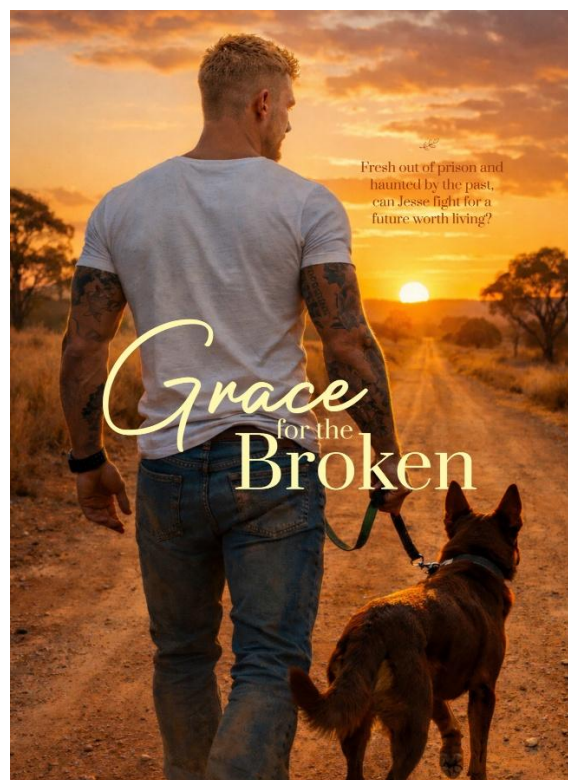
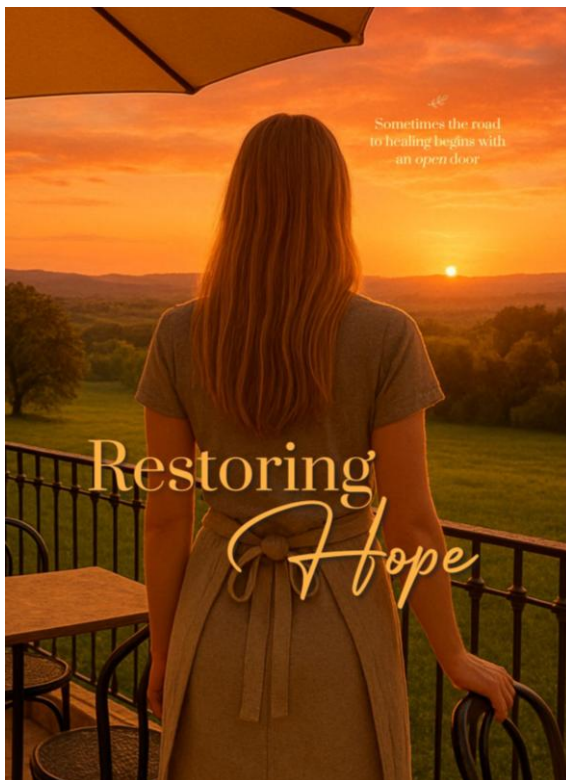


HEALTHY MEN

HELPING MEN

TO GROW SAFER RELATIONSHIPS

A DISCUSSION GUIDE
USING SCENARIOS FROM



GREG AND PHILIPPA CLEALL

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The extracted scenarios from *Restoring Hope* and *Grace for the Broken* are a work of fiction inspired by themes, stories, and ideas. While they may reference or draw from real experiences, figures, or sacred texts, all the characters, interpretations, and events depicted are fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is purely coincidental.

This guide is provided for educational purposes only. The contents are not professional advice. Facilitators should refer to 1800RESPECT or specialist services for support with any domestic and family violence concerns. Volunteer protection applies (NSW Civil Liability Act s64). No participant data will be centrally held. Facilitators to maintain their own group records.

Discussion Guide Contents

Introduction	Page 4
Facilitator Guide	Page 5
For Groups in Faith-Based Environments	Page 9
How to Use this Guide	Page 12
Structure of Sessions	Page 14
Facilitator Introduction to the First Session	Page 15
Session 1.1	Page 17
Session 1.2	Page 19
Session 2.1	Page 21
Session 2.2	Page 24
Session 3.1	Page 26
Session 3.2	Page 28
Session 4.1	Page 31
Session 4.2	Page 33
Ways for Men to Encourage Safer Relationships	Page 35

Introduction

This discussion guide is written for men to facilitate with men who care about the safety and wellbeing of women and children, but who may feel unsure about how to help, where they fit, or what meaningful action looks like when it comes to domestic and family violence.

Many men do not see themselves as violent or abusive yet still feel unsettled by the prevalence of domestic violence in our communities. They love their wives, daughters, sisters, friends, and partners. But when harm happens close to home, within families, workplaces, churches, community or friendship groups, uncertainty often takes over. Is this really my place to intervene? What if I get it wrong? What if I make things worse?

This guide exists to help address that gap.

The discussions in this guide are anchored in selected scenes from *Restoring Hope* and *Grace for the Broken* for a deliberate reason. A story creates a shared reference point that allows men to engage honestly with complex and confronting realities without placing pressure on anyone to disclose personal experiences or identify real people or situations. Using realistic fictional narratives helps keep conversations grounded, focused, and emotionally safe, while protecting anonymity and dignity for everyone in the room. The scenes allow participants to explore behaviour, silence, responsibility, and impact at a slight distance, close enough to feel real, but far enough to prevent conversations from becoming personal, accusatory, or unsafe.

As the guide progresses, the scenes open space for reflection on the ways domestic violence is misunderstood, minimised, or overlooked, and how well-intentioned men can sometimes remain silent or unsure when action is needed. The initial session focuses on men who want to help but don't yet know how. They explore why stepping in can feel risky, how loyalty and discomfort can override safety, and what it means to believe women without turning ourselves into judges or investigators.

Then, sessions introduce a narrative of a group of men attending a behaviour change program, not to invite self-confession, but to deepen understanding of the domestic violence cycle and the patterns that sustain harm. Through this, participants are invited to recognise that domestic violence is not limited to physical acts, but often involves intimidation, coercion, emotional abuse, and control. These are behaviours that thrive in silence and denial. The focus remains on understanding, not diagnosing, awareness, not accusation.

The final session shifts attention toward action. Participants are encouraged to consider how safe men can actively step up by challenging unsafe attitudes, responding appropriately to disclosures, supporting accountability, and helping to shape communities where truth, responsibility, and protection matter more than comfort or reputation.

This guide is not about shaming men, nor is it about rescuing or fixing others. It is about the men having the courage to listen carefully, reflect honestly, and recognise the influence they already carry. Change begins when safe men choose to be more than bystanders and understand that their voices, responses, and silence all matter.

That is where this journey begins.

Facilitator Guide: Supporting Safe Men to Become Part of the Solution

1. Who This Guide Is For

This guide is written primarily for:

- Men who support organisations working with women affected by domestic and family violence
- Men who want to understand how violence occurs and how it can be prevented
- Men who want practical ways to challenge harmful attitudes and support safer communities

It is not a replacement for professional Men's Behaviour Change Programs, nor is it designed to assess or treat men who are demonstrating violent behaviour. Instead, it offers a reflective, educational space for men who want to grow in awareness and be part of the solution.

2. Shift from Self to Awareness

Reflections should be focused around:

- situations they've witnessed
- attitudes that are absorbed
- cultural messages they've heard about masculinity, strength, or loyalty

Helpful language during discussions:

- "What messages have men been taught about this?"
- "What makes stepping in feel risky?"
- "What do we tend to excuse or overlook?"

This keeps discussions relevant without turning the room into a personal disclosure space.

3. Keep the Lens on Influence, Not Guilt

Safe men often underestimate their influence.

Encourage reflections on:

- what men laugh off or stay silent about
- how male loyalty can override safety
- the impact of disbelief or minimisation
- what it communicates when no one intervenes

4. Watch for Defensive Alignment With Harmful Behaviour

Even safe men may instinctively defend “other men” or feel personally accused.

Common responses:

- “Not all men do this.”
- “We don’t know the whole story.”
- “Some women are abusive too.”

Facilitator redirection:

- “It sounds like this is bringing up some discomfort. That’s okay. This space isn’t about labelling people as bad, we’re looking honestly at behaviours and their impact. Let’s stay with that.”
- “We’re not talking about all men, we’re talking about real patterns of behaviour.”
- “Yes, some women are abusive in relationships, but as men we are here to learn how we can help men who are being harmful. If you know any male friends who are feeling unsafe in their relationship, encourage them to contact RESPECT 1800 and to implement safe boundaries for the protection of themselves and their children.”

This keeps the group aligned with purpose rather than debate.

5. Avoid Turning the Group Into a Courtroom

Safe men may want proof, fairness, or full context before believing harm.

Gentle reframes:

- “Believing doesn’t mean we are convicting anyone.”
- “Listening doesn’t mean taking sides.”
- “Supporting safety isn’t the same as judging guilt.”

This helps men understand supportive action without fear of false accusation.

6. Use the Fictional Scenes as the Container

The scenes from *Restoring Hope* and *Grace for the Broken* are the primary discussion anchor.

If conversation drifts into hypotheticals or personal opinions, bring it back to the text. Ask:

- “What did you notice in this scene?”
- “Why might a man respond this way?”

This keeps discussion emotionally safe and focused.

7. Clarify That “Safety” Includes More Than Physical Violence

Safe men often equate domestic violence with physical assault.

Reinforce gently:

- fear, intimidation, control, and coercion are safety issues
- children are impacted even if not directly harmed
- community silence increases risk

Avoid graphic detail; focus on patterns and impact.

8. Prepare Men for the Final Shift to Action

As sessions progress, help men move from concern to responsibility.

Ask:

- “What could stepping up look like in ordinary moments?”
- “Who are the men you have influence with?”
- “What gets in the way of saying something?”

Emphasise:

- small actions matter
- courage is often quiet

9. Maintain Emotional Safety Without Avoiding Depth

Safe men may still feel grief, anger, or discomfort.

Facilitator guidance:

- acknowledge emotion without asking for personal disclosure
- don’t rush to reassurance
- allow silence

Helpful phrasing:

- “It makes sense that this feels heavy.”
- “Awareness can be uncomfortable, that’s part of growth.”

10. End With Responsibility, Not Resolution

Close sessions by reinforcing:

- awareness precedes action
- no one is being asked to “fix” violence alone
- safety is a shared responsibility

Suggested closing:

“Being a safe man isn’t passive. It’s an active choice we need to make.”

A Final Word for Facilitators

You are not leading men toward shame or self-examination of harm. You are leading them toward moral clarity, courage, and responsibility.

Safe men are essential to prevention. When they understand the dynamics of domestic violence, believe women, and refuse silence, communities change.

That is the work this guide is inviting them into.

For Groups in Faith-Based Environments

This discussion guide may be used in church or faith-based settings where participants hold strong beliefs about gender roles, leadership, and family structure. In some contexts, including those shaped by complementarian theology, conversations about domestic violence can trigger defensiveness, confusion, or fear that faith itself is being challenged.

It is important to name early that this guide is not a theological debate about marriage roles, nor is it an attempt to undermine faith, scripture, or the importance of family. Rather, it is a conversation about safety, responsibility, and the use of power. These themes sit at the very heart of Christian ethics.

Key Principles for Facilitators

1. Separate leadership from control

Many men have been taught that “leading” means deciding, directing, or maintaining authority. This guide invites reflection on a different question:

How is leadership expressed when safety, dignity, and freedom are at stake?

Helpful reframes:

- Leadership that instills fear is not biblical leadership.
- Authority that silences or intimidates contradicts the call to love.
- Strength given by God is not for control, but for protection and care.

You are not required to argue theology, simply hold the line that fear and harm are incompatible with faith.

2. Expect Scripture to be used defensively

Some participants may reference verses about submission, headship, forgiveness, or endurance in suffering.

Facilitator guidance:

- Do not debate proof texts.
- Gently redirect to outcomes and impact.
- Ask reflective questions rather than offering rebuttals.

For example:

- “How do we recognise when ‘headship’ becomes harmful?”
- “What does love look like when someone feels afraid?”
- “Would Jesus’ leadership ever rely on fear or intimidation?”

Keep the focus on lived reality rather than abstract interpretation.

3. Address the myth of male responsibility meaning sole authority

A common belief is that men must be “in charge” to keep families safe.

Clarify gently:

- Responsibility does not require dominance.
- Safety grows through mutual respect, accountability, and choice.
- Being responsible includes listening, believing, and stepping aside when harm is present.

4. Guard against spiritual minimisation of harm

Be alert to language that spiritualises or softens abuse, such as:

1. “We’re all sinners.”
2. “Grace covers this.”
3. “Marriage is hard for everyone.”
4. “God hates divorce.”

Facilitator response:

- Acknowledge faith, then return to safety.
- Name that grace never requires enduring harm; biblical repentance always includes turning away from sin and from patterns that cause fear.
- Reinforce that accountability and repentance are inseparable.

A useful statement:

“Forgiveness does not remove the need for truth, safety, or change.”

5. Reassure participants they are not being accused

Faith-based men may fear being labelled abusive simply for holding traditional views.

Name explicitly:

- This guide is for safe men.
- Reflection is not accusation.
- Growth does not equal guilt.

This reassurance helps men stay present rather than shutting down.

6. Hold firm boundaries when safety is threatened

If discussions begin to justify control, dismiss fear, or prioritise reputation over protection, facilitators must intervene clearly and calmly.

You are not being divisive by naming harm.

You are being faithful.

A Note of Encouragement for Faith-Based Facilitators

Some churches have unintentionally protected harm by prioritising unity, forgiveness, or male authority over safety and truth. This guide offers a way forward that does not abandon faith, it actually deepens it.

When safe men learn to use their influence to protect rather than control, faith communities become places of refuge rather than silence.

How to Use This Guide

This discussion guide is designed to be used in small groups of men who are committed to learning, reflecting, and contributing to safer relationships and communities. While it can be used by a range of settings—including community organisations, faith groups, and informal men’s gatherings—its effectiveness depends on the tone and care with which it is facilitated.

Group Size and Format

- Recommended group size: 4–8 participants
- Sessions: 4 sessions, ideally spaced weekly or fortnightly
- Session length: 60–90 minutes

Smaller groups allow for deeper discussion, greater trust, and safer conversations. Each session focuses on a passage from one of the novels, followed by guided reflection questions.

The Role of the Facilitator

The facilitator’s role is not to lecture or provide all the answers, but to:

- Hold a safe, respectful, and accountable space
- Keep discussions focused on behaviour, impact, and responsibility
- Interrupt minimising, denial, or victim-blaming if it arises
- Encourage listening over debating or defending

Facilitators do not need to be experts, but they do need to be prepared to gently challenge harmful assumptions and bring conversations back to the purpose of the guide: reducing harm and increasing safety.

Where possible, facilitators should familiarise themselves with concepts around domestic and family violence, particularly coercive control.

Creating Safety in the Room

Before beginning Session One, it is strongly recommended that the group agrees to some shared expectations, such as:

- Confidentiality (with clear limits if safety concerns arise)
- Respectful listening without interruption
- Reflecting on provided scenes, not discussing other people’s relationships

- Willingness to sit with discomfort
- No justification of violence or abuse

This guide may surface strong emotions, defensiveness, or discomfort. These reactions are normal and can be part of meaningful change when handled with care.

Using the Novel Extracts

The novel passages are included to:

- Create emotional distance that allows honest reflection
- Help participants recognise patterns of harm without feeling they are intruding on lives
- Invite empathy for those affected by violence

Participants are encouraged to:

- Read or listen carefully to the extract
- Notice their own reactions in agreement, resistance, discomfort, recognition
- Reflect on how similar dynamics can appear in real life and communities

The goal is not to analyse the literature, but to use the story as a mirror.

Reflection Questions

The reflection questions are intentionally open-ended. Not every question needs to be answered by every participant. Facilitators may:

- Select a few key questions if time is limited
- Allow silence and reflection before responses
- Redirect discussion if it becomes abstract or detached from real-world impact

Participants should be encouraged to reflect honestly, rather than offering what they think is the “right” answer.

Important Considerations

- If a participant discloses any current violence or risk of harm, facilitators should prioritise safety and refer to appropriate professional services.
- This guide should never be used to pressure any person to forgive, reconcile, or remain in unsafe relationships.
- Change is a process. Awareness is a beginning, not an endpoint.

Structure of Sessions

The following material is designed to be facilitated over 4 sessions. This can be condensed or extended as needed for different group environments.

The intention is for the guide to be used in the following way:

Session 1 –

1.1 – Becoming Men Who Want to Help

1.2 – Invitations To Do the Work

Session 2 –

2.1 – Motivations

2.2 – Men Owning Their Own Mirror

Session 3 –

3.1 – Through Their Partner's Eyes

3.2 – Listening To Truth

Session 4 –

4.1 – Women Who Harm

4.2 – Stepping Up to Help

Facilitator Introduction to the First Session

Facilitator's Sample Opening Script

“Before we begin, I want to acknowledge that this isn’t an easy topic. Talking about domestic and family violence, power, and responsibility can bring up discomfort, resistance, or strong emotions. That is normal. This group isn’t about shaming men or labelling people as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. It *is* about honesty, responsibility, and learning how men can contribute to safer relationships and communities.

Violence against women is not just a women’s issue. It is also a men’s issue, and therefore a community issue. Domestic and family violence affects our neighbours, colleagues, sporting clubs, and community organisations; it is everyone’s business, not just a private family matter. Change only happens when men are willing to talk honestly with other men about attitudes and behaviours that cause harm.

Across Australia, women and children continue to be harmed and killed by men they know, trust, or once loved. Australian Femicide Watch (*The Red Heart Campaign*) * recorded that in 2025 alone, **77 women and 26 children** lost their lives as in Australia as a result of murder or manslaughter from a partner or previous partner. However, beyond this, thousands of women were injured. These are not just statistics; they represent lives cut short, families devastated, and communities left carrying deep and lasting trauma.

And yet, many men remain silent.

Survey data by the *Our Watch* organisation in 2024** revealed that four in five men surveyed said they want to change the alarming rates of violence against women, although 43% said that they personally don’t feel able to do anything. While this discomfort is real, silence and inaction come at a cost. When safe men look away, harmful attitudes and behaviours are allowed to continue unchecked.

Being a safe man is not simply about avoiding violence yourself. It is about being an **active participant** in shaping a world where women, children, and vulnerable people can live without fear, and where safety is not negotiable and accountability is normal. It means being willing to listen, to reflect, to challenge other men, and at times to sit with discomfort for the sake of change.

This discussion guide, *Healthy Men Helping Men to Grow Safer Relationships*, is designed to support men in doing exactly that work.

It’s important to say clearly what this group is, and what it isn’t.

This is not a therapy group, and it’s not a Men’s Behaviour Change Program. It’s a reflective discussion space for men who want to understand how harm happens, how it’s minimised or ignored, and what healthier responses look like.

We’ll be using short passages from novels. These stories give us some distance, they’re not about anyone in this room, but they reflect very real situations. As we discuss them, I invite you to notice your reactions: agreement, discomfort, defensiveness, recognition. Those reactions are often where the most learning happens.

Before we go further, I want us to name what matters most here: **safety**.

The safety of women and children needs to come before our comfort, reputation, or loyalty to other men. If harm or fear is named in our discussions, we don't explain it away or defend it, we take it seriously.

Changing ideas and perspectives can take time. What is expected here is a willingness to listen, to reflect honestly, and to stay open, even when something feels challenging.

Before we begin, it is important that we agree on some shared expectations:

- Confidentiality (with clear limits if safety concerns arise)
- Respectful listening without interruption
- Reflecting on provided scenes, not discussing other people's relationships
- Willingness to sit with discomfort
- No justification of violence or abuse

Are there any concerns about respecting these in our sessions?

If at any point during these sessions you feel overwhelmed, you're free to step out or let me know. Support is available, and safety always comes first.

Let's begin our first session."

* <https://australianfemicidewatch.org/database/>

** [Our Watch | Four in five men want to stop violence against women, but...](#)

1.1 - BECOMING MEN WHO WANT TO HELP

Session Goal: For men to recognise the importance of becoming part of the solution to reduce and stop domestic violence.

Extract from *Restoring Hope* – Chapter 30

- Tom Harvey (55 yr old minister, trained pastoral supervisor)
- Dave Sullivan (44 yrs old, community police officer, married with two young daughters)
- Joe Butler (42 yrs old, community vet, widower, dating a woman who has left an abusive relationship)
- Steve (42 yrs old, married with a 7yr old daughter, has enabled others in coercive control and violence)

Tom spoke to the men he had invited over for a coffee after there was a woman harmed in their community and they did not recognise the offender's behaviours. "It's hard to admit we've been taken in. Harder still to admit we didn't act when we should have. Sometimes we cling to a person's story because the alternative is admitting we were wrong. But pride doesn't protect people, it only protects our egos. And we weren't called to that."

Joe looked up slowly. "So, what do we do now?"

Tom's voice was steady. "We live differently. We stay alert. We listen. We can believe women when they speak. We don't leave them to carry danger or unsafe situations alone. We make sure that this town becomes the kind of place where truth and protection aren't optional."

He leaned back slightly, eyes kind but firm.

"It's not too late to be the kind of men we're called to be. The kind who protect others. Who pursue truth."

Steve glanced at Tom, his face tense. "But how do we know where that line is? I mean every guy raises his voice sometimes. We're not all manipulators."

Tom looked at him steadily. "No, we're not. But we are responsible for how we use our voices. Our strength. And if someone says they were afraid, or that behaviours make them feel unsafe, we have to ask why. Not defend people first."

Steve looked away, jaw tight.

Dave looked around the table. "It's not just about what happened with the man who abused a woman in our community, it's about what kind of community we're building. What kind of men we're encouraging. I've got two daughters. And I want them growing up in a place where men understand that we weren't given strength to control and intimidate, but to carry carefully. To protect. Not exploit."

Reflection Questions

1. Often safe men are concerned when they hear statistics e.g. one in three women are exposed to domestic violence (DV) in their lifetime*. Why then, aren't more men motivated to ask, how can I be part of the solution to reducing DV?
2. What fears or beliefs can stop men from stepping in to help when they witness disrespectful behaviour towards women?
3. Dave states that men were not given greater physical strength to control or intimidate women, but instead to protect them. What beliefs about power or entitlement result in some men wanting to control women rather than to protect them?
4. Do you think that men who perpetrate domestic violence consider the impact on their children when they are violent or controlling at home?

* World Health Organisation, 2024

1.2 - INVITATIONS TO DO THE WORK

Session Goal: To consider what accountability requires, why change is resisted, and how motivation to change can grow.

Extract from *Grace for the Broken* – Chapter 6

- Evan (34 yrs old mechanic, has had multiple AVOs, separated from partner and 6 yr old daughter Lily)
- Alek (32 yrs old labourer, wife left him due to violence, 4 yr old son)

Local Police Officer Dave wasn't looking forward to the afternoon's conversations he needed to have. But he knew nothing in these men's lives would shift until they did.

His first stop was the mechanics, where Evan had been working since his last court appearance.

The clang of tools and the smell of oil filled the shed. Evan was half-buried under the hood of a Ford, hands black with grease. He glanced up when Dave's boots crunched on the concrete, then went back to tightening a bolt that didn't need tightening.

Dave waited until the rattle stopped.

"You said you wanted to see Lily again," Dave began, voice even. "That doesn't start with a judge. It starts with you."

Evan snorted. "So now I've gotta sing kumbaya with a shrink to see my daughter?"

Dave stayed steady. "No. You need to learn how not to scare people. That's what this is about."

Evan's jaw hardened. "People exaggerate."

"Do they?" Dave asked quietly. "You scared a six-year-old and broke her dog's leg. That's not exaggeration. This Men's Behaviour Change Group I told you about could change your life and hers for the better." Dave didn't raise his voice. He didn't need to. The truth had its own weight.

Evan wiped his hands on a rag and muttered, "I'll think about it."

"That's all I'm asking," Dave said. He turned to go. "But thinking won't change anything if you never act."

Inside his sister's house, Alek sat at the kitchen table, arms crossed, eyes wary. His sister moved quietly at the sink, listening but pretending not to.

Dave stayed standing. "There's a group starting up," he said. "It's not soft, but it's honest. If you want to be different, this is one way forward."

Alek looked at him hard. "You think this will make people forget?"

Dave shook his head. "No. I think it'll help you remember who you wanted to be."

Hanna turned then, drying her hands on a tea towel. "He's been trying," she said softly. Dave didn't push. "You've got my number. It's voluntary. But if you come, come ready."

Reflection Questions

1. What makes taking responsibility for harmful behaviour harder than feeling regret?
2. Alek asked, will attending a men's behaviour change group help people forget his harm. Can men be motivated to change even if their partner never forgets what happened?
3. Do you think it is likely that these men's relationships will be fixed by them attending the Behaviour Change group?
4. What real change do you think would be required of a man like Evan to become safe?

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