



Facilitator Instruction Guide

Eco-System of Support: A therapeutic tool for working with LGBTQIA+ SB Mob to explore experiences of sexual violence

Overview

The *Eco-System of Support* is a narrative therapy tool inspired by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing - centring **Country** as a living co-facilitator. It uses the natural elements of Country (like trees, rivers, animals, and mountains) as metaphors to guide reflection, connection, and storytelling about personal support systems, identity, strengths, and experiences of resistance, hope, and joy.

The authors (Sam Ivancsik, Leslie Purcell (Flowers), Locky Bygrave, Annie Monks, David Hunter and Madi Day) acknowledge Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough's Tree of Life methodology and work, which was adapted to create a culturally responsive therapeutic tool for LGBTIQIA+SB mob to explore experiences of sexual violence.

This tool is to be used alongside the Recognising the Drivers of Sexual Violence Framework for LGBTIQIA+SB mob, it can be used individually or within a small group setting.

Introduction to Narrative Approaches and the Eco-system of support

Narrative therapy is a respectful and empowering approach to healing that invites individuals to reclaim their stories and centre their strengths. Rather than seeing problems as located within a person, narrative therapy externalises them - separating the issue from the person - and invites a process of re-authoring life stories in ways that affirm identity and resilience. This is especially aligned with First Nations worldviews, where storytelling is not only a communication tool, but a cultural and spiritual act of survival and strength. As Kaurna Elder and narrative therapist Aunty Barbara Wingard says, "*We assist people to tell our stories in ways that make us stronger.*" For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, stories carry cultural knowledge, guide social behaviours, and connect individuals to Country, Kin, and Ancestors.

Narrative approaches also honour the relational nature of healing in First Nations communities. In contrast to Western therapeutic models that often isolate the self from its social context, narrative therapy recognises that healing happens in relationship - with community, with cultural identity, and with the land. This ecosystem of support is vital for wellbeing. It sees people not in isolation but as part of interconnected systems that include



Country, family, community, and spirit. The use of narrative tools help individuals explore personal and collective experiences, locate resistance and strength, and express complex emotions that may otherwise be difficult to voice.

The billabong was chosen as it is a powerful cultural metaphor within this therapeutic framework. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, billabongs are sacred places - deeply connected to spiritual and clan identity. They represent more than waterholes; they are sites of reflection, connection, and belonging. The billabong is a place where the physical, emotional, and spiritual come together. In therapeutic practice, this image offers a culturally grounded symbol of healing - a place to sit, reflect, feel, and connect. It becomes a container for stories, emotions, and memories, held safely within the layers of Country and culture.

Integrating items from the billabong ecosystem into narrative therapy invites individuals to journey through their own stories with grounding and curiosity. Each item, whether a stone, animal, or ripple in the water, can represent an emotion, event, or experience. By engaging the senses and prompting reflection, participants are supported to make connections between their inner world and the environment around them. The eco-system elements and their associated questions allow for a gentle entry into difficult topics, supporting expression through metaphor when words are hard to find. This kind of practice respects cultural ways of knowing, being, and healing, and reinforces the power of storytelling not just as therapy, but as a way of life.

Purpose

- To help participants reflect on their networks of support and resilience.
- To externalise challenges and lift personal stories of strength, resistance, and hope.
- To nurture LGBTIQA+SB identity, belonging, and agency through storytelling rooted in Country.

Materials Needed

- Large blank paper or canvas with the printed Billabong in the middle
- Markers, pens, paint or natural items (e.g., leaves, flowers, sand, dirt, sticks) for participants to use.
- Copies of reflective prompts and example eco-system of support (optional handout).



- Soft music, nature soundtrack or listening to Country outside (optional).
 - A quiet, comfortable space (ideally a culturally important/ healing area on country)
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Facilitation Steps

1. Welcome & Grounding (10–15 min)

- Acknowledgement or Welcome to Country.
 - Invite participants to take a few breaths, connect with the land beneath them, and reflect on the idea that Country holds us and remembers us.
 - Explain that this session will explore support systems through metaphors in nature, inviting a connection with self, others, and the land.
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2. Introduce the Eco-System Metaphors (10 min)

Walk through each element and its associated reflection question:

- **Flowers - "Who are your chosen family?"**
Represent the people you choose to stand with you - friends, family, chosen family, mentors, ancestors, community.
- **Underground Water Systems – "What are your values?"**
These unseen but essential waters represent the values that nourish your roots and guide your decisions.
- **Billabong Ripples - "What is weighing your spirit down?"**
The ripples on still water show the impact of burdens, grief, or pain that need acknowledgment.
- **Rocks - "What have your acts of resistance been?"**
Solid and enduring, these represent your moments of standing firm, moments of self protection, or surviving.
- **Animals - "What strengths do others see in you?"**
Animals show up with different traits and identities - strength, cleverness, speed, nurture. What do others notice in you?



- **Trees - "What does hope feel like?"**
Trees reach upward with resilience. Describe hope as a feeling, an image, or a sensation.
 - **Mountains - "What brings your spirit joy?"**
Mountains can be awe-inspiring, grounding, or freeing. What uplifts your spirit?
 - **Addition of own symbol - "Is anything missing or need to be added?"**
Listen to your spirit and add any symbol you feel is missing
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3. Creative Reflection (50 min)

Option A: Individual Exploration

- Participants create their own Eco-System of Support landscape on paper.
- Encourage them to draw, write, or use symbols to respond to the seven reflective prompts.
- Provide participants with a hand out of 'example billabong' (see appendix A)

Option B: Group Mapping

- Create a large shared map on butcher paper or canvas.
 - Invite each person to contribute one reflection per element.
 - This builds a collective eco-system and highlights shared experiences.
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4. Story Sharing Circle (Optional, 20–30 min)

- Invite participants to share reflections if they feel safe and ready.
- Use prompts:
 - "Would anyone like to share a flower - someone in your chosen family?"
 - "What's one rock - an act of resistance you're proud of?"
 - "What animal do you think represents you?"
- Respect silence and allow non-verbal forms of sharing (pointing, drawing, etc.)



5. Closing & Grounding (10 min)

- Reflect as a group:
 - What strengths did you see in yourself or others?
 - What part of Country are you taking with you today?
- Invite a closing breath and a moment of stillness with country.
- End with a poem, song, or Dadirri.

Facilitator Tips

- **Know Your Audience** - Understand the identities and needs of the individuals, group or community.
- **Trauma-Informed:** Let participants have choice throughout the activity, allowing them to opt out of any question. Have an additional facilitator present, to provide support available
- **Flexible Use:** This tool works in therapeutic, group, or cultural healing contexts. Adapt as needed, participants may feel additional pieces of country need to be added to their Billabong.
- **Nature Connection:** If indoors, bring in elements of Country - photos, branches, stones, natural items.

Reflection Prompts Recap (Eco-System Map)

Element	Reflection Prompt
Flowers	Who are your chosen family?
Underground Water	What are your values?



Billabong Ripples What is weighing your spirit down?

Rocks What have your acts of resistance been?

Animals What strengths do others see in you?

Trees What does hope feel like?

Mountains What brings your spirit joy?

Acknowledgement

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Appendix A

