

A project of the Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute (CTRI)

# COUNSELLING

# ACTIVITIES WORKBOOK

*Handouts and Exercises for Working With People*



EDITED BY

Wilma Schroeder

REFLECTIVE EXERCISES • WORKSHEETS • MAPPING ACTIVITIES • COPING STRATEGIES

**COUNSELLING**

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WORKBOOK

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# INTRODUCTION

There are many theories about counselling and numerous ideas of how it is best approached, but one common element among many of them is the use of activities that can help people develop new insights and skills. Activities such as written worksheets, questionnaires, skills practice activities, and creative expression tools are valuable for both the counsellor and the person they are supporting. They provide active and experiential learning, helping the person move from discussion to action. Through activities, the person becomes more able to monitor their own change process, remember what was discussed in a session, and practice new skills.

Since 2007, the Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute (CTRI) has developed over 50 workshops in the areas of trauma, mental health, and counselling skills. We regularly hear from participants that the resources found in our training manuals are beneficial not just for the training, but for future reference and use in their practice. In addition to resource manuals, CTRI has published two books on the topic of counselling: *Counselling Insights* and *Counselling in Relationships*. This workbook is a compilation of key activities and resources found in both our resource manuals and our books.

Many experienced counsellors have contributed to these resources, including the creation of various activities and some of the section introductions in this workbook.

## **WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR**

The ultimate goal of this book is to assist people who are experiencing emotional or relational distress and help them find new ways of experiencing and managing themselves, their life issues, and their relationships. However, this is not a self-help book. The activities require the counsellor to select appropriate exercises and guide the person in using them in the context of the helping relationship. Therefore, this book is designed for the counsellor, as a resource to assist in their work.

We use the term “counsellor” throughout this workbook, but this resource is intended for anyone who has a formal role helping others as well as the knowledge and skills required to provide safe and ethical mental health support. The helper may be a person with professional credentials or a community support worker, Elder, or anyone who works with people experiencing mental health or relationship issues.



## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS WORKBOOK

This book contains a wide variety of activities based on an equally wide variety of counselling approaches, such as cognitive behavioural, narrative, family systems, and mindfulness to name a few. All the activities are suitable for people who are 16 and older. They are formatted as handouts that can be photocopied from this book or printed from our website and given to the person. Activities include questionnaires, worksheets, reflective exercises, mapping activities, safety plans, and coping strategies. Most of the activities are relevant to many issues, including those related to relationships and mental health, and they are not limited to specific diagnoses such as anxiety or depression. Instead, we have endeavoured to gather general activities that can be used by many people to help them reach their goals.

## HOW THIS WORKBOOK IS ORGANIZED

The activities are organized in sections according to broad themes of common concerns (refer to the Table of Contents for guidance). Each section begins with an introduction that briefly describes the purpose of the activities and a summary of key points related to their use, including when to use them, which ones should precede others, how to introduce them, and points to remember regarding safety.

Within each section, activities are organized with simpler ones first, in the order in which they might be used. For example, Change and Planning begins with activities to examine reasons and motivations for change, then goal setting, then strategy development.

## HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This is a copyrighted work; however, you are invited to copy and distribute these activities for use with the people you support. These activities are also available on our website at [www.ctrinstitute.com/workbook](http://www.ctrinstitute.com/workbook). To access the downloadable PDF copy of the book, you will be asked to provide your email address and the download code **ctriwbca** (*this code is intended to be used only by people who have purchased the book*). There are instructions for how to print these resources on page 203, as well as in the PDF.

All activities should be introduced within a counselling session and followed up on in later sessions. Some will require you to practice the skill with the person – the handouts are not intended to be given out without any discussion.

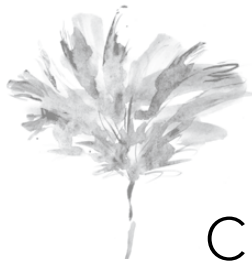
My thanks go to all the skilled trainers and counsellors who have contributed their ideas to CTRI's training materials and books over the years. It has been a pleasure to review and collate these activities, and to make them available to the larger helping community in this accessible format. For your reference and further acknowledgement of the previous work done, please read the acknowledgements on page 204.

I hope that you and the people you work with will find this workbook useful.



Wilma Schroeder

Editor and Trainer, Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute



# CHANGE AND PLANNING

It can be difficult for people to make a change. Change may feel overwhelming, or its costs may seem to outweigh its benefits. The activities in this section can be used to assist people to examine their reasons and readiness for change and set manageable goals and steps.

Just as change is a process, working to motivate and support others toward change is also a process. We can think of this process as having three steps:

1. Become an ally by building a trusting, supportive relationship. It is important to spend as much time as necessary in this step and resist the temptation to push for change. Often people with the best of intentions will begin by trying to persuade a person to change what they are doing, but this will only increase reluctance and may cause them to drop out of counselling altogether. Put the trusting relationship first, as this will be the foundation for all future work.
2. Create space for the person to recognize and work through the ambivalence they may have toward change. While a part of them may wish to make a change, another part may be anxious or reluctant about it. They may have valid concerns, such as a fear of losing important relationships, and so it is necessary to address them.
3. Support and build on *change talk* – statements from the client that indicate they are willing to change, are feeling optimistic and see the benefits of change, or recognize that change is necessary. Explore these statements as the person moves from thinking about change into actively planning for it.

These three steps build on one another, and the time required for each will vary from person to person.

It's important to be sure each step is well established before moving on to the next, and at times you may need to return to previous steps. Most important is the spirit and intention with which you approach the change process. It is important that counsellors regard people with positivity and openness in order to create an environment where change is possible.

## WHEN TO USE THESE ACTIVITIES

Use these activities when a person expresses a desire to make a change and a good alliance has been established. Below are some general guidelines for when to use each activity.

- **The person is considering making a change in the future**  
Use *Costs and Benefits of Working on Change*; *My Motivations for Change*; *Inspirational Hero*; *Ready, Willing, and Able*; *Thinking About Making a Change*; and *Identifying Your Barriers to Change*.
- **The person is interested in making a short-term change**  
*Identifying Your Barriers to Change* and *Planning for Change* will be useful at this stage.
- **The person expresses readiness to try some new strategies**  
Here they can benefit from *Tracking My Strategies*.
- **The person has had some successes and is interested in pursuing further growth**  
If this is the case, use *Applying My Strategies to Future Goals*.
- **If the person is struggling with substance use**  
*Goal Setting for Substance Use* is specific to this concern; however other activities in this section may also be valuable for people wishing to change their use of substances.

## HOW TO USE THESE ACTIVITIES

The change and planning activities can be used as part of a conversation within a counselling session or assigned as homework.

- Ensure you are going at the person's pace and not following your own agenda.
- If assigning an activity as homework, discuss it with the person first and ensure they have what they need to get the most out of it.
- Remember that change rarely happens in a straight line! A person can spend a varying amount of time in each step and can move backward or forward in the process. They can always revisit activities to evaluate and adapt their plans.
- Above all, it is important to maintain a supportive, compassionate presence and shift judgement to curiosity as you and the person explore their paths to change.

# COSTS AND BENEFITS OF WORKING ON CHANGE

---

**PURPOSE:** The following chart can be used as a way to work through some of the contradictory worries that come up when you are trying to change. It can also be used to sort through which coping strategies are more helpful or less helpful.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Complete this chart, and then consider the questions below.

NEW COPING STRATEGY OR CHANGE			
<i>What might happen if I make this change?</i>			
Short-term costs	Long-term costs	Possible short-term benefits	Possible long-term benefits
<i>What might happen if I don't make this change?</i>			
Short-term costs	Long-term costs	Possible short-term benefits	Possible long-term benefits

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Which of these costs or benefits carries the most weight for you right now?
2. How strongly do you believe each cost or benefit?
3. What are some reasons you want things to stay the same as they are now?
4. What are some reasons you would like things to be different?

# MY MOTIVATIONS FOR CHANGE

---

**PURPOSE:** The following rating scale can be completed on a regular basis to evaluate your growth and increase self-awareness. The higher the score, the greater your motivation to change.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Rate these statements on a scale of 1–10. A 1 indicates you strongly disagree with the statement; a 10 indicates you strongly agree. Use your total score to assess your motivation for change. Reassess your motivation periodically.

- I want to stop doing things that hurt myself or my relationships.
- I want to treat myself better.
- I want to develop healthy coping skills.
- I want to learn to talk to people honestly when I need help.
- I want to make new friends.
- I want to feel proud of my accomplishments.
- I want to have positive things in my life that make me happy.
- I want to improve my relationships with my loved ones.
- I want a positive plan for the future.
- I want to have more positive thoughts about my life.

**Are there other things that you want? Add them below:**

- I want to \_\_\_\_\_
- I want to \_\_\_\_\_
- I want to \_\_\_\_\_

**Total score:**

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are your most important motivators (for example, relationships with others, personal growth)?
2. What can you do to achieve the things that you want?
3. How have your ratings or motivations shifted over time?

# INSPIRATIONAL HERO

---

**PURPOSE:** You can be motivated for action when you consider the qualities you appreciate about someone you find inspiring. This activity asks you to identify your personal *inspirational hero* – someone whose attributes, actions, and values inspire you.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** You do not necessarily need to know this inspirational person. They can be a writer, neighbour, celebrity, or fictional character. Once you've chosen your hero, reflect on how they could inspire you to achieve one of your current goals.

**My inspirational hero:**

I am motivated by my inspirational hero because:

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---

---

Write about a current goal that you hope to achieve.

---

---

---

How might your inspirational hero inspire you to achieve this goal?

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# READY, WILLING, AND ABLE

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**PURPOSE:** Confidence and a sense of importance are part of our internal motivation for change. It's useful to understand how confident you feel about making a change, the importance of that change, and how ready you feel to make it.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Use the rulers below to rate yourself on a scale of 1–10 for each category. Discuss your ratings with your counsellor or a trusted support person.

## Confidence

On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being not confident at all and 10 being extremely confident, how confident would you say you are that you could make this change right now if you decided to?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not able at all				Somewhat able				Extremely able	

## Importance

On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being not important at all and 10 being extremely important, how important would you say it is to make this change right now?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not important at all				Somewhat important				Extremely important	

## Readiness

On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being not ready at all and 10 being extremely ready, how ready would you say you are to make this change right now?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not ready at all				Somewhat ready				Extremely ready	

## Ability

On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being not able at all and 10 being extremely able, how able would you say you are to make this change right now?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not able at all				Somewhat able				Extremely able	

# THINKING ABOUT MAKING A CHANGE

---

**PURPOSE:** People often feel compelled to use certain coping behaviours, even when the results are mixed or harmful. Compulsive coping behaviours are used for a wide variety of reasons: for recreation, to connect with others, or to escape, cope, or numb, for example. The first step of changing behaviour is understanding what is maintaining the behaviour in the first place.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Consider something in your life that is causing some drawbacks or harms (for example, use of a substance, a behaviour, or a relationship). Think about the following questions:

1. What needs does this behaviour or relationship fulfill (what are its benefits)?
2. What are other ways those needs can be addressed?
3. What are the drawbacks or harms that this is causing?
4. How would you describe this behaviour or relationship?
5. How do you want to be with this behaviour or in this relationship?
6. How would you rate the following statements on a scale of 1–10? A 1 indicates you strongly disagree with the statement; a 10 indicates you strongly agree.

- I am confident that it is possible to make this change.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

- It is important for me to make this change.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

- I feel ready to make this change.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

- I feel able at this time to make this change.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

7. What are some ideas for changing this behaviour and for reducing its harms?
8. When I make this change, what will be different in my life? What will I or others notice in terms of behaviour, relationships, mood, or thinking?



# IDENTIFYING YOUR BARRIERS TO CHANGE

---

**PURPOSE:** Sometimes it is difficult to make a change, and you may get frustrated or want to give up. It can be helpful to identify what stands in your way, and then look for solutions for moving forward.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Use the chart below to evaluate your barriers to change and identify possible solutions. Make a commitment to try out the solutions.

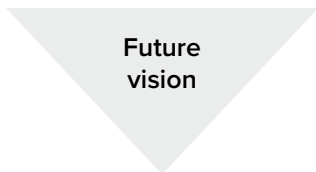
What stops you from achieving your goal?	<i>How much control do you have over this factor?</i> (High, medium, or low?)	What are some possible solutions?
Spending time looking for misplaced items	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize my space with a place for the things I lose most often</li> <li>• Hang keys on a hook by the door</li> </ul>

# PLANNING FOR CHANGE

---

**PURPOSE:** Once an area of change has been identified, it is helpful to explore how to achieve it in more detail.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Complete the questions below.



**When I achieve this, what will be different in my life? What will I or others notice in terms of behaviour, relationships, mood, and thinking?**

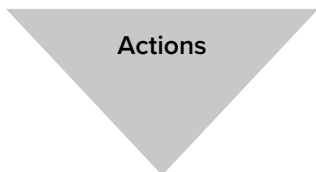
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**On a scale of 1–10, where am I now? \_\_\_\_\_**

*(1 = Haven't started; 10 = Have reached my goal)*

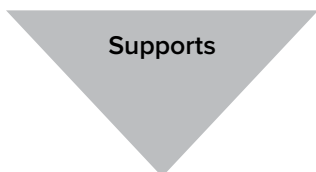


**Steps I can take toward making this change are:**

*(Tip: Consider what has been helpful so far. What needs to happen to move up one notch?)*

Specific action: \_\_\_\_\_ When: \_\_\_\_\_

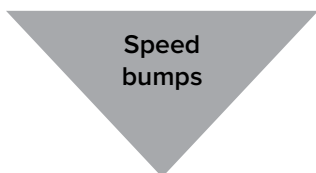
Specific action: \_\_\_\_\_ When: \_\_\_\_\_



**People who can support me in these changes:**

Person: \_\_\_\_\_ How they can help: \_\_\_\_\_

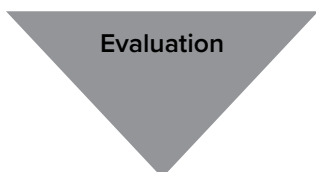
Person: \_\_\_\_\_ How they can help: \_\_\_\_\_



**What might get in my way, and how will I handle these obstacles?**

Possible obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_ Response: \_\_\_\_\_

Possible obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_ Response: \_\_\_\_\_



• When will I evaluate my progress? \_\_\_\_\_

• How will I know my plan is working? \_\_\_\_\_

• What results will I see? *(Tip: Look for the first signs of your future vision taking place.)*

---

# BEING PROACTIVE IN DECISION-MAKING

---

**PURPOSE:** It is healthy to take a thoughtful approach that ensures the best results for decision-making. Instead of waiting for things to change, you can use this method to become proactive in thinking about what needs to be done and making plans for change.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Think of an issue that you need to make a decision about, then use the steps below to explore your options. Choose one option to try and reflect on your progress.

**1. Pose the issue or decision.**

What is the issue?

**2. Consider your options.**

What are the options?

• Option 1: \_\_\_\_\_

• Option 2: \_\_\_\_\_

• Option 3: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Generate a list of pros and cons for each option.**

Without even knowing it, most of us use the method of weighing the pros and cons of a situation. The key is to make the exercise more conscious so that for every choice you need to make, you weigh the upsides and downsides. In most cases, whichever option has the most pros wins – although there are times when one pro or con is so weighty in its implications that it outweighs the others.

**4. Use your emotional wisdom.**

Consider your pros and cons lists and star or circle the items that carry more significance or weight for you based on values, meaning, or hopes and dreams you may carry.

**5. Choose the best option and take action!**

Given the above activity, what action will you take? Make sure you have carefully considered the outcomes that would come as a result.

**6. Reflect on your changes and progress.**

Decisions are often a process with a series of choices, not just a one-time choice. Come back to these lists as you move through a decision-making process. You may need to make new lists!

# GOAL SETTING FOR SUBSTANCE USE

---

**PURPOSE:** This goal-setting worksheet can be used to work with your counsellor or trusted support person to clarify the goals you are working to achieve. It assists in breaking down the large goal into manageable chunks and encourages small successes along the way.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Complete the worksheet below by identifying a long-term goal and some strategies to achieve it. Then break it down further into two or three short-term goals related to specific areas (domains) of your life and list some strategies for each.

GOAL SETTING		
<b>Substance use goal:</b> Abstinence <input type="radio"/> Harm reduction <input type="radio"/>		
<b>Long-term goal</b> What kind of use by what date? Be as specific as possible.		<b>Short-term strategies to achieve goal</b> These are concrete plans, tasks, or strategies that will help you achieve the long-term goal.
		1.  2.  3.
<b>Life domain impacted</b> for example, physical health, emotional regulation, workplace or family relationships, or spirituality.	<b>Short-term goal</b> Be as specific as possible.	<b>Short-term strategies to achieve goal</b> Concrete plans, tasks, or strategies that will help achieve the short-term goal.

# MY WEEKLY GOALS

---

**PURPOSE:** This worksheet can help you identify simple, attainable goals that can be accomplished in a short period of time.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Use the chart below to list things that you feel you can accomplish *this week*. Keep your goals simple and celebrate your successes. Use this chart weekly to adjust or add goals as desired..

This week I will keep doing...	
This week I will start doing...	
This week I will avoid...	
Something I will do this week for physical activity is...	
Something I will do this week that will give me a sense of accomplishment is...	
The fun things I will do this week are...	
This week I will relax by...	

**PURPOSE:** Identify goals for the future and steps that can be taken toward achieving them.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Answer the questions below. Keep these somewhere you can refer to them often. Revisit them regularly and adjust them as needed.

**What would you like to accomplish this month?**

What will be better or different for you if you accomplish this goal?

---

---

What do you need to do to reach your goal?

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**What would you like to accomplish in the next six months?**

What will be better or different for you if you accomplish this goal?

---

---

What do you need to do to reach your goal?

---

---

What would you like to accomplish in the next year?

What will be better or different for you if you accomplish this goal?

---

---

What do you need to do to reach your goal?

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What goals do you have for your long-term future? Think 5 to 10 years from now.

Where would you like to be?

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What would you like to be doing?

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What will be better or different for you?

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# TRACKING MY STRATEGIES

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**PURPOSE:** This tool will help you break down goals into manageable steps and learn new coping methods. It will also help you identify which strategies work best for you.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Consider the personal goals you have set for yourself. Use the table below to identify small, manageable steps you can take to reach your goals.

**Example:** My goal is to be less anxious at meals and bedtime.

Strategy I am trying	When did I try it?	How did it affect my day?	General level of my goal (1–10)
Belly breathing	Lunch time	Slowed down, didn't feel nausea after eating	Anxiety level Before: 8 After: 6
Tense and release	Before bed	Felt less anxious for a while, then it built up a bit	Anxiety level Before: 7 After: 5.5

**My goal:**

Strategy I am trying	When did I try it?	How did it affect my day?	General level of my goal (1–10)



# APPLYING MY STRATEGIES TO FUTURE GOALS

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**PURPOSE:** This worksheet will help you plan and practice manageable steps that will challenge old patterns.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Use the chart to first identify which steps of change you expect to be most difficult or easiest. Rate the steps from 1 to 10, with 1 being the easiest and 10 being the hardest. Then list strategies that you have found helpful in the past along with new strategies that you could try in the future. Next, try your easiest strategies first and progress to more difficult ones after you have success with the first ones.

**Example:**

<b>Rating</b> 9 8	<b>These are the hardest steps:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going somewhere new alone</li> <li>• Being alone when anxious</li> </ul>	<b>Which strategies may help?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing a small comfort object in my pocket to touch if I feel anxious</li> <li>• Playing uplifting music</li> </ul>
6 5	<b>These are somewhat difficult:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning meals for the day</li> <li>• Getting tasks done alone</li> </ul>	<b>Which strategies may help?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a weekly menu list that I can choose from</li> <li>• Doing a step at a time and rewarding myself for each one</li> </ul>
2	<b>These are small worries:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walking the dog</li> </ul>	<b>Which strategies may help?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breathing exercises at home</li> <li>• Taking a friend along</li> </ul>

## Applying My Strategies to Future Goals Worksheet

Rate steps from 1–10, with 1 being the easiest and 10 being the hardest.

<b>Rating</b>	<b>These are the hardest steps:</b>	<b>Which strategies may help?</b>
	<b>These are somewhat difficult:</b>	<b>Which strategies may help?</b>
	<b>These are small worries:</b>	<b>Which strategies may help?</b>

## THE GOAL OF COUNSELLING IS TO SUPPORT PEOPLE

as they move toward their goals of managing themselves, their life issues, and their relationships. For helpers and counsellors, one way to provide this support is to use experiential learning activities to facilitate the development of new insights and skills.

This book contains a wide variety of counselling resources based on an equally diverse range of counselling theories, including cognitive behavioural, narrative, family systems, and mindfulness. The resources are formatted as handouts that can be copied or printed and given to the person you are supporting. Activities include questionnaires, worksheets, reflective exercises, mapping activities, safety plans, and coping strategies. Most of the resources are applicable to many issues, while others have a more specific focus and can be assigned in sequence so that their insights and strategies build on each other.

This workbook is designed for helpers and counsellors to use in the context of a helping relationship, where additional depth and guidance can be provided – it is *not* a self-help book. By providing multiple resources to draw upon, this book supports helpers and counsellors to feel more confident as they support others.

The activities in this workbook are suitable for working with people 16 years of age and older. All activities can either be photocopied or you can access printable PDFs on our website.



**This workbook has something for almost every person. It's well organized so you can quickly reference the skills and techniques that will be most useful.**

—Anne Whitford Fast, *Psychotherapist, A Healing Journey*

**What a wonderful, well-organized, and practical workbook! It covers a wide range of counselling concerns and provides clear strategies that are suitable for many different ages.**

—Denise Sargeant, *Marriage and Family Therapist*

**This is a wonderful addition to any counsellor's bookshelf. The activities are relevant to many aspects of treatment and are easy to use with people of all abilities.**

—Sarah Philbrick-Djerfi, *Social Worker*



### ABOUT THE EDITOR

**Wilma Schroeder** is a trainer and consultant with the Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute. She is a family therapist and former mental health nurse, and she holds a Master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy.



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