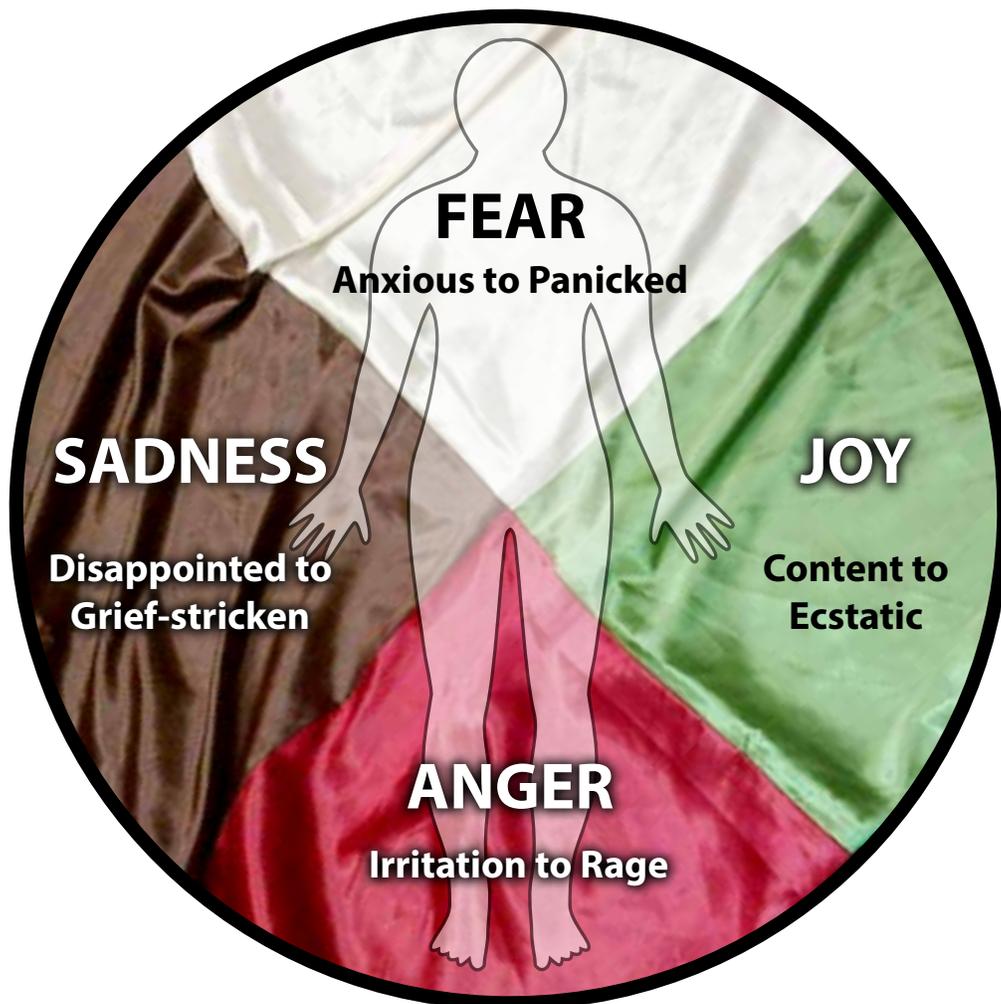
Essential Tool: Self-awareness

Which emotions are impacting me? Impacting others?

The image below was developed as a companion to the Peer Facilitator Training Manual Part B: Presence, where Susan Aaron's principles of psycho-dramatic bodywork are summarized on pages 25-36.

By increasing people's self-awareness of how they experience the primary emotional states, their capacity to identify and articulate the emotion(s) they are feeling is strengthened. The main categories of emotion are Joy, Anger, Sadness and Fear. The range of emotional states, such as from mildly anxious to panicked, communicate the message of a particular emotion. The goal of maintaining stability is to be in healthy dialogue with the messages that our emotions communicate, rather than suppressing them.

Emotional Wheel



Essential Tool: Bracketing

Bracketing is a process where a person notices an issue that is contributing to feelings of sadness, fear or anger, and they temporarily put aside the issue, so that they can pay attention to the present situation.

It is important that we recognize and take care of these 'emotional triggers'. We must have the intention of returning to remove the brackets (unbracket), which means that we then experience our own feelings and reactions at a time that is more suitable, convenient or appropriate. The stages below describe the behaviours, which are abbreviated to help to remember them: Acknowledge, Identify/Internal, Make, Breathe (AIMB).

1. **A**cknowledge that there is an issue that needs bracketing. "I am feeling sad/angry/etc. at what I am hearing..."
2. **I**dentify what part of your own story is being triggered. "This is reminding me about..."
3. Continue **I**nternal Dialogue – "I am not going to relate to this experience right now; I will remain focused on the person in front of me."
4. **M**ake a contract with yourself to later remove the brackets and access personal supports (informal or formal). "When can I look at these feelings and what or who will support me to do that?"
5. **B**reathe, bend your knees, look around!

Practices that I might use to help me bracket (i.e. remove piece of jewelry):

Essential Tool: Emotional First Aid

Emotional First Aid (EFA) is a series of supportive techniques for being with someone who is experiencing the spontaneous release of sadness, anger or fear.

These techniques enable us to support someone through the natural release of their emotions. The techniques come from Sean Haldane's book, *Emotional First Aid*, and are natural and intuitive responses to care for another human being. Unfortunately, we have often been socialized away from these instinctive responses and need to be reminded of their usefulness.

1. Supportive techniques include reassuring people:
 - that the **emotional expression they are experiencing is natural and normal**,
 - that we are comfortable being with them through this process.
2. The condition of support is this: **do not try to help a person to express an emotion that you yourself are not able to express comfortably.**
3. Basically we have a short-term contract with the person: **we want to support him/her through this emotional expression process** without deepening the experience.
4. It is non-judgmental, peer support. **We offer acceptance and permission with our words, gestures, facial expressions and touch (with permission).**
5. The peer providing the support has responsibility to both the person receiving the aid, and to the environment, **keeping both the person and those around feeling safe.**
6. **There is no attempt in Emotional First Aid to deepen the emotions, to give advice or to direct someone.**

There is a major difference between EFA and therapeutic facilitation (which works on a clear and defined contract, either short- or long-term, which involves a mandate to redirect, deepen, initiate, prohibit, facilitate or give advice). Therapists and facilitators have education, training, personal therapy and supervision that enables them to work with someone else's issues and stay grounded and clear.

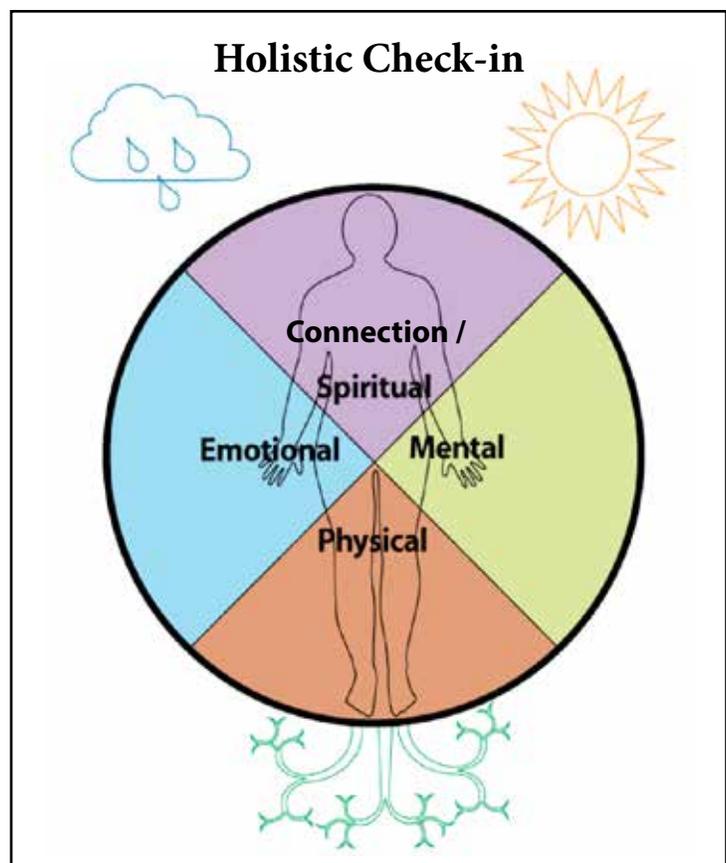
7. **Bracketing is a crucial skill to develop** before administering Emotional First Aid. Being close to someone who is having big emotions can often be triggering.
8. **Get support** for yourself to **unbracket and debrief** the experience, either informally or formally.

Essential Tool: Debriefing

Debriefing is a process when a person is supported to reflect on what has happened for them in relation to particular situation or period of time. It is a safe container where a person can experience their own feelings and reactions, without judgement, in order to make sense of current challenges.

Two essential tasks:

1. Build your individual capacity for **noticing and responding to the personal impact of your work from a holistic perspective.** This means checking in with yourself about what you are experiencing in your physical, mental, emotional, connection/spiritual.
 - How am I doing?
 - Am I noticing any changes in any quadrant?
2. Establish options for two levels of debriefing, where you speak in advance with someone about the role you would like them to play and you develop a mutual understanding with that person about a process that works for both of you, such as 30 minutes on the phone or 1 hour in person.
 - a) **Informal Debriefing** is when you want to talk about a situation and have someone doing active listening and support. It can be with peers or friends.
 - b) **Formal Debriefing** is when you want to explore your current experiences more deeply, with someone who can support you in your emotions and difficult questions. It can be with a supervisor, counsellor, or mentor.



Debriefing Guide:

Looking out for ourselves and each other

1 Assessment - It is important to listen carefully and to notice:

a) When do you need to debrief?

- After group events or one-on-one interactions, notice any impact on you personally, triggers and/or to update your own story.
- Repeating or replaying situations in your mind.
- Anxious feelings, feeling ungrounded or not present.

b) When does another person need debriefing?

- Telling big stories, seems emotionally charged.
- Not paying attention or seems distracted.
- Seems not themselves or high tone of voice.

2 Structure for Debriefing:

- Find a quiet setting for a committed amount of time for debriefing.
- Remember to help someone to use *I-statements* to describe their own direct experience rather than getting lost in the details of situations.
- Help the person to connect to and express what they are feeling (such as sadness, anger, fear).
- Apply the practices of Emotional First Aid.

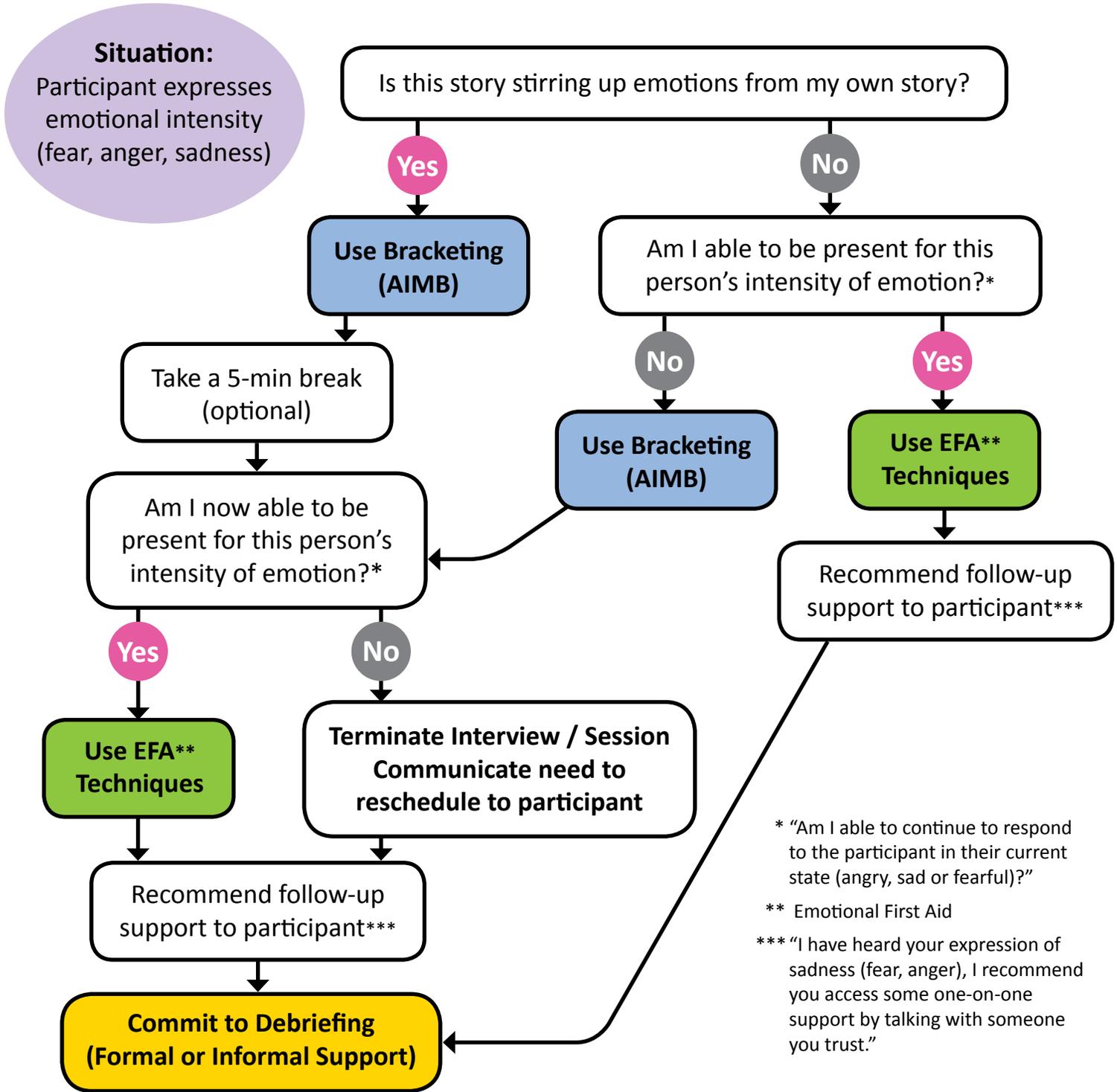
- Use reflective listening (“I hear a lot of frustration in your voice”) to make sure that the person feels validated and that you are understanding them clearly.
- Stay clear in offering support for the person to increase their own awareness of how a situation is impacting them, not problem solving or going into your own debriefing process.

Questions to ask in debriefing time:

- a) Can we start with getting grounded?**
Take at least three deep breaths with long exhales and have feet on the floor.
- b) How are you doing in relation to recent events?** (Holistic Check-in)
- Physically
 - Emotionally (Use reflective listening & EFA to acknowledge distinct emotions)
 - Mentally
 - Spiritually / Sense of Connection
- c) How do you/have you taken care of yourself** in this type of situation?
- d) Does this remind of any similar situations in your past?**
- e) Is there any other support you might need?**
- Any next steps?
- Further informal or formal debriefing support?

Navigating Emotional Triggers

Assessing personal capacity to respond to participants experiencing emotional distress



Steps of Bracketing - Bookmark (Front side)

STEPS OF BRACKETING

Acknowledge that there is an issue that needs **bracketing.**

Identify what part of your own story is being triggered.

Make a contract with yourself to later remove the brackets and access personal (formal of informal) support.

Breathe, bend your knees, look around!

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Emotional First Aid - Bookmark (Back side)

EMOTIONAL FIRST AID

ONLY support when you are **comfortable with the emotion** (anger, fear or sadness).

Non-judgmental, peer support communicates that **"experiencing emotions is natural and normal"**.

Offer acceptance with words, gestures, facial expressions and touch (with permission).

Keep both the person and those around **feeling safe**.

Make **no attempt to deepen the emotions**, give advice or direct someone.

Get support for yourself to **debrief**.

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