

MORAL INJURY EXPERIENCE WHEEL EXERCISE

Intro to
the manual



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The Moral Injury Experience Wheel: An Instrument for Identifying Moral Emotions and Conceptualizing the Mechanisms of Moral Injury

Wesley H. Fleming¹

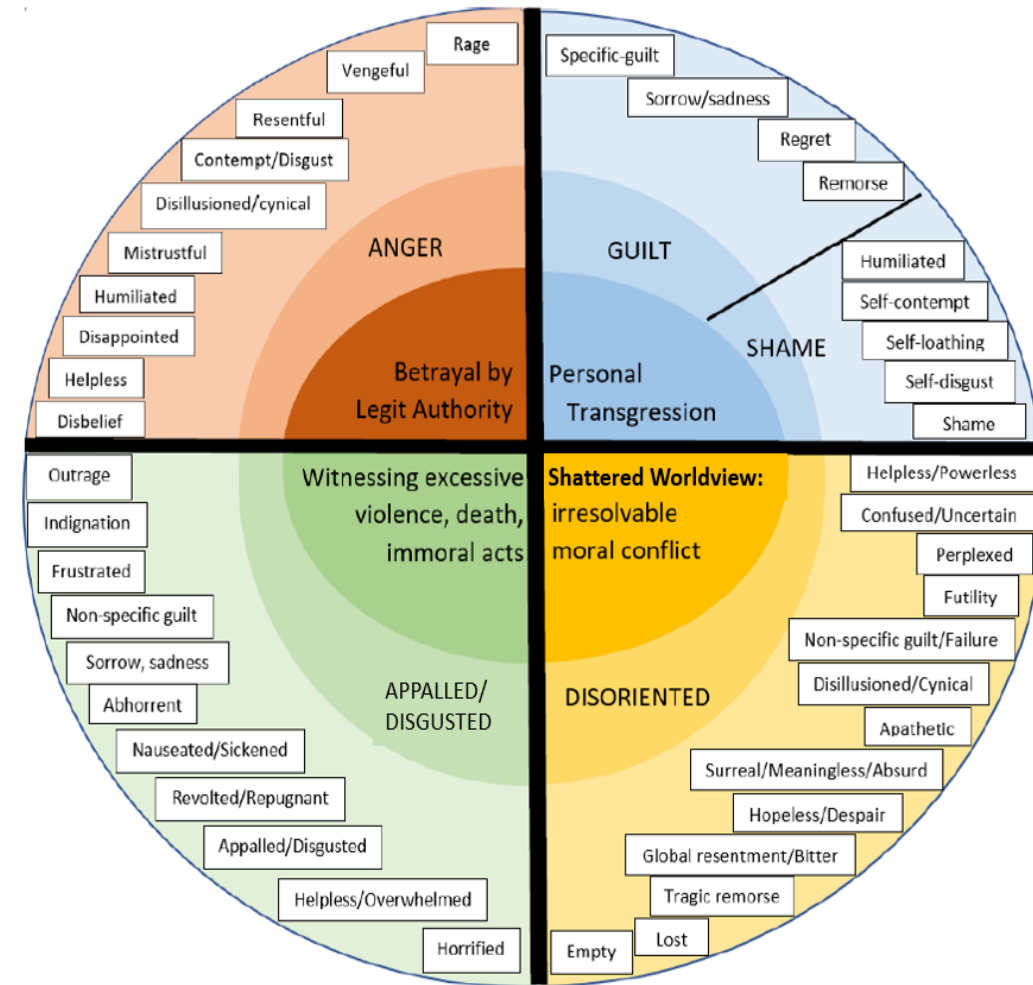
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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364319237_The_Moral_Injury_Experience_Wheel_An_Instrument_for_Identifying_Moral_Emotions_and_Conceptualizing_the_Mechanisms_of_Moral_Injury

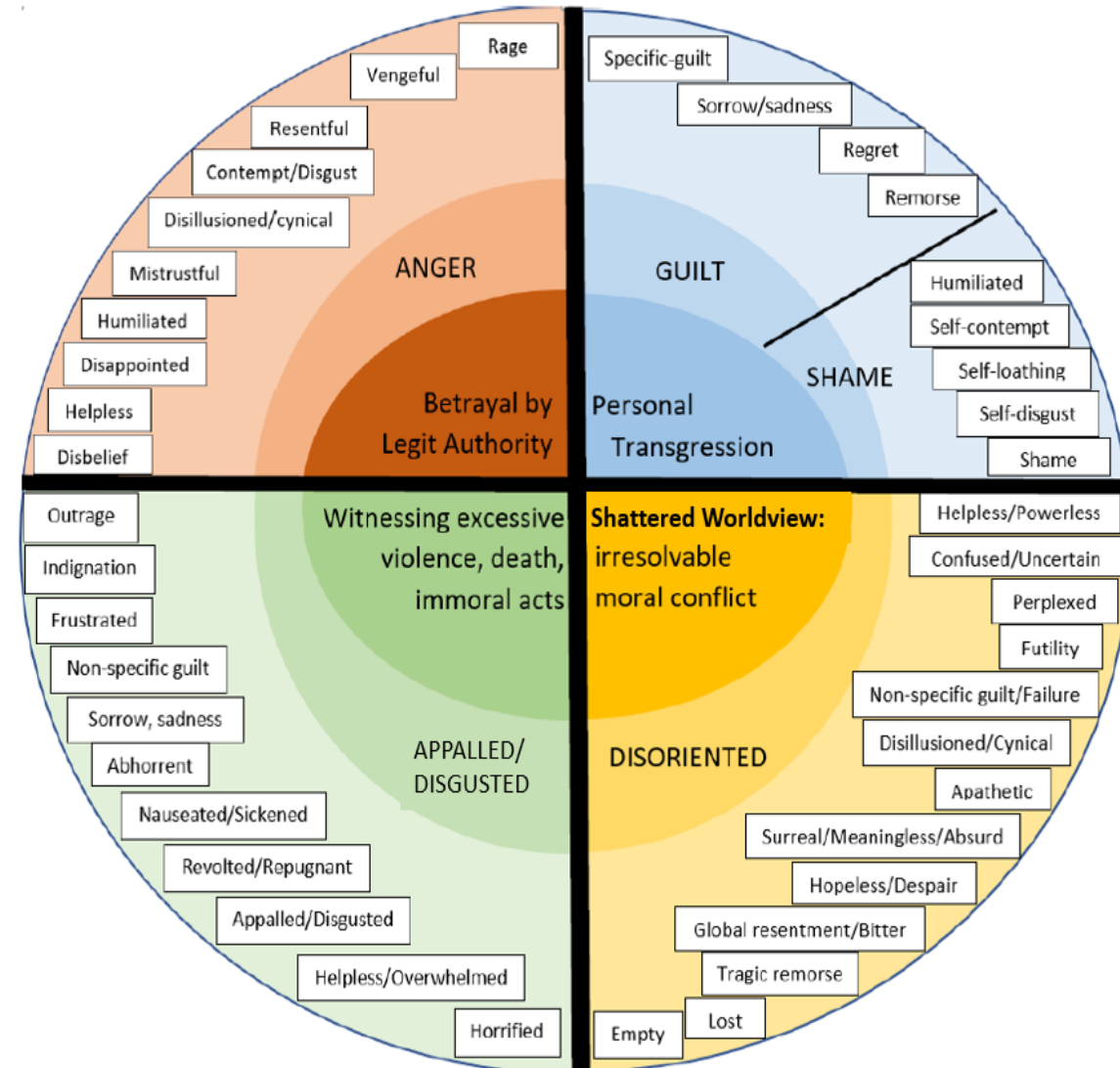
MORAL INJURY AND GRIEF

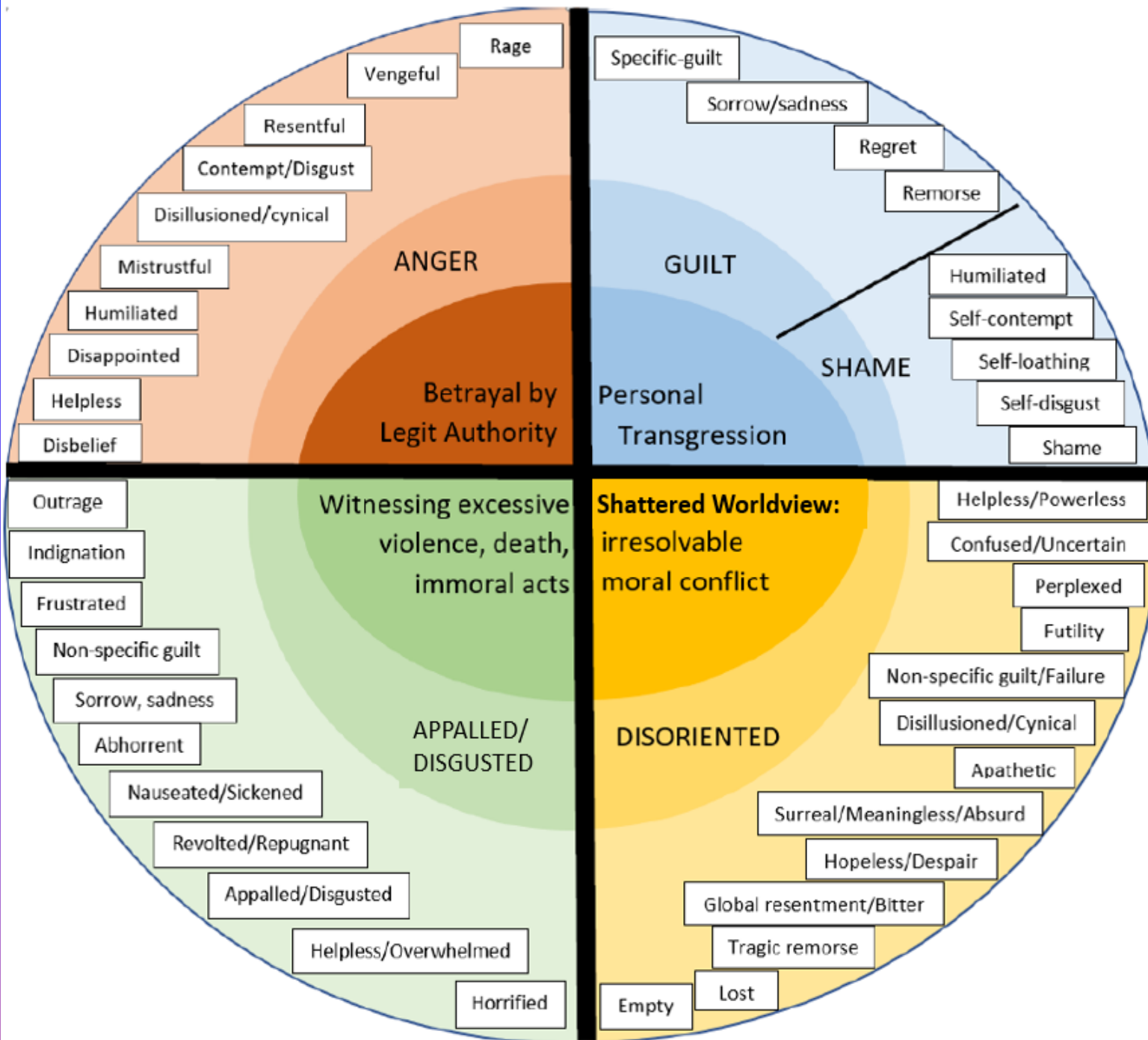


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Concept

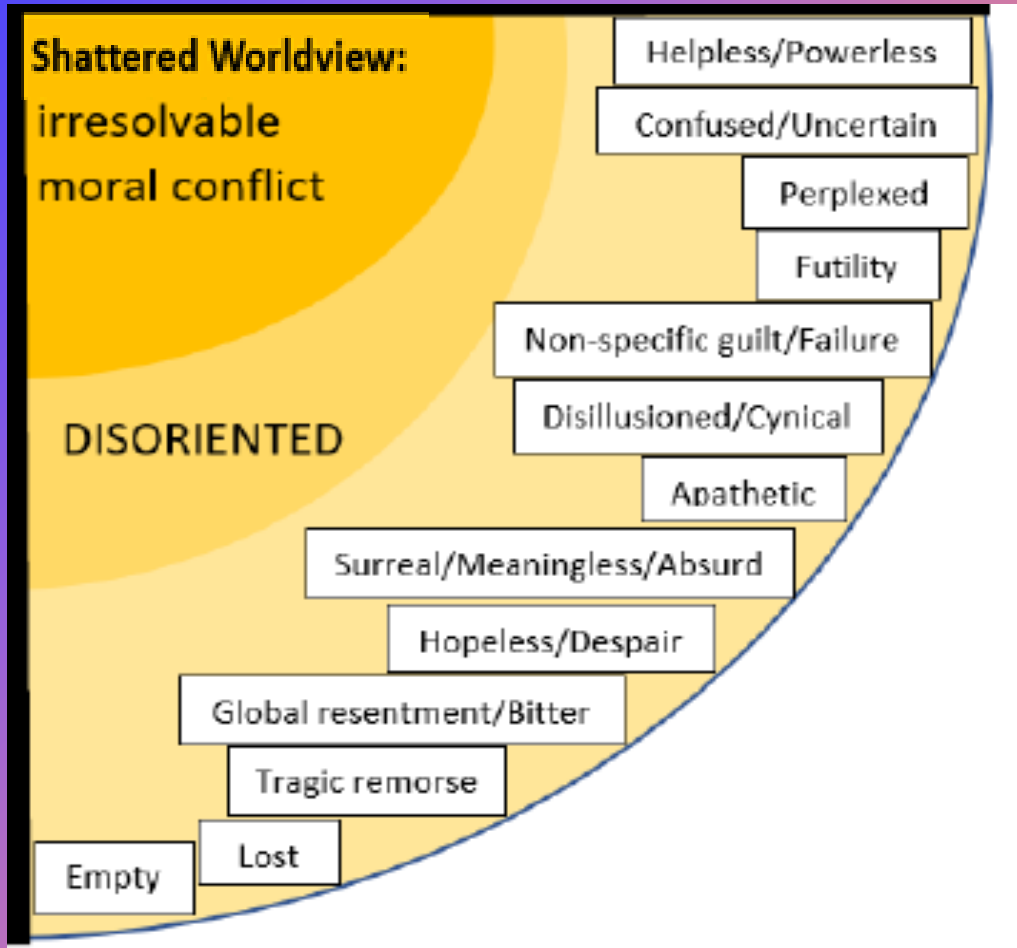
- An infographic tool designed to help users accurately label moral emotions and conceptualize moral injury (MI)





- ❑ Wheel represents moral injury in its broadest definition
- ❑ Four quadrants represent the four forms of morally injurious events (per definitional research)
- ❑ Center circles identify type of injury
- ❑ Primary emotions, in second circle, are in proximal relationship to events/experience
- ❑ Furthest circle out are moral emotions associated with the injurious event

Shattered Worldview



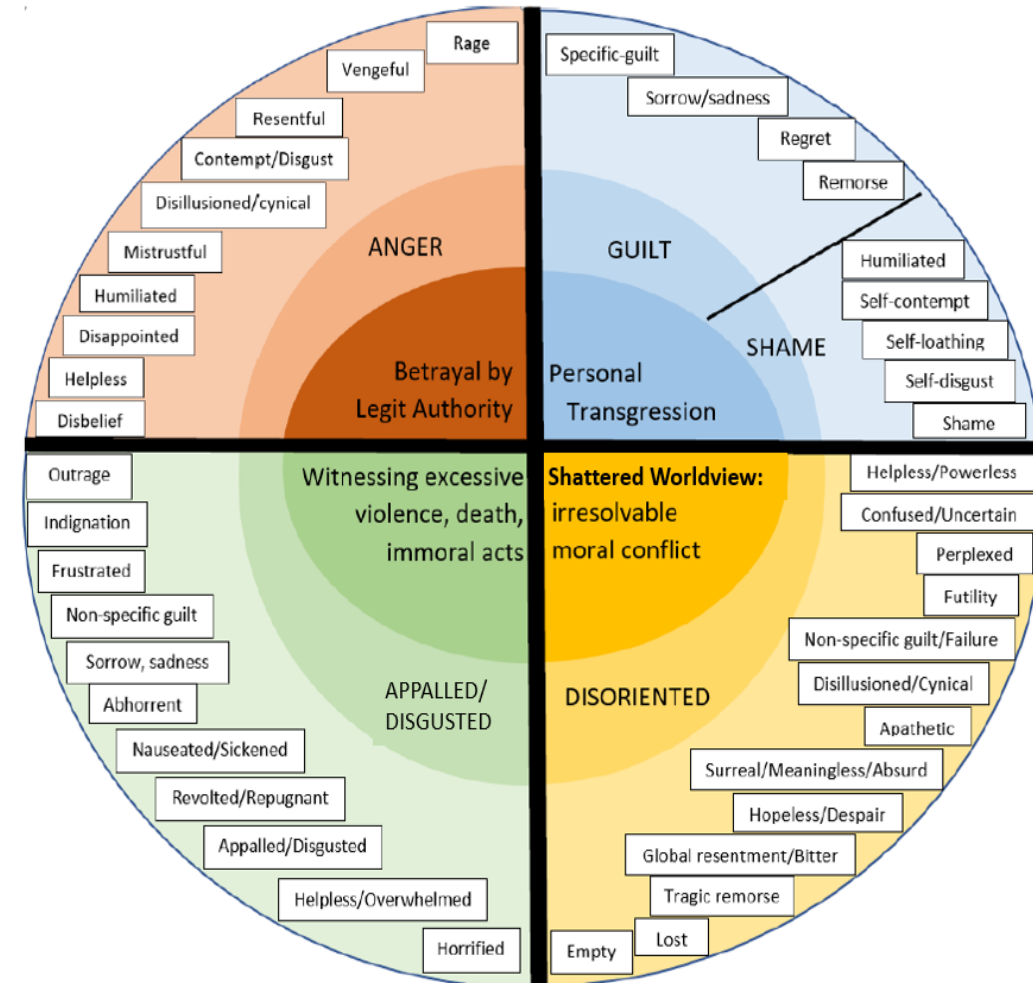
Irresolvable Moral Conflict

“Damned if I kill, damned if I don’t”

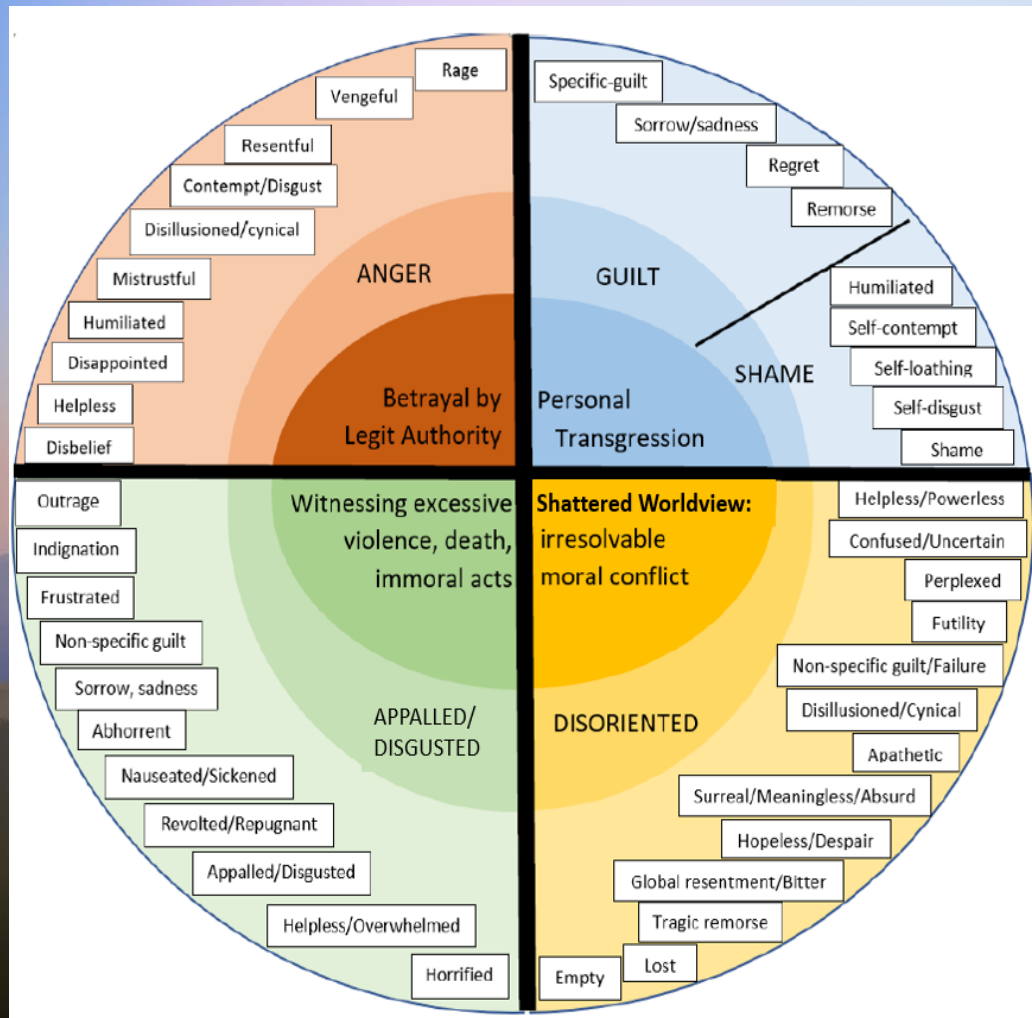
- ❖ Tragic circumstances, competing moral obligations, senseless loss, “dirty hands,” and the existential realities of human suffering (Fleming, 2021, 2022)
- ❖ Moral concerns, spiritual/ religious struggles, loss of religious faith or hope, and loss of meaning and/or purpose (Koenig et al., 2018)
- ❖ Incongruent and discrepant experiences that potentially “shake” a Veteran’s core beliefs (Litz et al., 2009).
- ❖ Ethical dilemma/moral conflicts: events that were tragic, chaotic and beyond my control (Currier et al., 2015)

Relevance

- Gives language to moral pain
- Helps identify the origin, context, and function of moral pain—reduces ambiguity/dissonance
- Improves accuracy of moral appraisals and attributions
- Increases agency, improves adaptive coping
- Promotes shared language, reducing isolation and facilitating communal grief



When to use?



- ❑ As a visual aid for psychoeducation
- ❑ Counseling: as a guide for identifying moral emotions with precision and conceptualizing moral injury
- ❑ Critical Incident Debrief: as a means of putting painful feelings into words and moral stress in context
- ❑ Moral Injury Groups: a catalyst for developing shared language and affective understanding
- ❑ Application for professional healthcare providers, first responders, law enforcement officials, as well as Veteran populations

Support for the Wheel

- Based on Plutchik's Wheel of Emotion
- Rooted in Emotion Differentiation research (Barrett et al., 2001; Schwarz, 2012)
- Draws from Moral Psychology research (Social Intuitionist theory) (Graham et al., 2013; Haidt, 2003; Cameron et al., 2015)
- Empirically grounded in MI definitional/scale studies (Litz et al., 2022; Currier et al., 2018; Koenig et al., 2018, Molendijk, 2018)
- Developed through an iterative feedback process from Veteran moral injury groups



(Plutchik, 1982)

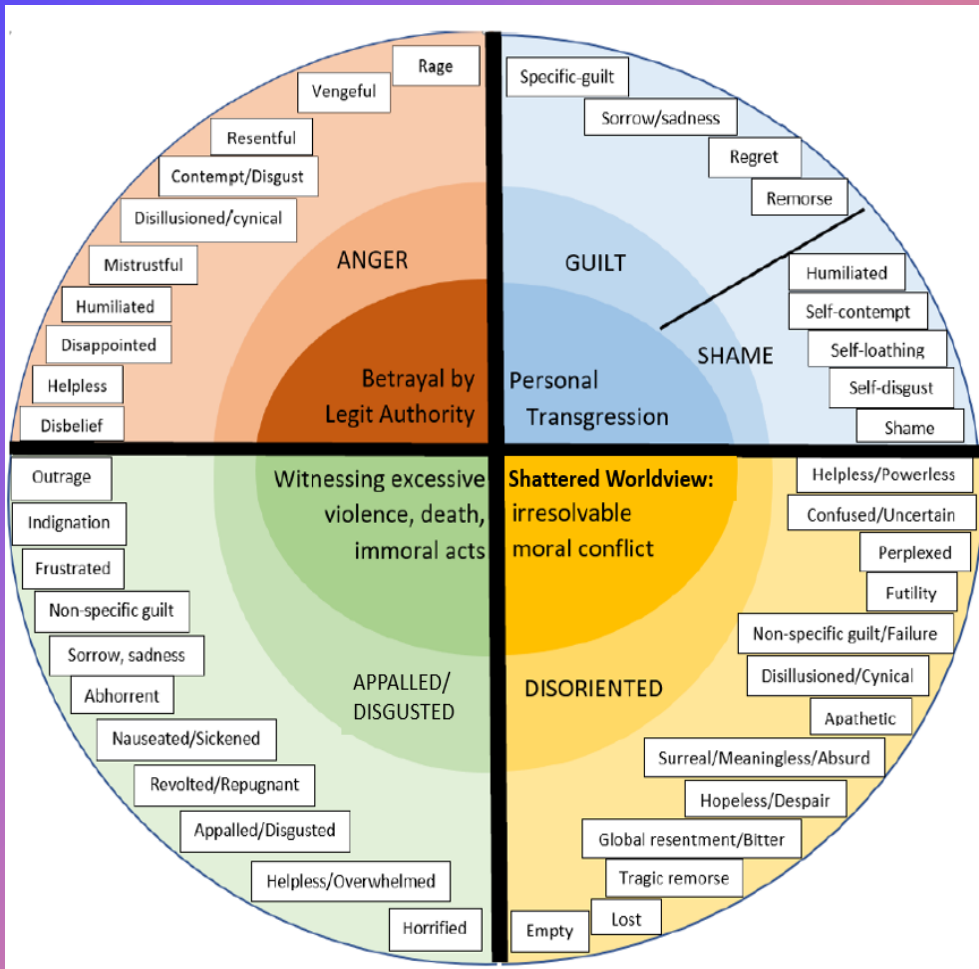


CAVEAT

- The Wheel is not a statement of fact about particular moral emotions and their association with specific event types.
- It's a useful tool, not a scale.
- The wheel is grounded in moral injury definitional research and tested through iterative feedback.

SETTING UP THE EXERCISE

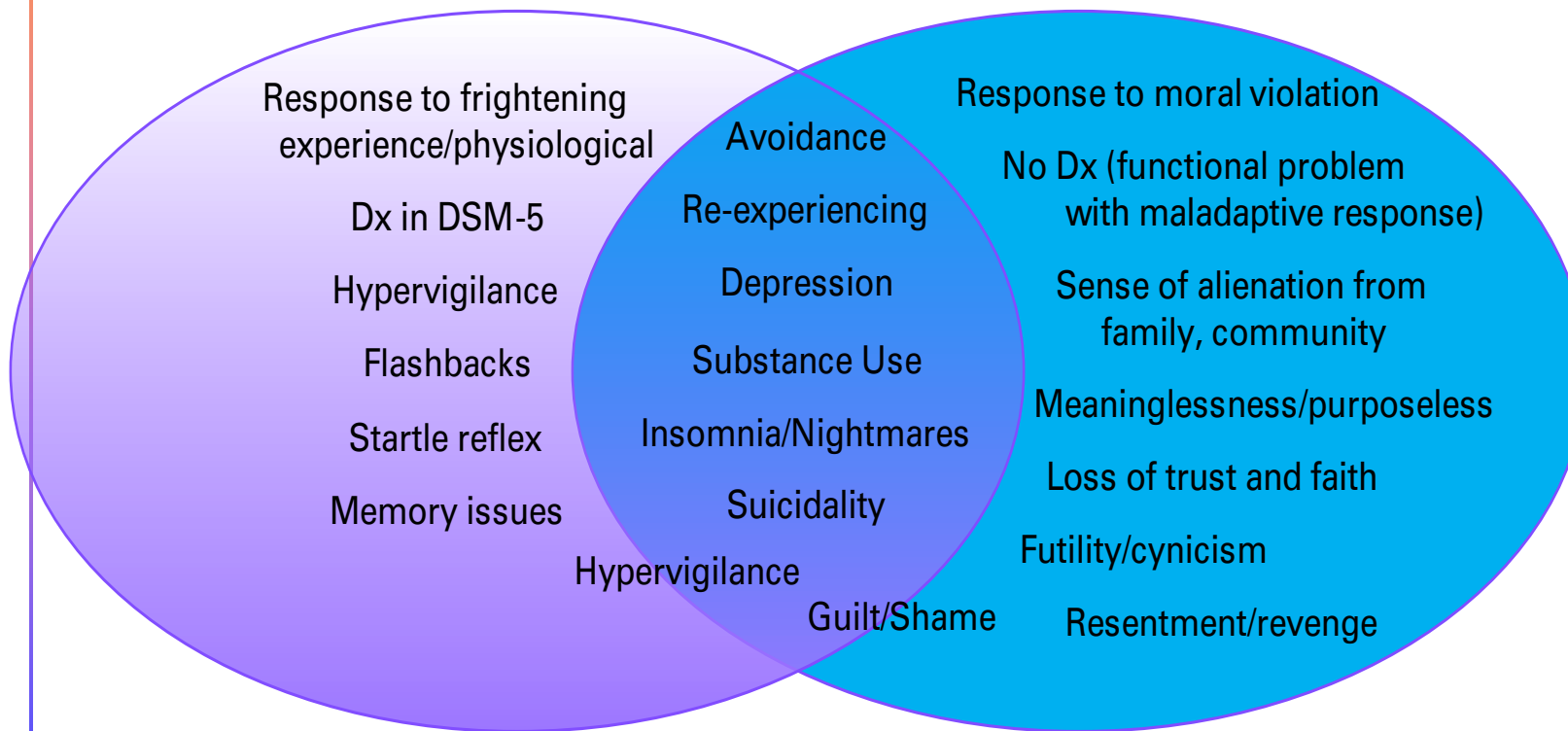
Helpful Script →



WORKING DEFINITION

“While performing your duties, did you ever feel like your moral code was violated? Perhaps you felt betrayed by your leadership or institution, or forced to do 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 guilty, ashamed, and angry.”

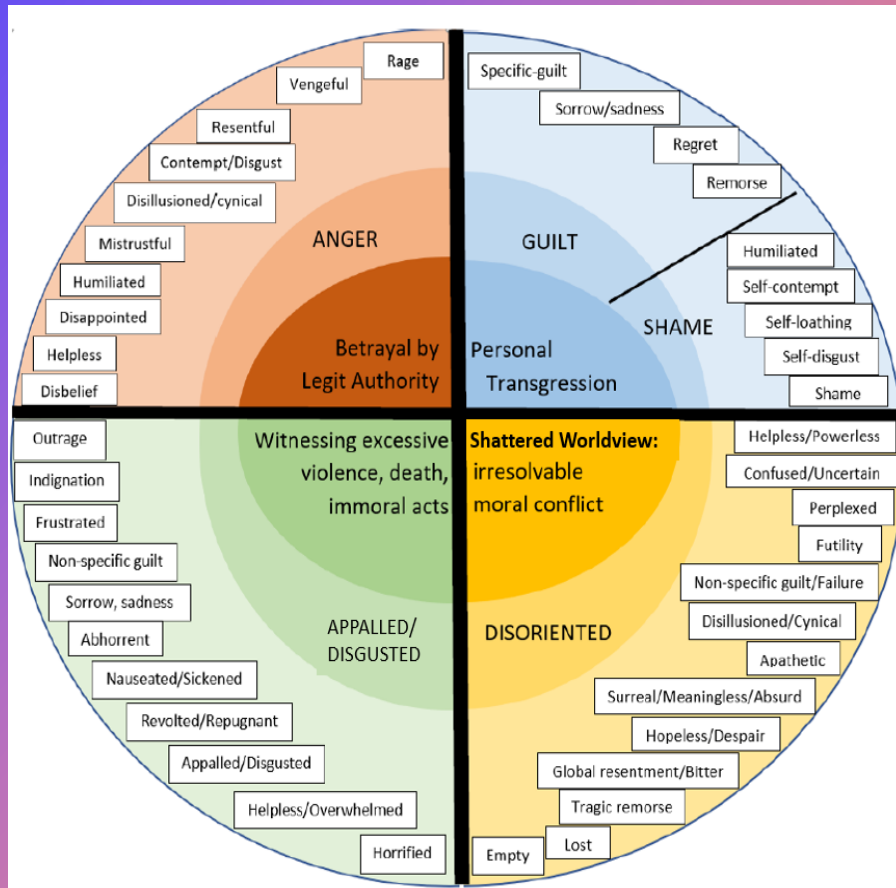
FEATURE OVERLAP

PTSD**Moral Injury**

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 response 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, loss of faith, and an inability to trust again.

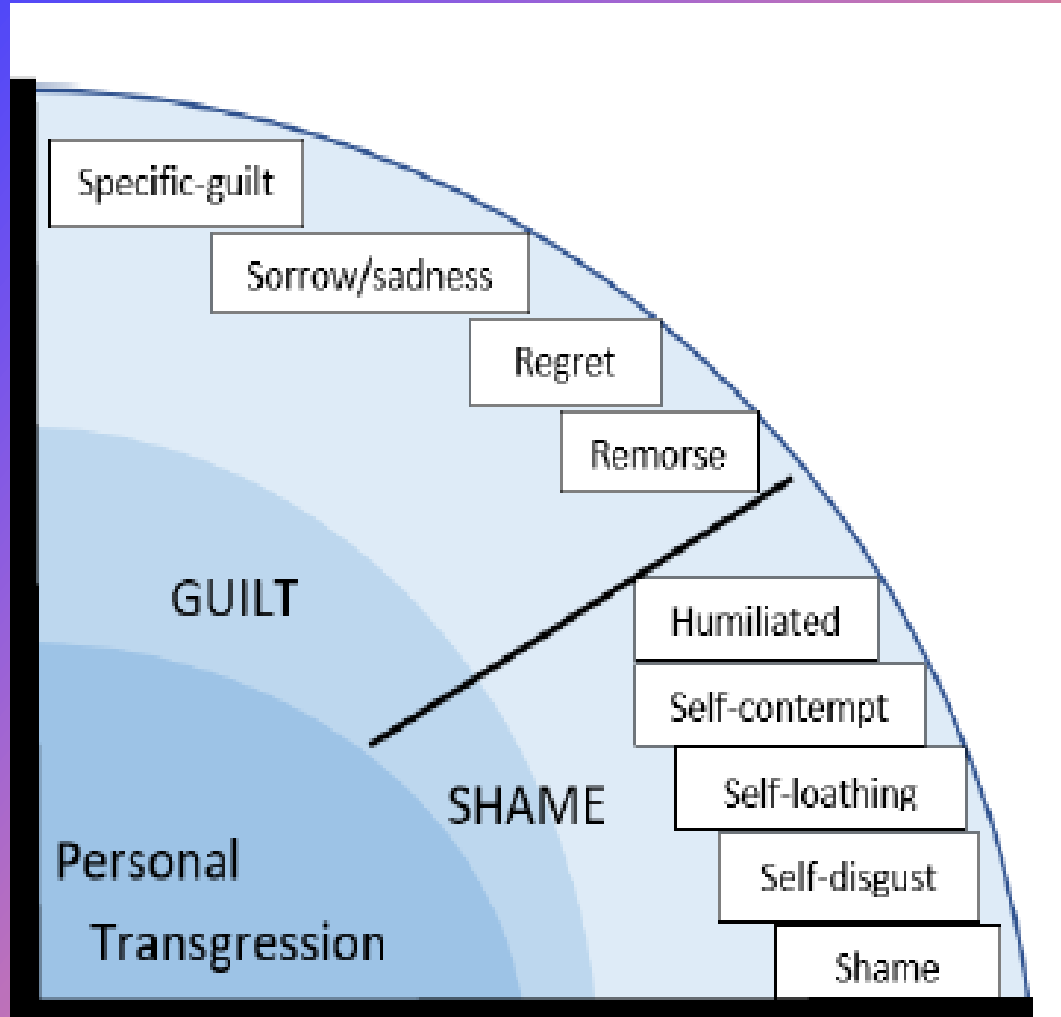
INTRODUCING THE WHEEL

Helpful Script →



- “Something to remember, moral injury will never completely go away. There are no magic pills or silver bullets. If it did go away, you would be left without your conscience.
- Our goal here today is to comprehend the origin, cause, effects and function of moral injury in your life. Putting your experience into words may help you to move forward with less distress.
- Moral injury is a part of human functioning—the result of an active conscience and limited power to control or change the outcome of morally significant events.”
- Avoidant behaviors like drinking, drugging, isolating, self harm are the problem”

Personal Transgression

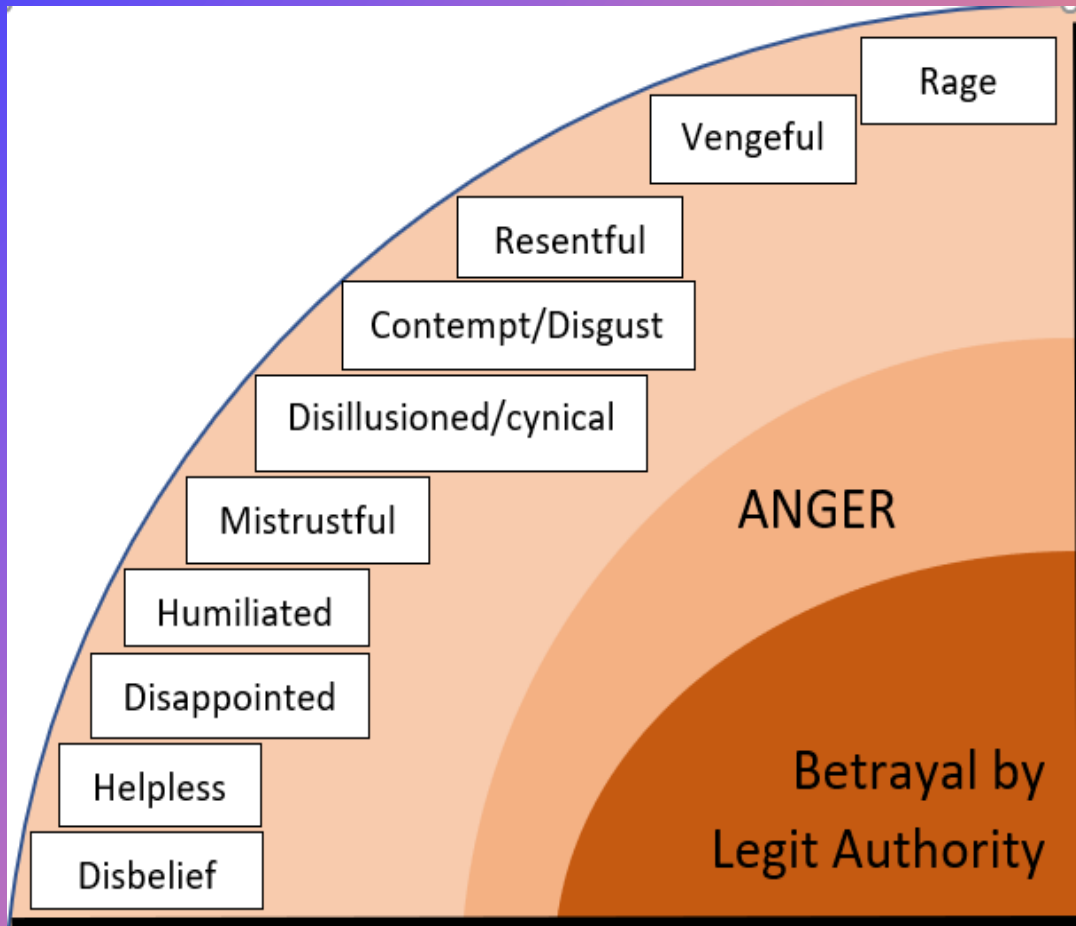


Case Study #1

*How could we have just walked away from the Kurds like that? They got decimated and we just sat and watched. So, yes, I feel like sh*t about that.*

Army Ranger, OIF

Betrayal by Authority

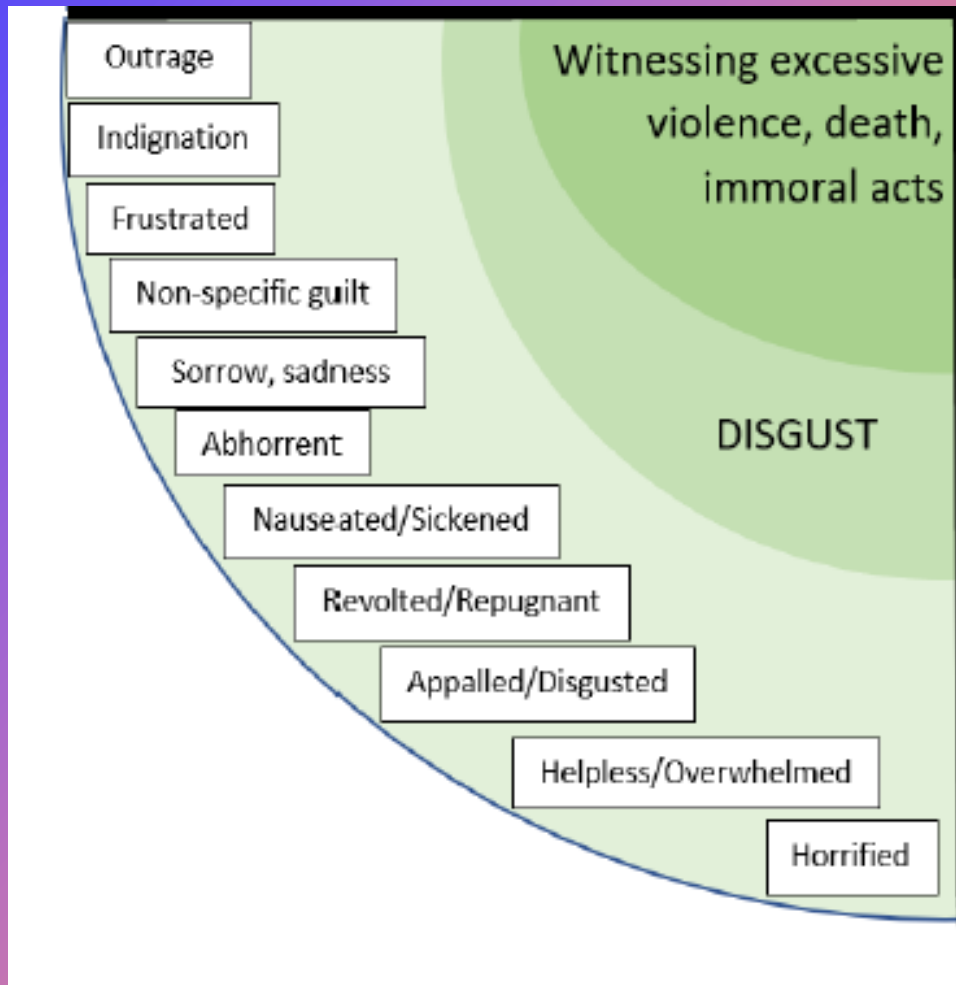


Case Study #1

No doubt anger... I'm in the angry section and, yes, it was about betrayal. I feel betrayed, all right. We made promises to the Kurds. And we were supposed to liberate Iraq, but it just got worse. That's why I was so angry when I first got home—just pissed off all the time.

Army Ranger, OIF

Witnessing

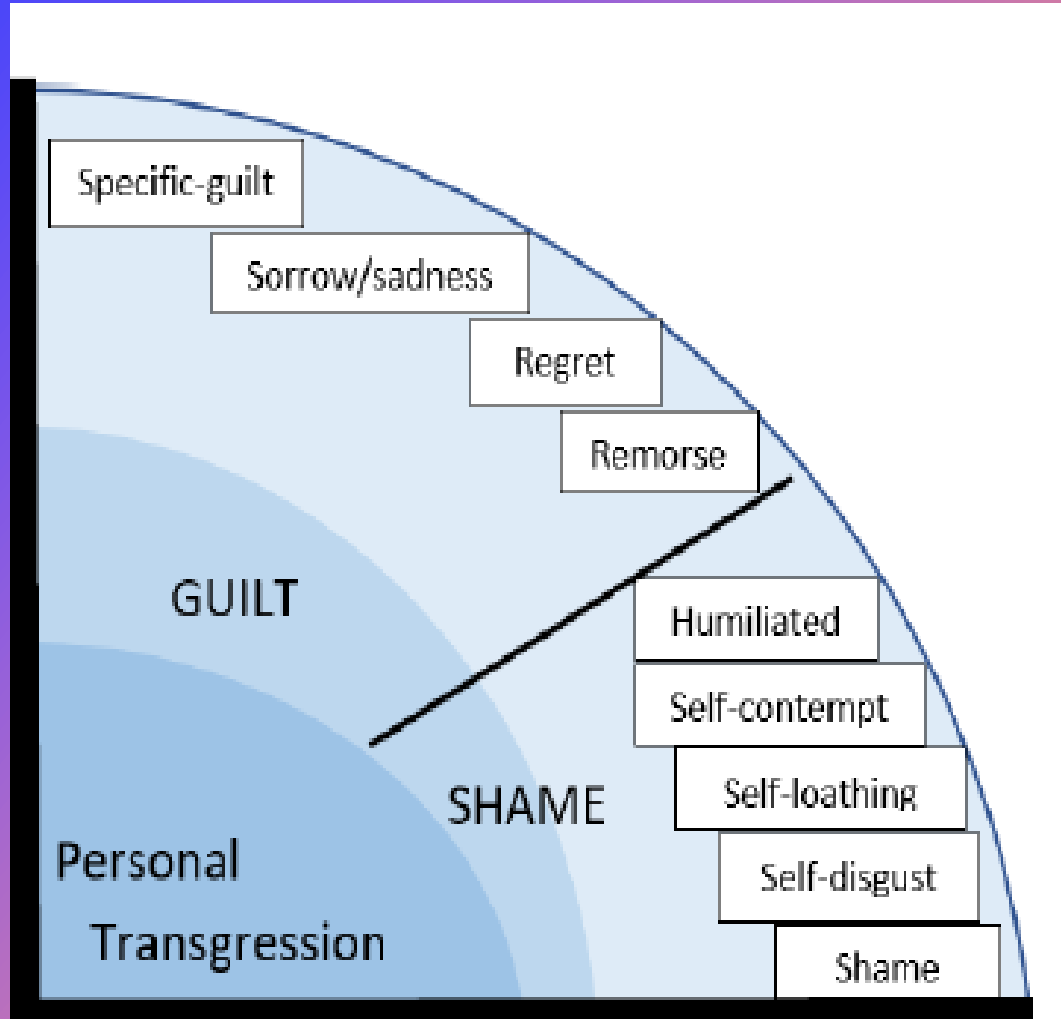


Case Study #1

I feel like I'm in the betrayed section but I'm also angry about what I saw. I felt so helpless watching the refugees. There was nothing I could do. It made me sick—I guess that's disgust right? So that kind of anger was more about witnessing, I guess. Like, indignation—it shouldn't have had to happen.

Army Ranger, OIF

Personal transgression

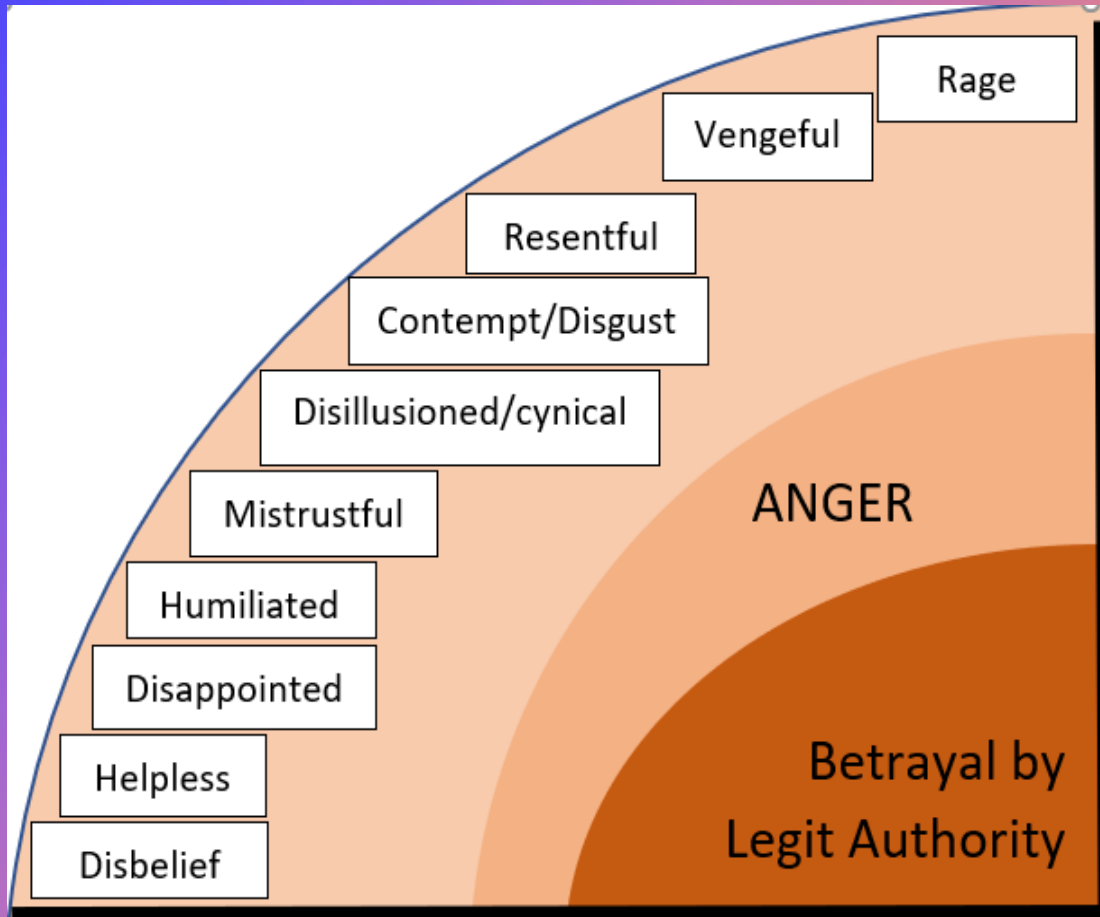


Case Study #2

I wanted answers about what happened to that [Afghan] village—I felt guilty that we let them down...

USMC, OEF

Betrayal by Authority

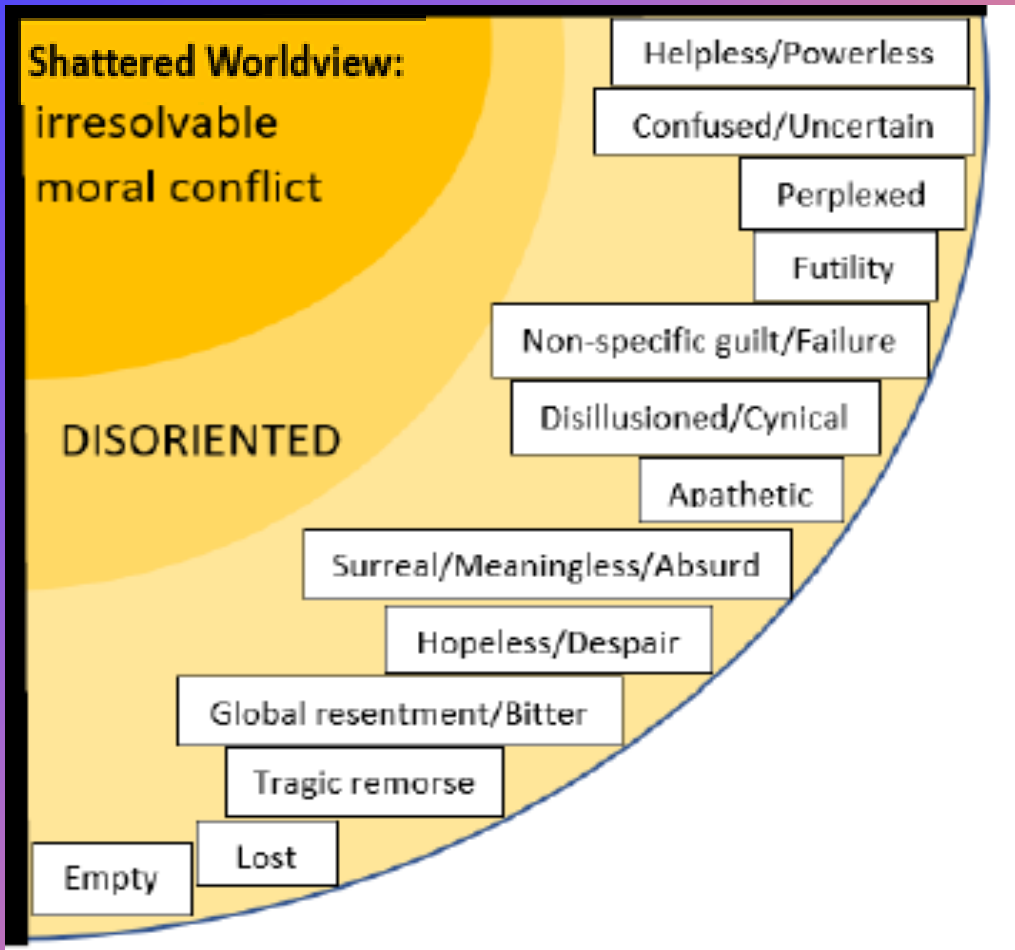


Case Study #2

...but also, angry that we turned it over to the nationals, and they destroyed it. So betrayed and angry...

USMC, OEF

Shattered Worldview



Case Study #2

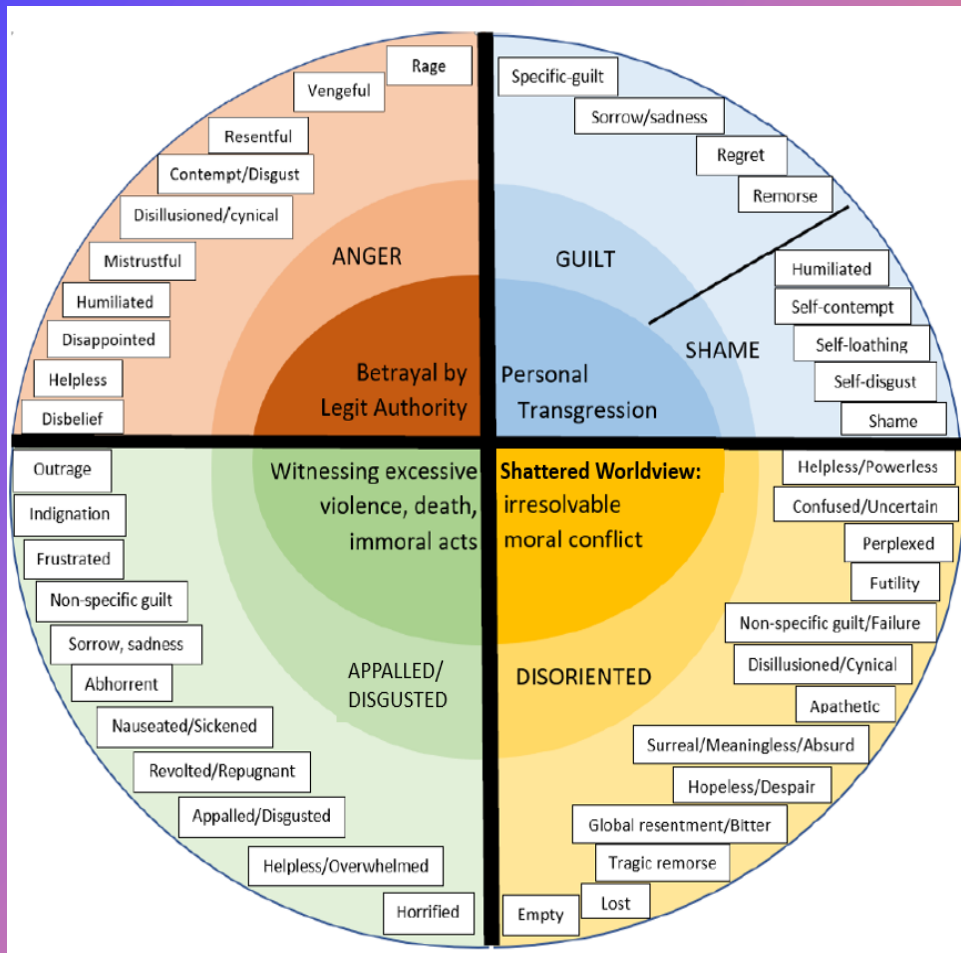
... but more than that. The more I think about my story the more I realize there are no answers. So, I think I'm disoriented 'cause I feel disillusioned. It all seems futile. I can try and blame but it does no good. I joined to defend our country and do what was right. But the handwriting was on the wall about how the war would end long before I arrived. My issue is with human beings. Will we always be at war?

USMC, OEF

OUTCOMES

Analysis of Case
Study Transcripts
from article:

Adaptive processes
&
Therapeutic
Benefits



Adaptive Processes and Therapeutic Benefits

Psychoeducation about MI: *I'm in the angry section and, yes, it was about betrayal.*

Promotes defusion (adaptive emotional distancing): *So betrayed and angry...
but more than that.*

Facilitates accurate appraisal: *My issue is with human beings. Will we always be at war?*

Elicits acceptance experience: *I can try and pin blame, but it does no good.*

Reduces dissonance: *The more I think about what happened the more I realize there are no answers.*

Adaptive Processes and Therapeutic Benefits

(continued)

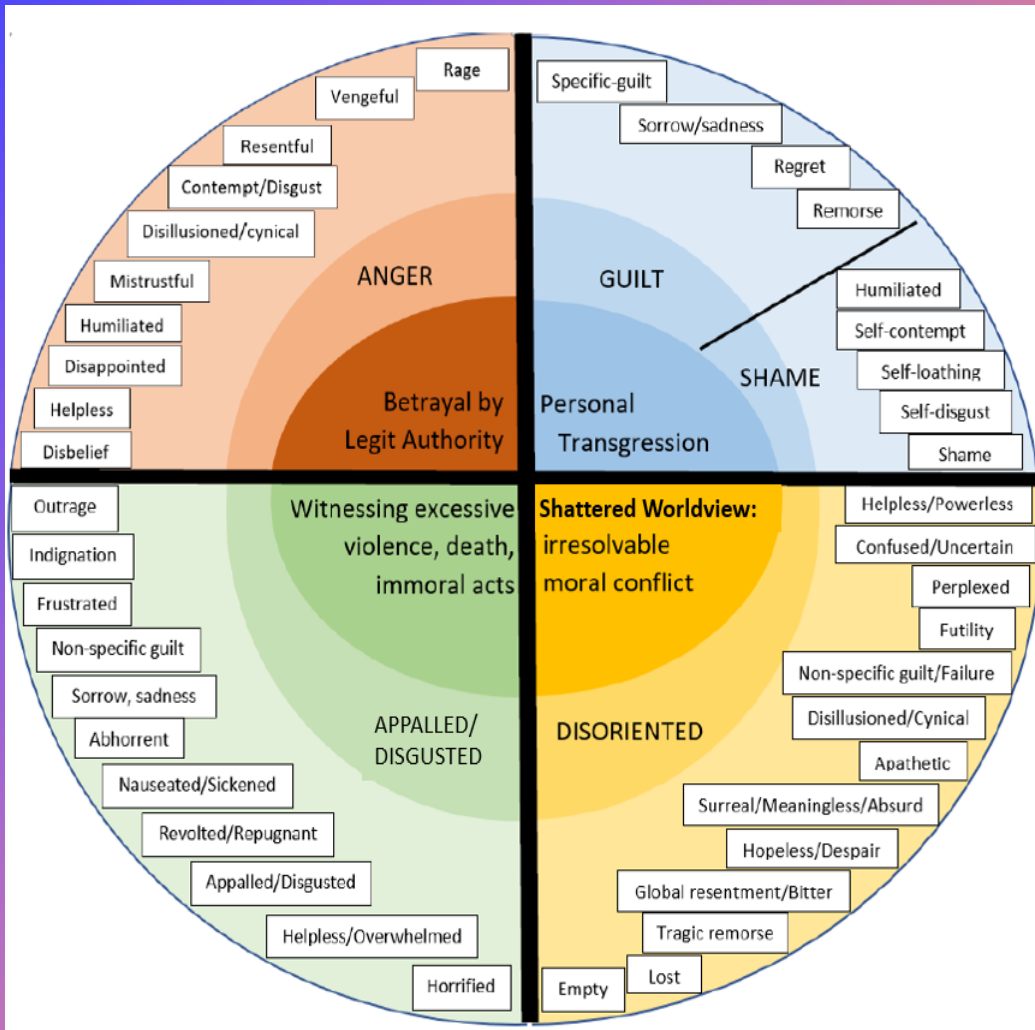
Enhances agency: *I get it. It's not going away—but at least I can move on with maybe a little wisdom.*

Reduces isolation: *The wheel showed me that my pain has a place. It's real. Others have felt this.*

Communal grief: *It all seems so futile.*

Reduces stigma: *At least we are not alone—we get it.*

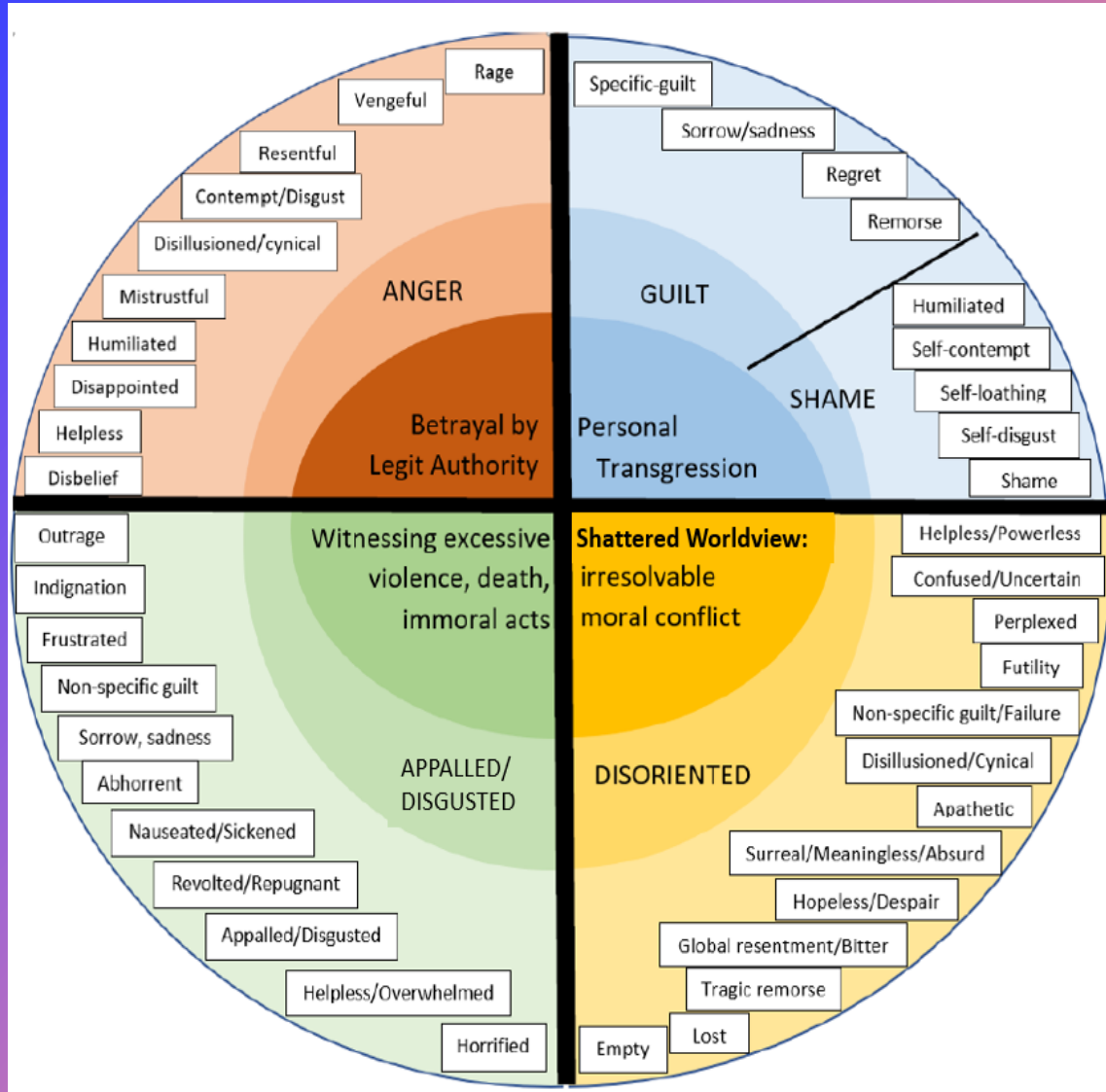
OUTCOMES



SUMMARY

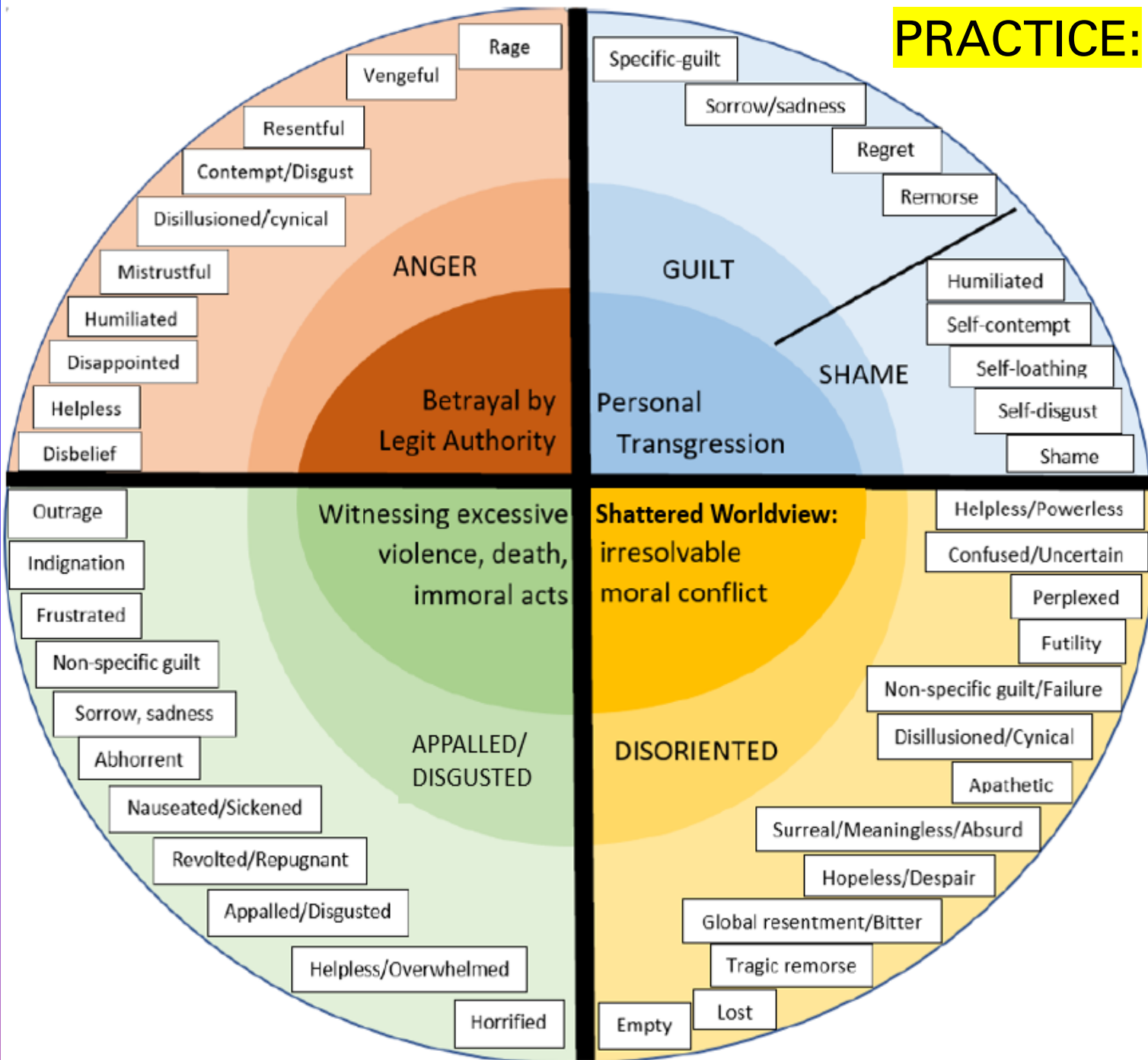
1. Psychoeducation about moral injury
2. Reduces ambiguity and related dissonance
3. Promotes defusion
4. Accurate appraisals (who is really to blame, if anyone)
5. Promotes acceptance processing
6. Reclaims agency and better coping
7. Shared language: reduces isolation and opportunity for communal grief

Helpful Script from Manual →



INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE OPTION #1

1. Now that we have a basic understanding of moral injury, if you feel comfortable, please share your story. [As participants tell their story, watch for trauma responses and support appropriately. Offer reflective listening throughout.]
2. Using the wheel as a guide, what events in the center of the wheel best describe your moral injury.
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? How does your moral injury involve other types of events/experiences?
5. In what ways did you benefit (if any) from telling your moral injury story using the wheel?

PRACTICE:

While performing your duties, did you ever feel like your moral code was violated? Perhaps you felt betrayed by your leadership or institution, or forced to do 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?

- ❖ Where do you see yourself on the wheel?
- ❖ What emotions do you most identify with?
- ❖ What events triggered your moral injury?
- ❖ How was the wheel helpful? 24

A Prayer for the Morally Injured

May you find grace to grieve your loss of innocence, identity, and a certainty that once was.

May you seek answers with all your heart and, if you figure out exactly who or what is to blame--though it will never be okay-- accept what is and find peace in letting go.

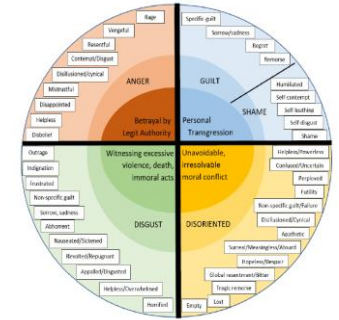
May you feel a love that delights in you as a limited and fallible human being with great worth and dignity.

Become injured healers, finding once again, a path of service and commitment to what is right and good.

And let zeal fill your heart as it did once before, only tempered this time with humility and wisdom, and fueled by a compassion to ease the suffering of others.

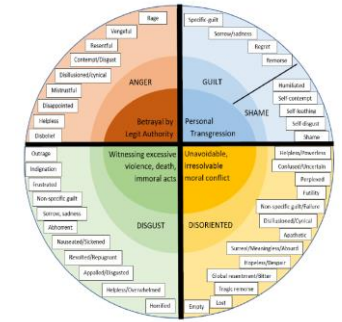
Amen.

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THANK YOU

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