



Connections and Self-Compassion

How Mothers Heal from Interpersonal Violence



Breaking the Cycle

October 2, 2025



Mothercraft®
Shaping Children's Lives Through Learning



presents:

Innovations in Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Trauma- and Violence-Informed Health Promotion

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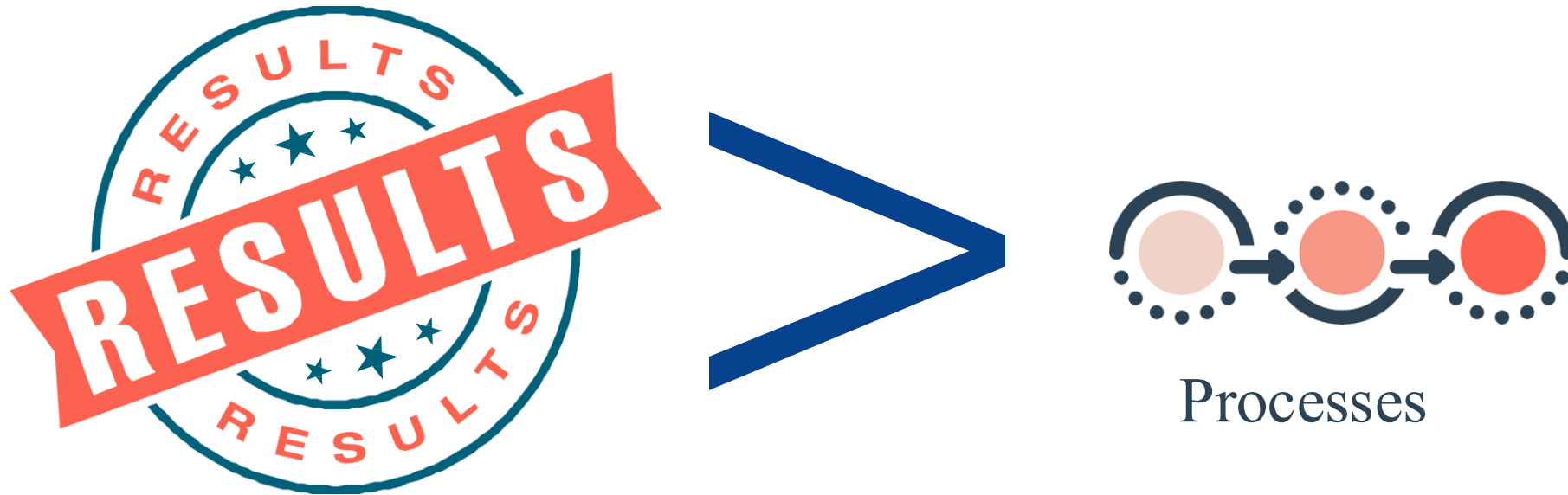
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- ✓ EXPLORE THE STUDY THAT IDENTIFIED THE MECHANISMS BEHIND POSITIVE CHANGES IN WOMEN WHO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE 'CONNECTIONS' INTERVENTION
- ✓ METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY
- ✓ DISCUSS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE NECESSARY INITIAL INTERNAL CHANGES THAT MUST OCCUR BEFORE THE POSSIBILITY OF INCREASING A WOMAN'S SELF-EFFICACY OR SELF-ESTEEM, WHICH OFTEN IS AN INTERVENTION OUTCOME GOAL





(Anderson & Van Ee, 2018; Greeson et al., 2014; McWhirter, 2011)



IN INTERVENTION EVALUATION WORK, MOST FOCUS IS ON OUTCOMES.
LESS ATTENTION IS PAID TO THE PROCESSES THAT FACILITATE / CONTRIBUTE TO CHANGES.

(Micklitz et al., 2023)



- AVAILABLE IN BOTH ENGLISH AND FRENCH
- AVAILABLE IN ADAPTED VERSION FOR ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

- ✓ A 6-TOPIC GROUP INTERVENTION, DEVELOPED BY BTC (MOTHERCRAFT), DESIGNED TO PREVENT OR INTERRUPT INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF IPV THROUGH THE PARENTING RELATIONSHIP
- ✓ AIMS:
 - 1) TO SUPPORT THE HEALTH AND HEALING OF MOTHERS AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS
 - 2) TO ENHANCE MOTHERS' CAPACITY SURROUNDING THEIR ADULT RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR PARENTING RELATIONSHIPS

(ANDREWS ETAL., 2021; LESLIE ETAL., 2016; MOTZ ETAL., 2019)

Ongoing evaluation of Connections using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies shows positive outcomes for the participants.

However, a knowledge gap exists in understanding the key processes or mechanisms that lead to positive intervention outcomes.



THE AIM OF THE STUDY WAS TO LISTEN TO MOTHERS' VOICES
AND REFLECTIONS ON THE KEY PERCEIVED PATHWAYS OF CHANGE
THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN CONNECTIONS

(ANDREWS ET AL., 2021, 2023)



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SETTINGS

Building Connections:
A national dissemination and evaluation initiative of the *Connections* intervention with partnered communities for early childhood program across Canada.

SAMPLING STRATEGY

Voluntary participation: approx. 1 month after *Connections*, mothers who had consented and provided email addresses were contacted to inquire about their interest in participating in a focus group or an interview.



QUALITATIVE APPROACH

- Phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of mothers participating in an IPV intervention program.
- Participants:
 - 224 mothers completed the *Connections*, and 94 had consented and provided email addresses
 - Overall, 43 mothers (19% of total) participated in the interviews or focus groups
 - 18 interviews with 14 mothers (4 of them interviewed twice, as per their completion of *Connections* more than once)
 - 6 focus groups with 29 mothers (between 2 - 8 participants each)

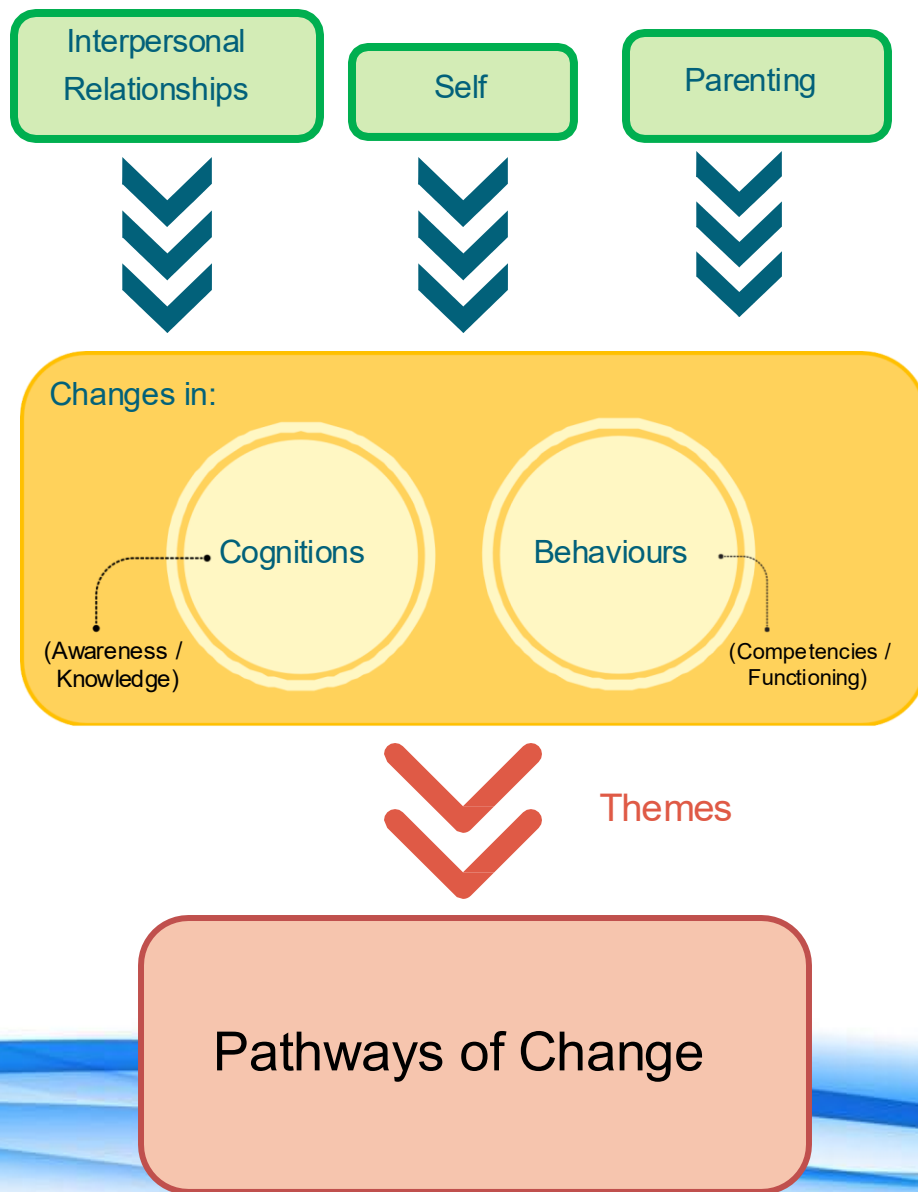
April 2017

December 2019

Semi-structured individual interviews or focus groups.

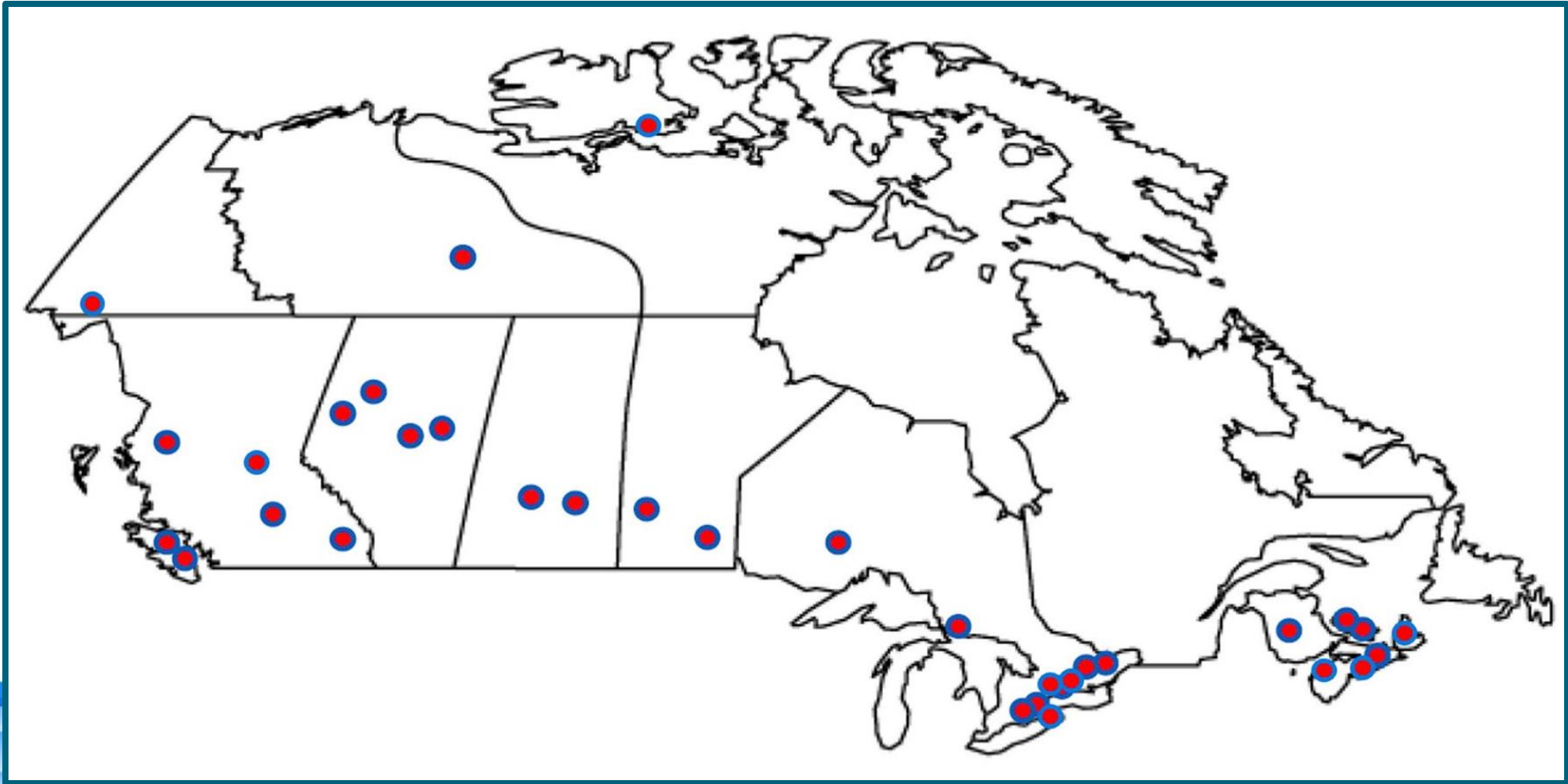
- Mothers were asked broad, open-ended questions, and were encouraged to reflect honestly on their experiences in *Connections*.
- Questions primarily related to any change the women might have experienced in the domains of self, relationships, and parenting.





Data Analysis

- A thematic analysis with a deductive phenomenological approach, capturing the subjective meanings that mothers ascribe to their lived experiences of participating in Connections.
- Themes were developed, then reorganized/clustered into pathways of change. These themes were then integrated into a preliminary model used to illustrate the perceived pathways of change.



Findings

Domain	Type of Change	Change Identified	N
Self	Cognition	Increased empowerment (more confident, strong, in control, affirmed, and hopeful)	8
		Increased self-forgiveness, less blame, shame, and doubt	5
		Increased self-compassion, self-worth, and self-kindness	4
		Reflective about healing left to do	4
	Behaviour	Increased self-care practices and routines (exercise, eating better, asking for support, and reflecting on group materials)	4
		Ended unhealthy relationships	4
		Increased focus on children (focus on self-esteem of child, focus on child instead of partner)	2

Participants reported changes from intervention participation



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Pathways to Change in Self

“Because I think that our partners had made us feel so ashamed about what was happening that I didn’t want to talk about it. But until I was able to start talking about it, then I was able to start forgiving myself... I forgive myself, for the guilt, for the things. I didn’t do anything wrong. But I’m forgiving myself for what’s happened so I can let it go.” (Participant 15)



Domain	Type of Change	Change Identified	N
Relationship	Cognition	Change in expectations, what they deserve in relationships (present and future)	7
		Identifying red flags, realizing current relationship is not healthy	7
		Accepting limitations in relationships, creating boundaries	2
		Understand need to focus on themselves	2
	Behaviour	Improved communication in relationships	4
		Improved boundaries	3
		Started new relationship	2
		Engaged in self-care practices	1

Participants reported changes from intervention participation



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Pathways to Change in Relationships

“The group helped give me more ideas and ...how to take more control, because I always had the idea of how [a healthy relationship] should look like, but not how to actually make it ... Because when I was in the program, I was actually in a relationship and that relationship ended shortly after the program and I kind of took more control ... So I kind of made a point to be like, ‘well no, like you weren’t treating me properly and this is why it can’t happen anymore’ kind of thing.” (Participant 2)



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Domain	Type of Change	Change Identified	N
Parenting	Cognition	Understanding how child has been impacted by IPV	2
		Better understanding of their child (better able to understand child's behaviours, more aware of child's self-esteem)	2
	Behaviour	Developing parenting strategies (better communication with partner; responding positively to child and with more patience; praise, encouragement, and positive feedback for child; and acknowledge and label feelings with child)	10
		Development coping strategies for parenting (regulate own behaviours in their parenting role, self-forgiveness / less self-blame regarding parenting, and mindful parenting)	5
		Focus on self-care and self-esteem (self-care practices for parent and child, strategies to build child's self-esteem)	4

Participants -reported changes from intervention participation



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Pathways to Change in Parenting

“How the prefrontal cortex isn’t nearly developed enough for them to be able to regulate their emotions. That helped me a lot to stay calm when he is having a meltdown and to let him get through... to help me stay calm, which then helped him stay calm.”

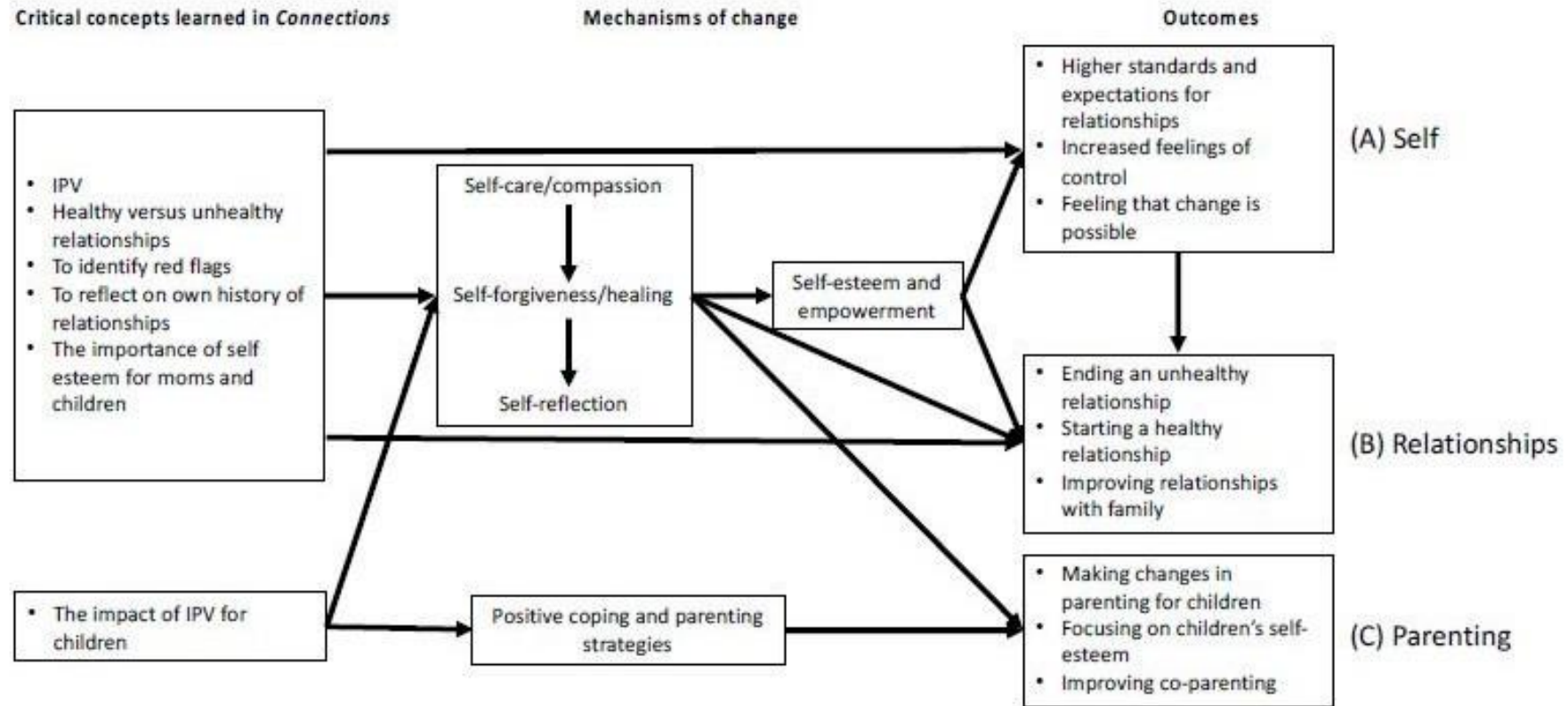
(Participant 3)

“So, I’ve learned how to take the 5-s breath and just calmly talk to my child, and it’s made our relationship so much better. My kids communicate to me so much better than they had before, and we have a better relationship.” (Participant 7)



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Conclusion



Based on the mothers' own words, the pathways to change in themselves and their relationships particularly rely on changes in terms of self-compassion, self-forgiveness, and self-reflection, along with parenting changes being based on learning and practicing positive coping and parenting strategies.



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THANK
you

BTC team

All participants involved in the
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Mothers who bravely shared their
lived experiences



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Thankyou!



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