



Keys to Interpersonal Resilience

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Reimagining 'Personality Disorders'

Personality disorders in general are pervasive, enduring and inflexible patterns of thinking, perceiving, reacting, and relating that cause significant distress or functional impairment.



Trauma-Informed Evolution of Horney's Work

Toward/Fawn

Affiliation



Dependency

Away/Flight

Freedom



Loneliness

Against/Fight

Assertive

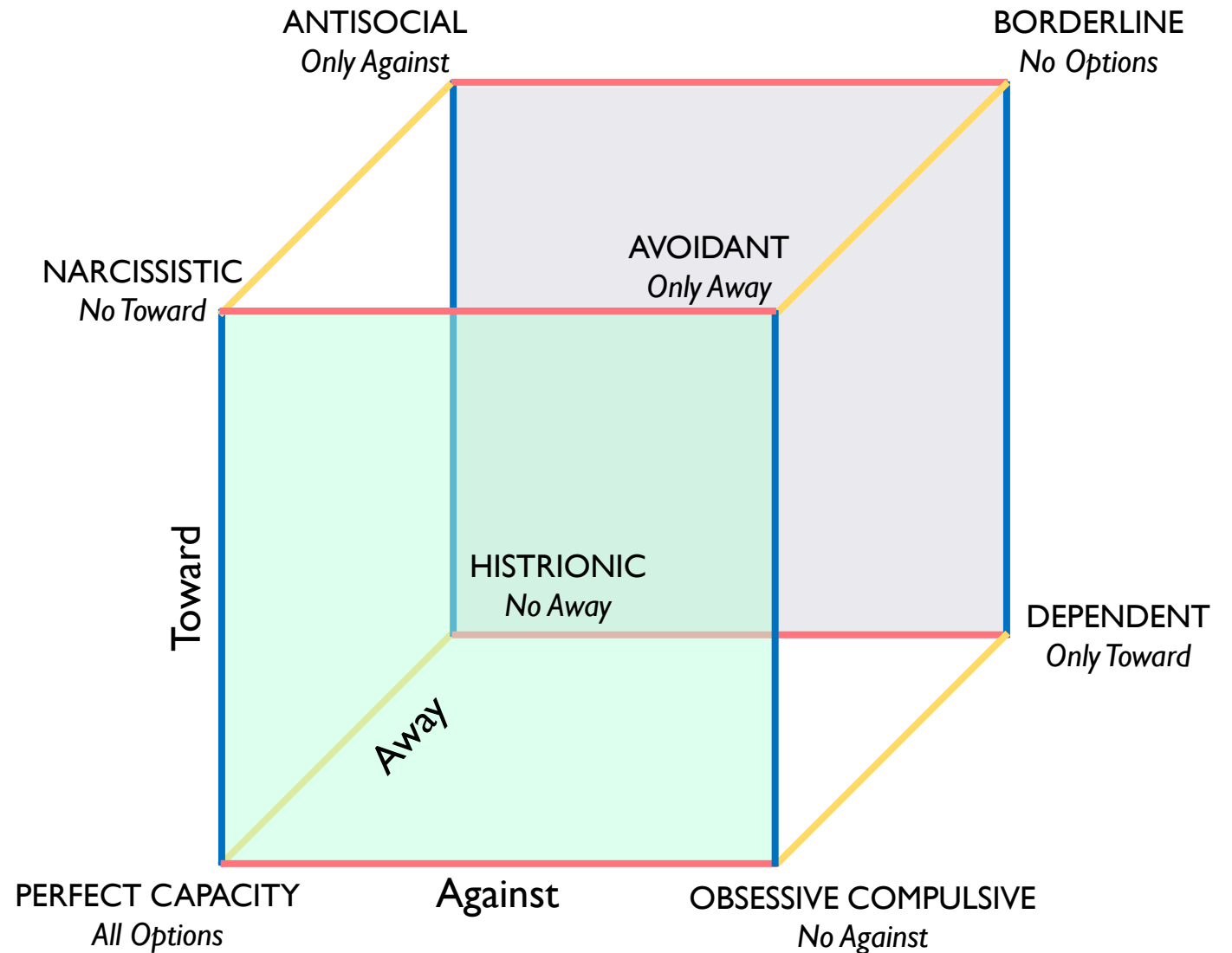


Aggressive

- Developed and refined over years of work with high-risk adolescents at Monash Health's Early in Life Mental Health Service.
- Evolved from Karen Horney's three basic anxiety positions, enhanced with contemporary developmental trauma understanding.
- These three positions are hardwired, mutually exclusive responses located in the automatic brain systems.
- Understanding what people *can't* do (the negative space) rather than focusing only on presenting behaviors.

The Cube

- "Personality disorders" stigmatises individuals when these patterns are actually survival-based relational adaptations to trauma and adverse environments.
- We all exist on this spectrum; "disorder" emerges from inflexibility, not the strategies themselves.
- These presentations are both consequences of past trauma AND contributors to ongoing relational trauma for individuals, families, and treatment systems.



Locks & Keys

Keys: interpersonal strategies to get needs met.

Locks: sensitivity and responsiveness to others' strategies.

We learn from experience which keys are not effective or even dangerous in our context.



Development of Interpersonal Strategies

- Infants regulate their world via their relationships with adult caregivers.
- Effective strategies elicit the desired response in the other and regulate **position** and **distance** from another.
- Over time, infants learn about their particular caregiver(s) and their caregivers learn to decode the infant's communication.
- This accumulated knowledge gives the infant a sense of predictability within relationship.

Toward

- Cooing
- Crying

Away

- Turning away
- Ignoring

Against

- Screaming
- Arching back

Complementarity: Locks

- We're unconsciously attracted to our "missing keys" – we gravitate toward people who use the interpersonal strategies we've discarded.
- Complementary key sets create relational stability, helping them feel balanced when partners have different but interlocking sets.
- We often seek relationships that make us feel whole – the 'Completion Fantasy' – by accessing strategies through our partner.
- However, what initially feels perfect in our attraction can later create dysfunction if we don't develop our own missing keys.



Inheriting Family Key-Rings

- Trauma restricts the family keyring – traumatised systems develop limited, "safe" interpersonal strategies while discarding others as dangerous or ineffective.
- Children learn what keys are acceptable – through observation and experience, children discover which strategies are welcomed, tolerated, or punished in their family system.
- Being scared off keys (trauma) vs lacking modelling of how to use them (inculturation of a preferred way).
- Two transmission pathways emerge:
 - Replication: Child mirrors parent's restricted set of key and lock patterns.
 - Inversion: Child develops complementary keys to fit with parent's locks.

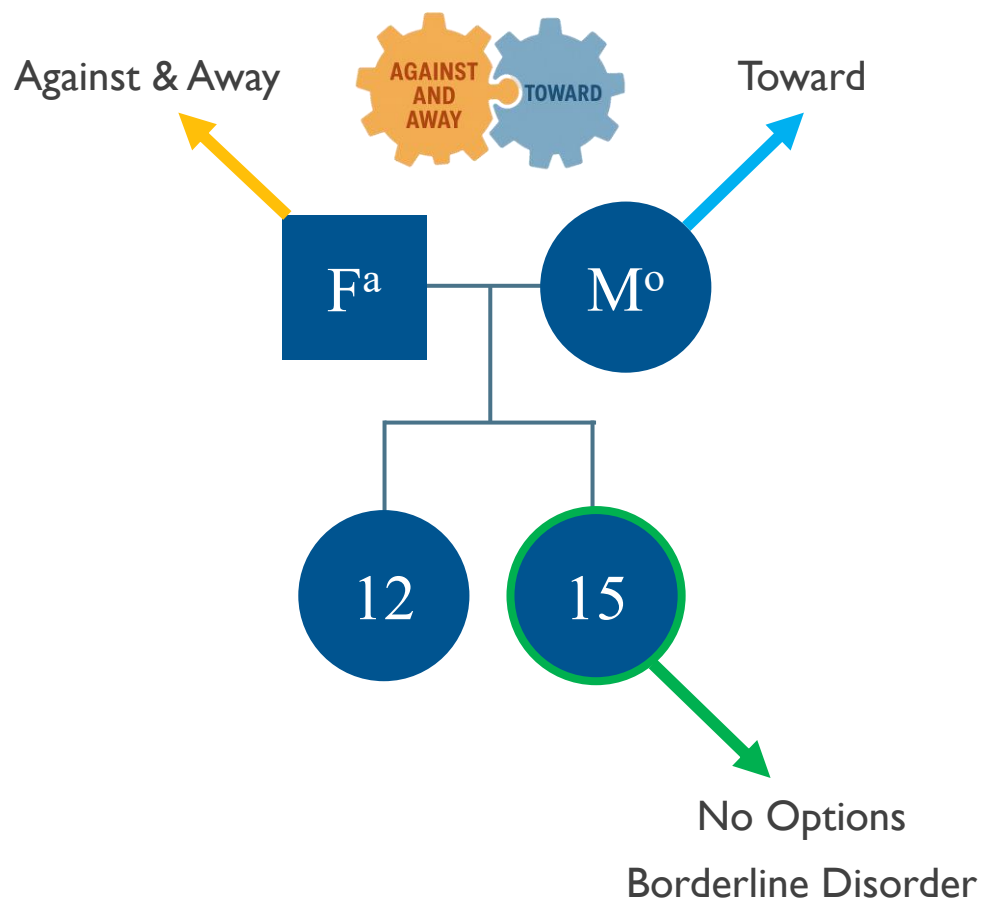




Presenting Problem

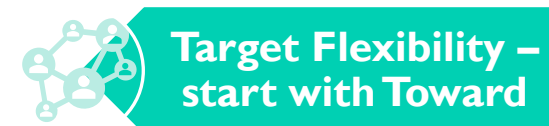
- Meg has been self-harming and talking about suicide.
- Meg has been shoplifting and recently got in a stolen car with peers.
- Kane & Stella have been talking about relinquishment.

Formulation



Treatment

- First, focus on stabilisation and safety using containment if necessary.
- Provide psychoeducation about this problem – reframe in a mutual way.
- Use your own Locks & Keys with each family member to model and stretch.



Case Study: 'The Johnson Family'

From Understanding to Healing



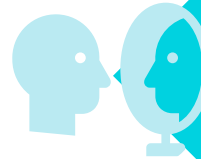
**Normalize adaptive
survival strategies**



**Collaborative key-ring
expansion**



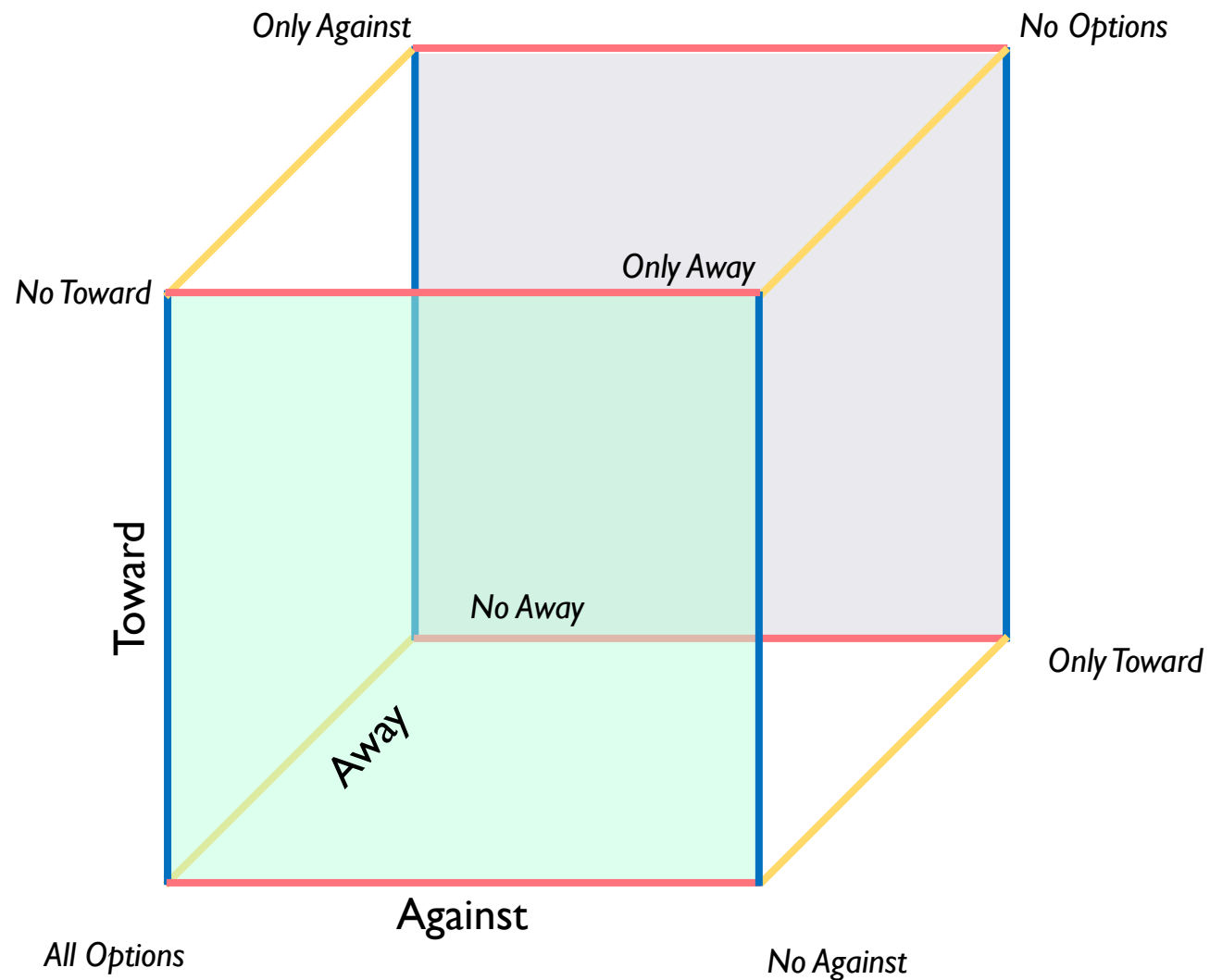
**Target flexibility over
symptoms**



**Monitor your own locks
while in contact**



**Empowerment in
recovery through choice**



We're all on the Cube!

- Defences, not disorder.
- Destigmatising care.
- Helping people understand their repeating patterns using reflection and...
- ...build flexibility with new locks and keys to...
- ...move past trauma!

	Toward	Away	Against
Narcissistic	-	+	+
Histrionic	+	-	+
Obsessional	+	+	-
Dependent	+	-	-
Schizoid/Avoidant	-	+	-
Antisocial	-	-	+
Borderline	-	-	-

Relational Personality Disorder defined by Absence