

Is forgiveness really possible?

The psychological and spiritual
impact of violent trauma

Escaping Victimhood

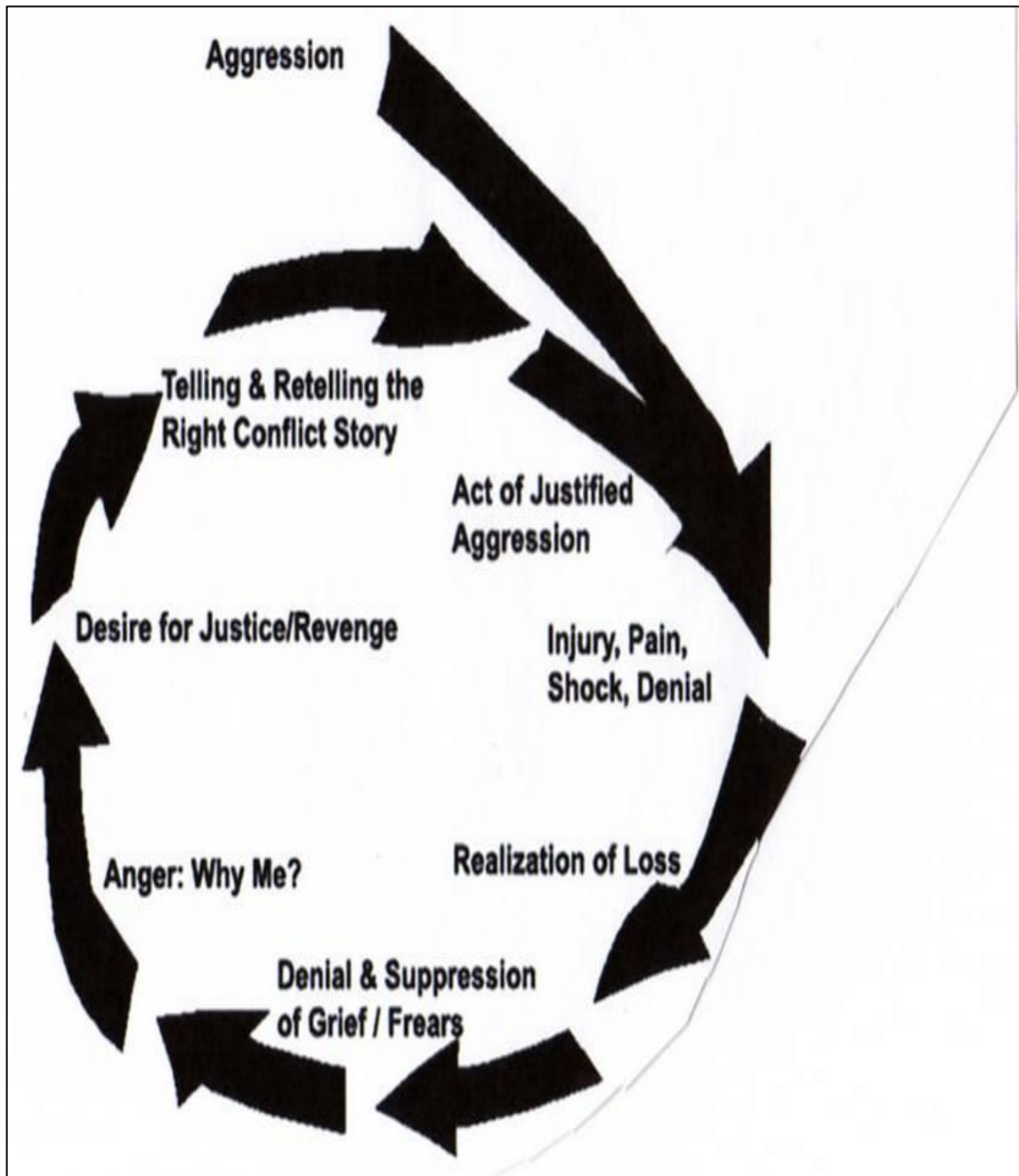
- We know the needs of victims of crime are not met by the justice system that thinks the trial will bring closure for victims
- Many victims of crime are never involved in a formal process-loss of control
- The focus on a more punitive system of blame is not necessarily going to help victims of crime to put their experience into perspective and gain control again

Impact of crime

- The impact of crime and its consequences are not recognised
- Trauma is under-researched but not in the USA because of their experience post Vietnam from which we can learn
- We can learn many lessons from their experience of taking the impact of trauma seriously
- But this is a cultural hurdle to climb

Some of the effects of crime on victims

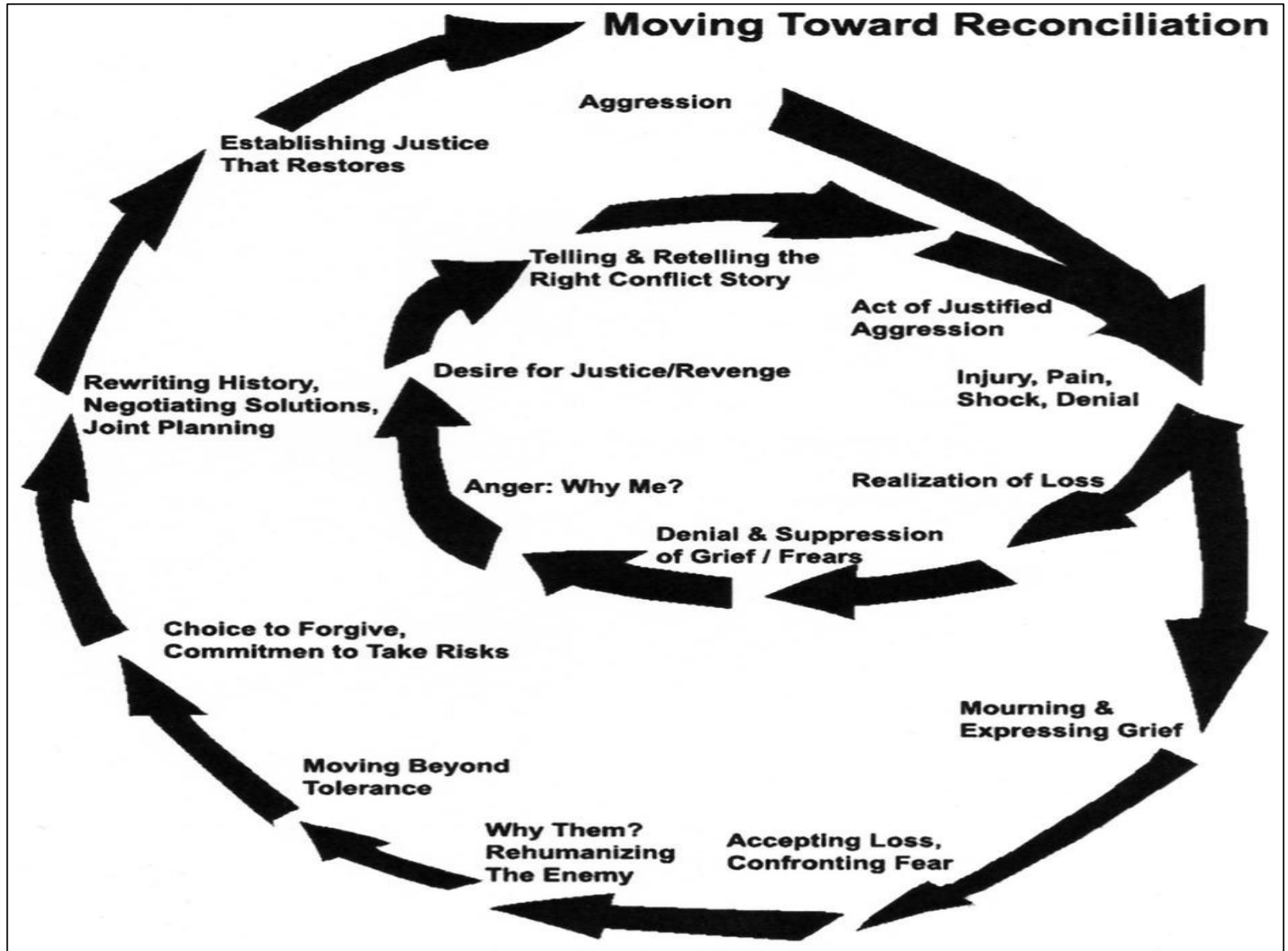
- Story fragmentation
- Trauma anxiety
- Grief displacement
- Memory/missing time
- Spiritual crisis
- Loss of identity devastation
- Disabling harm
- Blame/survivor guilt
- Truth dilemma
- Uncontrollable rage
- Victim/offender trauma bond
- Justice revictimisation
- Unsatisfactory closure driving revenge/
re-enactment-
- Recovery controversy
- Paralysing despair



Survivor/Victim Cycle

- Harm-psychological trauma the hidden wound
- Realisation of loss – panic
- Suppression of grief
- Anger and spiritual questions
- Need for justice
- Fantasies and fears of revenge
- Good v Evil narrative
- Acts of justified aggression in the name of self defence
- Physiological changes as a result of stress chemicals flooding the system
- Perceptual anomalies

Moving Toward Reconciliation



Breaking the Cycle

- Mourning and Grieving
- Accepting loss, confronting fears
- Re-humanising the enemy
- Moving beyond tolerance to acceptance
- Commitment to take risks
- Re-writing history, negotiating solutions
- Establishing justice that restores
- Integrating trauma into new identity
- Moving towards reconciliation

Maslov's Hierarchy of Needs



- **Traumatic Reactions**
 - Static non movement
 - Low self esteem
 - Isolated from family and community
 - Feels unsafe. Locked into traumatic incident
 - Poor sleep patterns, no libido, self medication with drugs or alcohol

Escaping Victimhood

- Safety with psychological grounding, support of other victims and reflective leaders
- Acknowledgement towards self of mourning and grieving, telling the story, exercises to re-site the traumatic energy, naming fears, expressing shame as well as honour, failings as well as strengths

Escaping Victimhood

- Acknowledgement towards others, seeking to understand causes, trying to see self as others see us, resisting the impulses to dehumanise and demonise the other
- Efforts to re-connect with ourselves and others – interconnectedness of all, search for justice that restores and heals, an openness for eventual reconciliation

Escaping Victimhood

- Residential, experiential workshop
- Safe, pleasant locations
- Experienced, dedicated staff
- Participants with shared experience
- Learning about 'the traumatic experience'
- Developing some skills to manage symptoms
- Sharing a model of the process of change
- Activity and relaxation to try out the ideas

feedback

The whole thing has had a massive effect of my life

Since the course I have met somebody – and I haven't had a girlfriend for 21 years – and we've struck up a really good friendship, and been to some events together. I wouldn't have been able to do this before. It's absolutely changed me completely.

I dread to think of the numbers of people are just 'battling on' with the effects of these awful experiences.

I have realised that I cannot change the world. But I can structure the world I live in to make it a more acceptable and pleasant place to be. I have found that inner strength which I thought had gone for ever.

Thank you I have found myself again.

It's had a profound effect on my life.

It was like someone injected you with life!

Whatever happened on that course must be available for other people.