

Respectful collaboration and a competency focused approach.

Tom (on one-to-one contact)

It's a conversation, it's not – you don't feel like you're being interrogated, and he'll ask you questions in a roundabout way. He just knows where to dig and what to ask ... he'd pick a subject and we'd branch off to that and how it affected everyone, then he'd pick something else, and more often than not, they may correlate, or we could get three points down the track and it would come back, and he just, he networked it really well, so, rather than hitting one path and running down a freeway, it was like a beehive, it was all over the place. And it didn't feel like it was an interrogation, because it just felt like we were talking. So, even if he did ask me a pointed question, it didn't feel like I was under the spotlight, just very easy. And there was no judgement.

Tom (on the men's group)

The way the group works, they've obviously got a [program/model] but they sort of put that down and they just start talking about things. And when you start talking about things you don't think about it so much and then – like they'd start out how's everyone's week been? Anything happened between last week and this week? And some people would go yeah, some people would go no, and the people that went yeah, they would start talking to them. And then they would say, so, what did you guys think of that? And then it would just go from that. They would just dig deep. They would just ask the right questions. [But] they wouldn't ask the right questions until they knew you were comfortable in the group. They were very, very good at reading people.

Practitioner

It's this sort of narrative, respectful exploration, even though, you know, I'm not judging him, I'm, sort of like, what's the implications of this for your current situation that you're concerned about? So, linking these things together and allowing him to sort of make meanings from these links. [But] in a respectful way that was touching on his own ethics, or his own concerns. So those sort of things are protective against people feeling, I don't know, ganged up on. The, kind of, insistence on men taking responsibility is one thing ... but in practice, when [you're] sitting in a room with a man or with a group of men, responsibility has to be co-constructed, it can't be taken as a given.

Sandy

Coming home from men's group was always, yeah, he'd say it was really interesting – I learnt a lot about this tonight ... He'd talk to me about respect or communication or whatever the theme was that night and he actually learnt stuff – stuff that I already know – he would talk to me as if someone had taught him something and that he was interested in it and inside I would be so frustrated, thinking, I've been trying to tell this shit for years but I wasn't the person that needed to present it to him, and he had a lot of respect for people running the course I know that

Supporting men to explore and articulate their ethical preferences

Tom

I didn't want to be unhappy, you know what I mean, I want to be a better man, a better father, I want to live a good life and have a good life, and that's what I was hoping would be the end result. A lot of things, I think, I knew in my heart, but actually giving voice to them, and bringing them to life, made it a lot better. And for someone to say, it's okay, you're getting it ... But I knew I had to fix myself because there was a serious problem with the way I was behaving, irrespective of whether Sandy was going to hang around or not. The behaviour was my behaviour and it was no one else's. So, I had to fix my behaviour to be a better person. I think I made a pretty conscious decision early on that I'm going to work at this and I'm going to get better at the way I do things. I don't want to lose what I've got, not at all. But at the end of the day I want to maintain myself as a person the way I'm going. I don't want to go back to that.

Practitioner

And he talked about this concern about being the pinnacle of the universe or the centre of the universe, that everything revolved around him ... And he was starting to really want to get some distance on that. And he talked about, for instance, the other things that were concerning him, the effects, he thought that the love and trust that was there, between him and the girls and his partner, was being diminished. And he was worried about bullying, what he described as emotional bullying and intolerance, and over-reacting to something the girls had done or not done. There's a whole plethora of things that were unsettling him. [...] And I guess in terms of my stance with him, it's kind of asking questions or checking in with him pretty routinely about his, sort of, readiness to go to particular places in these conversations, to respond to particular questions, even about the effects on others around him, his children and partner, like why would he be up for looking at that? What would matter to him about looking at this? So this is woven all the way through, but it's an interest in what's important to him, his ethics in this, and trying to bring these forward, rather than him just answering my questions because I happen to be the counsellor ... but why, from his own point of view, would he be wanting to look at these sort of things? And, well, it's to do with some really clearly articulated ethics that he's known all the way through around, for instance, honesty, these are some of the things he's articulated. He's talked about a sense of honesty and truthfulness, getting more interested in how others around him are feeling or experiencing things rather than being the pinnacle or centre of things. A loyalty to his family, these things matter to him, wanting to negotiate. These were things that he was wanting, or hoping for, in terms of stepping into some other way of being... So I guess, in terms of the invitational narrative approach, it is trying to thicken up some of that story around his preferred ways around his ethics etc., sort of invitations for him to increasingly describe in more specificity and detail what he has been doing. So, what would this look like if I was a fly on the wall at your place?

Sandy

I got braver to tell him what's bothering me and that I felt that he needed to go and take the dogs for a walk or something like that, and when he actually started to respect that – respect what I was saying ... These were, I guess, the signs that I thought things were changing

Supporting men to identify what restrains them from living in accordance with their ethical preferences.

Tom

You know, you'd have moments, of just pure shittiness that you know it's not right, where it should be better, it could be better, and I just couldn't work out how to get there, you know, and all, so just being, like, angry and being spoilt is probably a good way of putting it - spoilt, so it's all about me. My philosophy used to be when Jane and I would have a heated discussion, I'd always have to have the last say. Yeah, I just felt like I won because she's silent. Before that it was just, well, you know, I'm getting what I want, you know, by stomping my feet and getting what I want or dominating, without really delving into, is the way that I should be going about it?

Practitioner

He also said he wanted to step away from this idea that he was pinnacle of the universe, he had this quite entitled space that he was starting to question, whether he wanted to be in it or not. [...] I guess the thing is finding ways in practice of inviting men to think about or externalise the sort of dominant ways of masculinity in our culture that support violence and abuse etc. At one point in the second or third conversation he was very troubled by this question of am I normal? [...] he was concerned that there was something wrong with him, his identity was spoiled or something. And I'm sort of interested in really getting him to step away from that idea, that there's something fundamentally wrong with his person, as opposed to him being recruited into these ways of behaviour and ... He had a hope to change

Supporting men in experiencing their shame in an environment that is non-judgemental and safe.

Tom

Yeah, I definitely felt ashamed and uncomfortable, because I was owning up to myself ... because part and parcel of that is realising that you do have a problem and that, yeah, you're not as perfect as you'd like to think that you are. Yeah, and it's not a nice feeling. But if it was, like if it was a great feeling, I wouldn't need to be there. Talking about Sandy's feelings and the girls' feelings and how my actions affect them, and going through all the stages of guilt and shame and remorse, and yeah, the things that you have to admit to, otherwise you can't move forward. You know, like if you think that you've done nothing wrong, or you have no shame or guilt, or remorse, then you've got nothing to be sorry for.

Practitioner

Because this is potentially shameful to acknowledge to anybody, to acknowledge it to [himself], but to acknowledge it to the likes of me or others shame can come pretty close on the coat tails of that conversation. [...] Tom would talk quite explicitly about the sense of feeling ashamed about some of his behaviour, and he said the shame was in relation to him wanting to be more approachable or wanting to be able to have conversations on a sort of a level keel with the girls, or Sandy, or a dialogue as he put it, you know, recognising other people and their opinion instead of trying to obliterate their opinion in the interest of his own, etc. These are conversations most of these men have never had with anybody, and I have remember that, you know? It's weird isn't it, but lots of men I work with - who have made life incredibly dangerous and painful for the people around them - require a huge sense of safety to talk about that. So, the simultaneous visiting of huge trauma and hurt on others, and creating a constant atmosphere of no safety, and then we have to work very, very hard to provide a context of safety for them to step into, to be able to work in this space. A lot of men find it easier talking generalities with intentions and dreams and hopes. But the concrete - sort of what did I do, who did that effect, what did I say, how do they feel, what do I see, what was I feeling at that time - brings a whole different light to what we're talking about. So, we can get lost in generalities that are distant and not touching me, not creating any movement of shame or anything like that. Whereas when we're talking about specific, real events, that had an impact on me and the people I care about, has a real different effect. For Tom, seeing himself through his kids' eyes, and the undeniability of that was really useful for him. So topic after topic, conversation after conversation, Tom would bring it back to what he'd done, what he was doing, even in little ways, and how that effected his kids, and then his wife, and how that connected to their past, their history, [...] because of what he'd done before, and how everything you do now is linked back to what you've done before.

Supporting men to name their violence and explore how it has affected their partners and children.

Tom

Doing that [checklist of DFV related-behaviours] on domestic violence, that was huge for me. There were five pages of it, and when you're ticking 80% of them, you've just got to go holy crap! [...] It's huge. It's huge. Just little things like controlling a situation, controlling a situation to get an outcome that I want. Like you wouldn't think much of it but when you persuade someone to change their point of view to get what you want, you're not listening and you're not understanding what's going on. Yeah it goes back to even when we got married I reckon. There was signs of it back then. When I really look back, if I want to look back deep [...] It's what I could get away with and how much I could pull back and then do it again, pull back. It was just constant. It's also about being able to name, in concrete detail, some of my own behaviours, like eye-balling someone and all that, this is quite ... And the damage I think I've realized that I've caused ... So, despite what's going on now, that domestic violence imprint is still there. [...] and it may not, it may not ever get to that point where Sandy feels she could just say what she wants to physically say because she might think something's going to happen. And she even says now, like there's situations that crop up, that she'll just start crying. [...] It's almost like a PTSD; she's just traumatised by it. [...] I [have] tried just reassuring her. But it's already done. I can't stop what she's feeling from several years ago.

Practitioner

[Tom] was able to increasingly describe those, in some detail, eyeballing Sandy, like getting right up close, raising his voice in a particular tone - a particular tone he could get in his voice that would send everybody on edge. ... Very aggressive language, very pointed words. You know, he's got quite a range of vocab and when he explained how he could use this, it made sense to me that he could very quickly turn language around to really skewer somebody with it and he would do this with the girls sometimes, or with Sandy. So, a narrative invitational approach is trying to, inviting him to name this, to be able to call it for what it is. So, to, sort of, find the right name for this, as opposed to oh I just lose my temper. So it's [also] around the politics of language, really, what would Sandy think if you were describing this as you being a little bit upset, as opposed to being emotionally abusive? What would she think? These sort of questions to try and get the language right as a sign of stepping and taking full responsibility for it, rather than trying to shrink it or diminish it.

Sandy

I would say to Tom, [...] I would be like, well, I'm broken – you fuckin' broke me you bastard. So just deal with it – you are going to have to deal with this until I get better. So, I really pushed him sometimes. I got really, really, mean.