Module 4: Rituals for Resilience

Trauma Responsive Mind Body Wellness & SEL Somatic Healing

Session 1: Healing Collective, Social Justice & Empowered Leadership with Heather Kent, TI-Psychotherapist

*"Pain travels through families
until someone is ready to feel it."*
~ Stephi Wagner
Family Therapist

The Legacy of Trauma

Research into the effects of trauma – especially single-episode-present-life trauma – is now well understood among the scientific and psychological community and the wider public. However, the impact of intergenerational trauma, and its expression, is a growing phenomenon. The occurrence of *intergenerational trauma* is frequently examined as part of *historical trauma*. Intergenerational trauma is a term first coined to discuss stress-related symptoms in children whose parents were Holocaust survivors. Social scientists and psychologists noted that a large number of commonalities presented themselves in the second generation of those whose parent or parents had been Holocaust survivors, and who were themselves experiencing mental health-related issues. One of the first studies that documented intergenerational trauma was in 1966, when Canadian psychiatrist Vivian M. Rakoff, MD, noted high rates of psychological distress among descendants of Holocaust survivors.[1] These commonalities included such things as a distrust of others, hypervigilance, high anxiety, a tendency towards hoarding, panic attacks, nightmares, low self-esteem, secretiveness, over-eating, and cold, authoritarian parenting. The research noted that these manifestations, which could easily be explained as a response to histories of abuse on the part of the survivors themselves, were also exhibited in their children and appeared to be transgenerational in nature. Throughout this wide pool of research, there has been a consistent prevalence of trauma disorders among the children of trauma survivors.

Understanding Intergenerational Trauma

The most well-known source of reference to intergenerational trauma is that of Holocaust survivors and their families. Another glaring and more recent historic example that is finally becoming more widely discussed and shared within the mainstream is the impact that the Indian Residential Schools in Canada has had on the children (and the parents who had their children

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[1] *"Intergenerational Trauma and Residential Schools."* The Canadian Encyclopedia. Thecanadianencyclopedia.Ca, 2021, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/intergenerational-trauma-and-residential-schools.

taken from them), and the subsequent trauma that survivors of these schools have passed along to their own children. The last Indian Residential School did not close until 1996; this is an example of intergenerational trauma that has happened within our lifetime.

Although the work on intergenerational trauma began with studies on Holocaust survivors, the field has expanded to include groups of individuals who have been party to extreme suffering through oppression and torture, or stigmatization, in ways that create lasting damage. Currently, the broadening scope of the work also includes, but is in no way limited to, the children of those

who survived Holodomor; the Khmer Rouge killings, the Rwandan genocide, victims of colonization and settler culture, residential schools for Indigenous peoples, victims of slavery, and systemic racism. Researchers are also exploring whether the PTSD suffered by war veterans has ramifications that extend to the second and third generations. It is also now understood that intergenerational trauma does not only occur from historical traumas, but it can also exist within families who have experienced individual traumas.

The initial line of thought regarding intergenerational trauma was that its symptomatic behaviours were learned ones, as they were modelled in the home environment of the survivors themselves. However, further research has recently suggested that while there is a component of modelling and repetitive conduct involved, there may also be a process of *epigenetics* that factors in. Scientists are currently exploring the likelihood that our DNA can actually be modified by extreme stress or trauma, resulting in permanent shifts or alterations to our genomes, which are then passed on to subsequent genetic generations. One's capacity to manage stress responses seems to be an area that is particularly susceptible to the effects of intergenerational trauma.

When broadly understood, intergenerational trauma is thought to have three components:

a) the specific nature of parental trauma

b) the intergenerational transmission of that trauma to children and grandchildren

c) the behavioural characteristics manifested in subsequent generations.

The transmission of such trauma is now understood to have taken place both through direct and specific means as well as through indirect and general means. Essentially, transmission occurs through day-to-day experiences, including the sociocultural, as well as in communication patterns, attachment, and epigenetics. Parenting and modelling play significant roles; for example, we know that in healthy environments, children learn their coping skills from their family members and that their resilience and ability to navigate the world stem initially from an emotionally stable and supportive environment.[2]

When parents live under oppressive circumstances, for example, they can develop "survival messages" (e.g. "don't ask for help, it's dangerous") that may be taught and passed on from one generation to the next.[3] While these messages may have helped protect earlier generations, they can cause later generations to have a fearful and distrustful outlook on life and towards helping

[2] DeAngelis, Tori, "The Legacy of trauma: An emerging line of research is exploring how historical and cultural traumas affect survivors' children for generations to come," *American Psychological Association*, February 2019, Vol. 50, No. 2.
[3] Ibid.

professionals, further alienating the support that is needed to overcome the aftermath of the trauma itself. Studies have shown specific maladaptive behaviour patterns within the trauma survivor's children and grandchildren, including immature dependency, codependency, an obsession with the trauma event, control issues, avoidant attachment, and an over-protective attitude to parents or associated family members. These reactions are known as *reparative adaptational impacts*. This reflects a child's desire to repair the traumatic past of their parents, and create a world where the parent feels safe and one where future generations of the family are secure.[4]

How Trauma Affects Parents

Parents may have inherited genetic vulnerabilities based on a traumatic event that happened to them directly or a parenting style that was passed down from their parents. Survivors may face many obstacles when they become parents themselves. This includes difficulty bonding and emotionally attaching to their children. Survivors of trauma are often sensitive to stimulation of any kind, which can isolate them from the rest of the world, and their families. There are three common outcomes that we see:

- *Victim Mentality*: Depression is a frequent friend of trauma, which may cause a parent that has experienced trauma to self-isolate or be combative and argumentative.
- *Fighter Mentality*: Alternatively, fighters may arm themselves with a hard outer shell and are intolerant of weakness or self-pity.
- *"Those Who Made It"*: Defined by social-economic success but have distanced themselves from their experience of trauma and other survivors.

Healing Intergenerational Trauma

Fortunately, trauma survivors and their descendants can help to reduce the impact of generational trauma on future generations. Just as traumatic experiences can be passed down

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[4] Danieli, Yael et al. "The Danieli Inventory Of Multigenerational Legacies Of Trauma, Part II: Reparative Adaptational Impacts.". *American Journal Of Orthopsychiatry*, vol 85, no. 3, 2015, pp. 229-237. *American Psychological Association (APA)*, doi:10.1037/ort0000055.

from one generation to the next, so can the capacity for overcoming the trauma and building resilience. For example, Braga et al. (2012) explored how open and loving communications styles between generations helped foster resilience and connectivity.[5] They found that when survivors of trauma openly tell their story and when descendants are able to deal with their parents' traumatic past, new lines of healing communication open between them.

Mark Wolynn, author of *It Didn't Start With You*, also encourages open dialogue between parents and children regarding the history of family trauma. He encourages parents to "Tell [your children] the terrible things that happened to you and whatever you know about what happened to your parents and your grandparents. They could be the unwitting recipients of painful feelings from the past. When you tell them what tragedies smolder in the family history, it can come as a great relief to them—especially if they make the connection that they've been carrying what belongs to you or to your parents or grandparents."

On the other hand, transgenerational trauma snowballs in families that do not speak of their traumatic experiences. Instead, these families keep the traumas a secret or continue to convey them in indirect or maladaptive ways. Trauma survivors can either repeat the cycle or generate a solution by creating a new narrative. This happens when family members speak up and work through any hurt, pain, or abuse from the past.

Despite the many gaps that still exist in understanding the transgenerational effects of trauma, clinicians and researchers are delivering interventions based on recent findings, including at the community level. One example is a long- running intervention being adapted to First Nation

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[5] Braga, L. L., Mello, M. F., & Fiks, J. P. (2012). Transgenerational transmission of trauma and resilience: a qualitative study with Brazilian offspring of Holocaust survivors. *BMC psychiatry, 12,* 134. doi:10.1186/1471-244X-12-134

and Native American tribes in Canada and the United States called *Strengthening Families*. Based on a highly successful evidence-based program started at Iowa State University, it aims to prevent early substance use by improving family communication, reducing family conflict and teaching children substance-use resistance skills. Other evidence-based interventions for healing intergenerational trauma include naming what happened, acknowledging the impact of the trauma-constructed patterns, and recognizing emotions that family members feel/felt.

Building Resilience and Promoting Healing

There is a growing body of research on how resilience - the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress - is actually a life skill that helps people persevere and become healthy and well.

Manifestations of Intergenerational Trauma	Reclaiming Wholeness
- Rage - Fear-based scarcity mindset - Colonial mentality - Overwork, burnout - Chronic anxiety, depression, complex trauma - Somatic symptoms, chronic health conditions - Addiction - Codependency - Parentified children - Shame - Silence	- Honoring grief and loss - Growth-oriented abundance mindset - Unlearning internalized oppression - Resting - Creative & authentic expression - Ritual & celebration - Respecting internal boundaries - Connection with earth & ancestral wisdom - Acceptance of change & uncertainty - Communities of care - Embodying your truth

"If we have inherited generations of trauma, then let us not forget we have also inherited generations of strength and resilience."

*"Alone we can do so little;
Together we can do so much"*

~ Helen Keller

Social Justice and Empowered Leadership

The term *social justice* refers to a political and philosophical theory that focuses on the concept of fairness among individuals in society, and equal access to wealth, opportunities, and social privileges. Theoretically, social justice means the eradication of all social inequities and disparities. Practically, social justice means seeking out ways to redress social issues and injustices, both through legal and cultural means. Put simply, social justice seeks fairness in societies. It is grounded in the idea that every human being deserves the full spectrum of political, economic and social rights, and opportunities. To withhold this access is the opposite of social justice, which we identify as discrimination. According to social justice principles, society should never withhold rights and opportunities because of:

- race

- gender

- sexual orientation

- sexual identity

- age

- ability or disability

- level of education

- economic situation

- geographic location, or anything else that's beyond an individual's control

Origins of Social Justice

While various iterations of the term and concept stretch back as far as Plato and the early

days of Christianity, the phrase "social justice" and its

contemporary meaning first took off in popularity around the time

of the Industrial Revolution. The staggering income inequality of

the time period, as well as the mistreatment of certain groups

within nation states and the far-spread marginalization of women,

led to the rise of movements bent on remedying these ills and

creating a more equitable society. It was during this time when

workers began forming unions and the women's suffrage

movement arose.
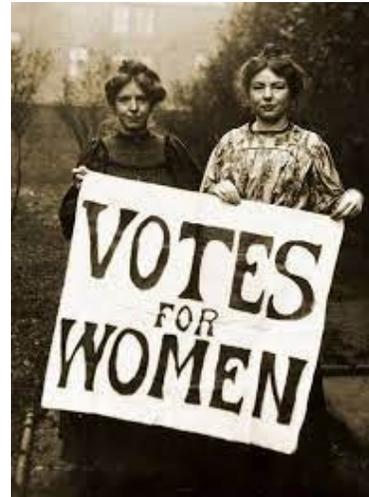
Since then, more contemporary philosophers like John Rawls (author of *A Theory of*

Justice) have updated the concept of "social justice" to meet the needs of the modern world. The

concept has gained exponential traction in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At this point,

seeking to establish a greater sense of social justice has extended beyond the scope of nonprofit

organizations or charities into the very charter of the United Nations. However, achieving total

social justice remains an aspirational goal.

Five Principles of Social Justice

There are five main principles of social justice that are paramount to understanding the

concept better. Namely, these are access to resources, equity, participation, diversity, and human

rights.

1. **Access to Resources**

    Access to resources is an important principle of social justice and refers to the

    extent to which different socioeconomic groups receive equal access to give everyone an

    equal start in life. Many developed societies offer a multitude of resources and services for

    their citizens, such as healthcare, food, shelter, education, and recreational opportunities.

However, unequal access to such services often exists.

For example, individuals from wealthy households among the upper and upper-middle classes are often better able to afford to attend good schools and access post-secondary education, which leads to a greater chance of obtaining jobs with higher income in the future. In contrast, those from the lower classes face fewer opportunities. It, in turn, limits access to education for future generations and continues the cycle of marginalization.

2. **Equity**

Equity refers to how individuals are given tools specific to their needs and socioeconomic status in order to move towards similar outcomes. It contrasts with equality, where everyone is offered the same tools to move towards the same outcome. As such, often, things that are equal are not equitable due to the more advanced needs of some individuals and groups. Social justice, integrated with addressing equity issues, might include advancing policies that provide support to overcome systemic barriers.

3. **Participation**

Participation refers to how everyone in society is given a voice and opportunity to verbalize their opinions and concerns and have a role in any decision-making that affects their livelihood and standard of living. Social injustice occurs when a small group of individuals makes decisions for a large group, while some people are unable to voice their opinions, as is often the case in countries with totalitarian governments.

4. **Diversity**

Understanding diversity and appreciating the value of cultural differences are especially important because policymakers are often better able to construct policies that take into consideration differences that exist among different societal groups. It is important to recognize that some groups face more barriers in society, and by considering the inequities, policymakers and civil servants will be in a stronger position to expand opportunities for marginalized or disadvantaged groups.

Discrimination in employment on the basis of factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, sex, age, and other characteristics are constant issues in society, and enforcing policies to reverse discriminatory practices are one way in which diversity is taken into consideration.

5. **Human Rights**

Human rights are one of the most important principles of social justice and form a foundational part of the concept. Human rights and social justice are certainly interrelated, and it is impossible for one to exist without the other. Human rights are fundamental to societies that respect the civil, economic, political, cultural, and legal rights of individuals and governments, organizations, and individuals must be held responsible if they fail to ensure the upholding of these rights. They are extremely important in many societies and are recognized internationally through institutions such as the International Criminal Court and the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Examples of Social Justice Causes

A wide array of causes have arisen over the years to rectify social injustices and lay the groundwork for a fairer society. Here are just seven prominent ones:

- **The civil rights movement**: In the 1950s and '60s, the civil rights movement set out to end racial discrimination against people of all races and ethnicities, shore up voting rights for all people, and achieve greater levels of economic equality within society. Since then, the Black Lives Matter movement has followed in its footsteps to combat on-going biases and injustices against marginalized groups.

- **Climate change activism**: Environmental justice is also a social justice issue. Climate change activists seek to protect the planet and mitigate the effects of climatic shifts to ensure the world remains healthy in its own right and sustainable for all of its current and future inhabitants.

- **Criminal justice reform advocacy**: While the law might technically "guarantee equality" in a traditional sense, certain activists believe greater protections and measures are

necessary to achieve that sort of equity for all people. As such, they seek to point out disparities certain groups face within the justice system, and the education gaps that exist within it.

- **The gender equality movement**: Over the centuries, feminists have viewed social justice as essential to their pursuits toward gender equality. For example, both achieving universal suffrage and striving for the success of equal pay initiatives are social justice initiatives.

- **The labour movement**: Since at least the Industrial Revolution, social justice has had plenty to do with a person's social class and socioeconomic station. The labour movement—as well as other economic justice movements, like Occupy Wall Street—have sought to achieve true economic opportunity, whether through lobbying for improved workplace protections or advocating for more far-reaching wealth redistribution as a matter of public policy.

- **LGBTQ+ activism**: Members of the LGBTQ+ community and allies lobbied policymakers for years to receive equal treatment before the law. In the twenty-first century, their efforts laid the groundwork for making it legal to marry a person of the same sex. Still, people face discrimination due to their sexual orientation and gender identity every day, indicating the fight for true social justice is far from over.

- **Universal health care advocacy**: Certain activists believe it will be impossible to achieve holistic social justice until everybody has equal access to a free public health care system. This includes resources for everyone's mental health and well-being as well.

*"Leaders become great
not because of their power,
but because of their ability
to empower others."*
~John Maxwell

Empowered Leadership

To say we are facing unprecedented circumstances in the world today is simply an understatement. How we respond, our reactions, and how we mentally manage these unique circumstances will be vital to our businesses, coworkers, families, neighbours, and communities. Present-day leadership is quite different from that of Caesar, Plato, the ancient Greeks, or the ancient Egyptians. Today's effective leaders utilize power-sharing, trust, team-building, and empowerment as tools to guide their respective communities. Through the leadership style of empowerment, casting a vision provides a shared set of values with a client focus. Successful organizations which practice empowerment delegate and expect people to initiate, to create, and to feel ownership.

Empowerment can be defined as the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. Methods to achieve empowerment include educating, leading by example, structuring, providing, mentoring, and actualizing. Genuine empowerment requires leaders to be involved, to be of service, to coach and mentor, to guide, to inspire; this requires frequent, highly involved interactions, but of a different nature than the traditional autocratic and controlling style.

Empowered Leadership Characteristics

Empowered leaders share common behaviours and traits. Here are some empowering leadership characteristics:

1. They constantly *remind others of the vision*, taking time to share the overall goal and value that each team member has in achieving it. This allows group members to understand the importance of their role and provides motivation to bring their best self to their work.

2. They are *effective communicators*. Leaders who empower others are constantly adapting to new methods of communication. Whether through email, phone, text, or an app, empowered leaders take initiative to implement more effective pathways for communication for the benefit of the entire group. This allows them to be available to resolve any inquiry or

roadblock the team may face.

3. They *delegate effectively*. Delegating builds trust and leads to empowerment. Leaders who empower show that they trust others, giving them authority to make decisions regarding their tasks and deliverables, reducing bottlenecking.

4. They understand the *value of each team member.* Empowered leaders understand that each team member was chosen to increase the value of the overall team and, therefore, is needed to achieve the goal. They show they value the group by listening to and acting upon feedback.

5. They *recognize others*. Leaders empowering others not only understand the value each team member brings but are quick to acknowledge it. Whether that is through public or private acknowledgement, leaders understand that reward leads to confidence and allows the team member to increase efficacy through repetition. Public acknowledgement of a behaviour or attitude spreads camaraderie among the group and builds a healthy working culture.

The Value of Empowered Leadership

Leaders who empower others understand that a vision is rarely achieved by just one person but by a team. Empowered leadership involves placing trust and confidence in team members; therefore, empowered leadership makes space for individuals to share creative ideas and also works to implement them whenever possible. Great leaders nurture the strengths and talents of their group members and build teams committed to achieving goals.

Homework

Exercise 1: Caring Practice

- These mindfulness practices focus on cultivating compassion to help care for oneself and others. Choose the ones that resonate and make self-compassion part of your daily rituals for wellbeing.
- https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/

Exercise 2: The Power of Collective Intention (podcast episode)

**August 16, 2022** **Episode #55** **Guest: Lynne McTaggart**

At this time in history, there is an amazing opportunity for groups of people to harness the power collective intention to create sustainable change that can help humanity and our planet.

Currently, society is mired in many outdated paradigms that no longer fit today's world. Many societal structures are falling apart, polarization between groups and inflamed biases have become more intense. The power of collective intention is not a new concept, yet we are reminded through examples that Lynne shares of how small groups throughout history have created significant changes that helped to improve and heal people's lives. In this episode award-winning journalist and author, Lynne McTaggart and our host, Deborah Rozman, talk about collective intention and Lynne's research in this area. Lynne shares her transformative results from bringing small groups of people with different beliefs and opposing views together to hear each other more deeply and to focus on an altruistic collective intention they all can agree on. Deborah and Lynne discuss how the new paradigms needed now for humanity to learn to get along with each other could very well come from small groups empowering a collective altruistic intention.

This episode closes with a heart-focused meditation that walks listeners through

HeartMath's Shift and Lift™ Technique. This heart-based practice facilitates groups and teams in deeper listening to the hearts of each other. This is an excellent way to sustain your own personal heart-practices. We also hope it will be a supportive tool for you to offer to your clients, patients and colleagues.

Notes & Key Takeaways
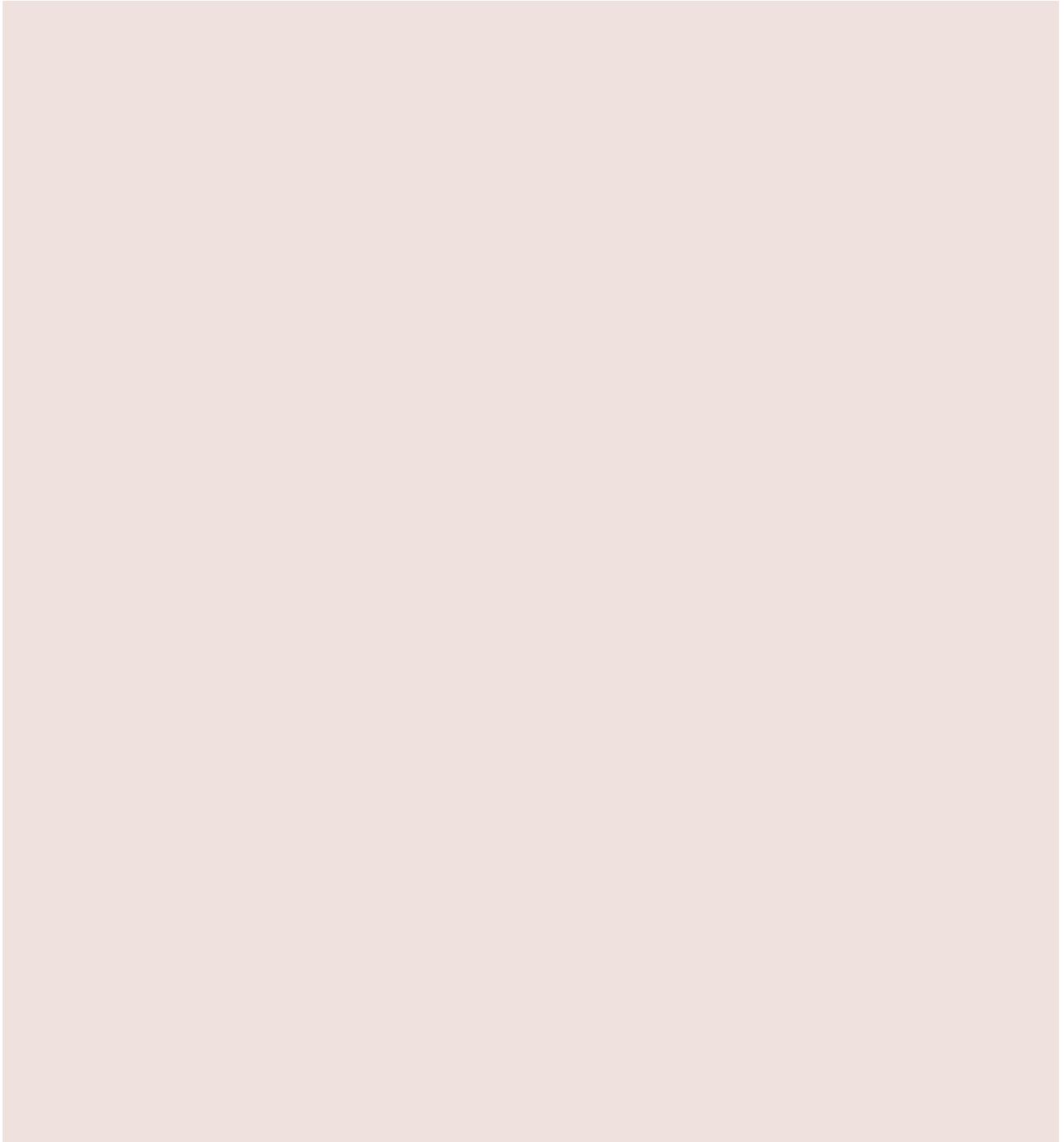
Resources

Suggested Literature/Readings/Books

- *It Didn't Start With You* by Mark Wolynn

- *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls

- *Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown

Suggested Videos

Breaking Generational Cycles of Trauma – *Tedx Talk*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXbg6e-A9V4