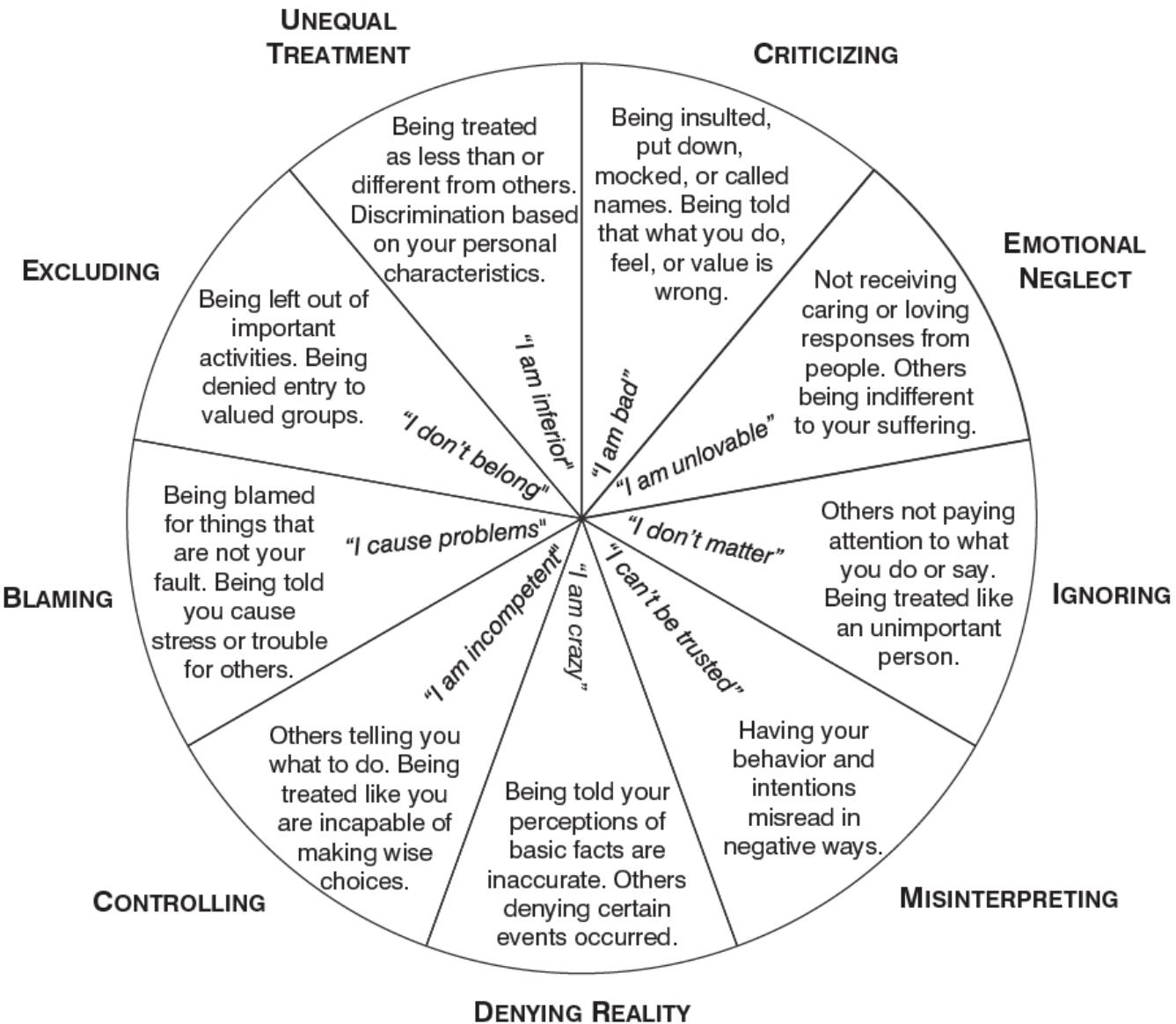


# Traumatic Invalidation & Learning Self-Validation

A large, abstract graphic element on the left side of the slide consists of three overlapping circles in varying shades of dark blue. The top circle is the largest and most prominent, with its right side cut off by the slide's edge. Below it is a smaller circle, and to its left is a medium-sized circle.

**Traumatic invalidation:** when the environment repeatedly or intensely communicates that our characteristics, behaviors, or emotional reactions are unacceptable.



# More on Traumatic Invalidation

- Can be done by important people
- May take place on a cultural level
- May range from overt abuse/messages to more subtle/unintentional behaviors
- Often is repeated but can occur via one extreme event

## Consequences of Traumatic Invalidation: Experiences of Traumatic Invalidation cause PTSD symptoms and negatively impact beliefs about self and relationships with others

- PTSD symptoms
- Self-invalidation – learn to invalidate ourselves in ways that are similar to how we were invalidated by others. Self-critical thoughts occur frequently and lead to shame and self-hatred
- Not trusting yourself – learn to doubt ourselves and believe we can't be trusted to make wise choices. Often can feel like we don't have inner wisdom and must rely on others to know what to do
- Unrealistic standards – learn to hold ourselves to strict and perfectionistic standards that are not realistic and lead to constantly feel as if we're failing or not good enough
- Pervasive insecurity – develop a pervasive sense of insecurity in relationships. Can often expect that others will reject us and have difficulty trusting and feeling safe around people
- Feeling invalid – being broadly and frequently rejected often threatens our psychological integrity and makes us feel as if we are not a valid, reasonable, or legitimate person

# How we approach in treatment:

- Trusting one's inner wisdom
- Grieving the pain of not being accepted
  - Finding validating environments in the present
- **Learning Self-Validation**

# Self-Validation

- Taking yourself seriously, allowing yourself to feel what you feel, think what you think, want what you want, with acceptance and without judgments, second-guessing, self-loathing, or self-contempt.
  - Giving yourself permission to feel emotions & acknowledging how they make sense.
    - Doing the opposite of how others have responded to you about your trauma and perhaps throughout life
- Benefits: decreased extra suffering, increased self-respect, increased connection to your primary emotions and using them to respond effectively in situations (e.g., heal from PTSD, make needed repairs/changes)

# Step One: Acknowledging

- Acknowledge the emotion that you are experiencing right now
- Let go of judgments
- Example: If you feel sad, then simple repeat: "*I am feeling sad.*" vs. "*I am so weak for always feeling sad*". Take out the judgment and generalization that the sadness/emotion will last forever

# Step Two: Allowing

- Remembering that it is okay to feel any emotion and allowing it to be there.
  - It is okay to feel the way I do right now.
  - I am allowed to experience this emotion.
  - Allowing myself to feel this way doesn't mean that I am behaving accordingly.
  - This will pass, but for now this emotion is here.
  - This emotion is uncomfortable, but it won't hurt me.

# Step Three: Understanding

- Create a context for the emotion you are feeling –**why it makes sense that you feel the way you do.**
  - “*I shouldn’t feel this way!*” vs “*why it makes sense that I feel this way.*”
- Think about the past events that have contributed to this emotion.
- Don’t judge yourself, stick with facts about the past events/context.
  - Example: “It is no surprise that I felt afraid opening up to my friend, since people I have trusted in the past have hurt me and abandoned me.” vs. “I’m so stupid for feeling afraid.”
- Soothe yourself and move on to your next activity

# Example:

- **Step 1: Acknowledging**-Right now I feel frustrated with myself.
- **Step 2: Allowing**-This feels uncomfortable, and right now it is what it is.
- **Step 3: Understanding**-I am frustrated with myself because I lost my temper with my partner and this is not how I want to treat people I love. I am not going to judge myself for this. It makes sense that I have a hard time when people give me constructive criticism given my abuse history. That's enough negative feelings, I don't need to make it harder on myself. I will apologize to him and make an effort to keep working on this in therapy.