

YOU BELONG HERE

CONVERSATIONS ON CHOSEN FAMILY



YOUTH
PROJECT!





THANK YOU

To our chosen families; without you this resource would not be possible. This booklet is dedicated to you – all of our chosen family members who love and accept us for our full & true selves. Thank you for supporting the work we do and helping to guide us through the ups & downs of life.

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PREAMBLE / INTRODUCTION



This resource is the result of group and individual conversations with the Youth Project's Youth Board, composed of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth under the age of 25, and the Youth Project Staff team in Kijipuktuk (Halifax). The conversation was inspired by various ancestors and elders whom participants claimed as thought provoking and liberatory leaders in their lives.

All of the people who contributed to this conversation have unique experiences and perspectives on chosen family. We hope that this resource shows you that there are multiple ways to cultivate familial love in your life.

Without a doubt, chosen families are spaces of change. Toni Cade Bambara explains in her essay, "On the Issues of Roles", that the desire for revolution requires enacting revolutionary relationships. She explains that revolution is not possible through strict conformity to gender roles dictated by the systems we wish to free ourselves from.

“LOVE
THE
POSSIBLE
INTO
BEING”

ALEXIS PAULINE GUMBS

Drawing on this perspective, Alexis Pauline Gumbs asks us to consider how practicing revolutionary love within our relationships can “love the possible into being” (Pleasure Activism, p. 72), how can we build communities and families that reflect the futures we want to see? In our conversations, we witnessed the ways chosen families offered space for creative, imaginative and generative possibilities.

This resource has two explicit purposes. It is designed to provide insight into how chosen families operate as spaces of reclamation, joy, support and generative conflict; as well as a tool to get you thinking about concepts such as intimacy, intergenerational healing, and emotional safety. There are spaces where you are encouraged to reflect on your own chosen family dreams through whatever medium you choose! We offer a gentle reminder to take a break and reach out for support if the content brings up body sensations, feelings or thoughts that feel overwhelming.

CONTENT WARNING:

There are sections of this resource that talk about themes of oppression, such as anti-Black racism and ableism, feelings of abandonment, violence and other topics that may bring up strong or uncomfortable feelings. Remember that it is okay to take space and time to love and care for you!





Two yellow pansy flowers with dark purple centers are positioned in the top right corner of the page. The background is a solid light purple color.


WHAT IS CHOSEN FAMILY?

Chosen family are relationships that foster trust, belonging, and affirmation of a person's whole self. Chosen family is about the transformational power in creating, naming, and deciding what familial care looks like and feels like.

Often, but not always, these relationships are forged outside of families of origin.

Examples of chosen family can include but are not limited to: friends, neighbors, members of the same faith community, pets, trusted adults and more!

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?




There are many different reasons why chosen family is needed and crucial. Chosen family is a radical, care-based response to meeting needs around support, access, and intimacy.


There are numerous reasons why biological and/or families of origin are not safe options – some may have been forced out due to religious abuse, queerphobia, or a breakdown of our family units.

Some may be disconnected as a result of systemic trauma, such as fleeing violence in our homeplaces, environmental racism that makes our homes unsafe, or trans-racial adoption.

Some lack physical proximity, they may be separated due to oppressive borders, cost of travel, or removal from family homes. While this harm can be immense and deeply affecting, fostering self-determined connections that honor unmet needs can be a powerful, healing magic.



HISTORY



There are many different configurations of families, although not all are recognized as such. Black, Indigenous and POC folks have cultivated family structures for generations that are different from the typical nuclear family.

In the 1980s, Kath Weston coined the term “fictive kin”, and wrote a book called *Families We Choose*, where she described the impact of kinship on the lives of queer and trans people. The term chosen family was later adopted by 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, describing relationships strengthened by intentional and ongoing choice rather than connections based solely on “typical” or nuclear family structures.

Creating chosen family often comes from the desire to give and receive care, it is important to name that systemically imposed barriers and oppressive community dynamics can result in unequal access to support, space, and priority. We still deal with realities of harm within our chosen families, and must hold ourselves to practices of loving accountability, self-aware communication, education, and responsibility in these units.

Colonial-western societal norms put a big emphasis on the normalized idea of nuclear, biological and heterosexual family. Societal markers of “success” like raising children, schooling, and home ownership, rely on the assumption that this kind of family is the only natural and real option.

In recent 2SLGBTQIA+ histories, hospitals denied the opportunity for chosen family and queer loved ones to support, comfort, or care for their loved ones during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Systemic and historic oppression like this still continues – many Disability Justice advocates talk about experiencing violence when they are looking for support, often because of an ableist and queerphobic healthcare model. These realities make chosen family relationships hypervisible, up for public examination and often labeled with scorn, contempt and invalidation. When a chosen family meets the state, more often than not the state has failed to recognize the legitimacy of these connections.

However, our love and dreams for collective futures will forever be more powerful than state violence. 2SLGBTQIA+ communities will continue what marginalized peoples have done forever, resisting through relationship building, cultivating joy, and dreaming fuller ways to cherish one another.



IN CONVERSATION: CHOSEN FAMILY

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN FAMILY OF ORIGIN
AND CHOSEN FAMILY FOR YOU?



FAMILIES OF ORIGIN

- RESPONSIBILITY : CARE/CONFLICT ◦
- JOINT STRUGGLE ◦
- FRAGMENTED ◦ SHARING FOOD ◦



... THE DIFFERENCE
WITH CHOSEN FAMILIES...



CHOSEN FAMILIES

UNABASHEDLY

I'M MORE OPEN
TO MYSELF

WITHOUT COMPROMISE

CHANGES &
SHIFTS IN TIME

& IT CHANGES THE WAY
I SEE MYSELF & THE WORLD





"WHAT WORDS/IMAGES/
FEELINGS/COLORS COME
TO MIND WHEN WE TALK
ABOUT CHOSEN FAMILIES?"



DISABILITY JUSTICE, PRINCIPLES & CARE WEBS

- What is a care web?



- Care webs can help you to show up as you are, while also being accountable to the people in your chosen family.
- An example mentioned in our conversation was a care web of chosen crip family.

Read more about care webs in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi-Piepzna Samarsinha

INTERSECTIONALITY
LEADERSHIP OF THE MOST IMPACTED
ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITIC
COMMITMENT TO CROSS MOVEMENT ORGANIZING
RECOGNIZING WHOLENESS
S U S T A I N A B I L I T Y
COMMITMENT TO CROSS DISABILITY SOLIDARITY

10
PRINCIPLES OF
DISABILITY
JUSTICE

INTERDEPENDENCE
COLLECTIVE ACCESS
COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

- SINS INVALID 2015



HOW DO WE TAKE CARE OF US?

MEETING CHOSEN FAMILIES' NEEDS



HOW DO WE TAKE CARE OF US?


MEETING CHOSEN FAMILIES' NEEDS





- Ensuring people's basic needs are met – food, shelter...
 - Supporting chosen family members' basic human needs can be a way that we show care.
 - Examples: making food, keeping company, listening to understand, giving space for changing capacities, (ex. mental health), accompanying them to doctor's appointments, decompressing, offering tangible ways to support in line with your own boundaries, writing letters, sending memes.

- What are ways that you meet the needs of your chosen family?
- What are the needs that you have met by your chosen family?
- What does it feel like in your body when you say yes?



- 
- In kinship and chosen family why do we find it hard to reach out and ask for what we need?
 - Opening up to chosen family about your needs can be difficult and is important!
 - Your needs are also community needs.
 - How do you communicate your needs to chosen family?

- 
- 
- Listening to others about the care that they need/want
 - Making space for discussion of what makes people feel comfortable, safe, loved
 - Offering a non-judgmental ear
 - Creating boundaries as an act of love and respect
 - Acknowledging the ability to step away or step back
 - Making space for generative conflict (conflict can be a space where solutions can be found)



CONSENT:

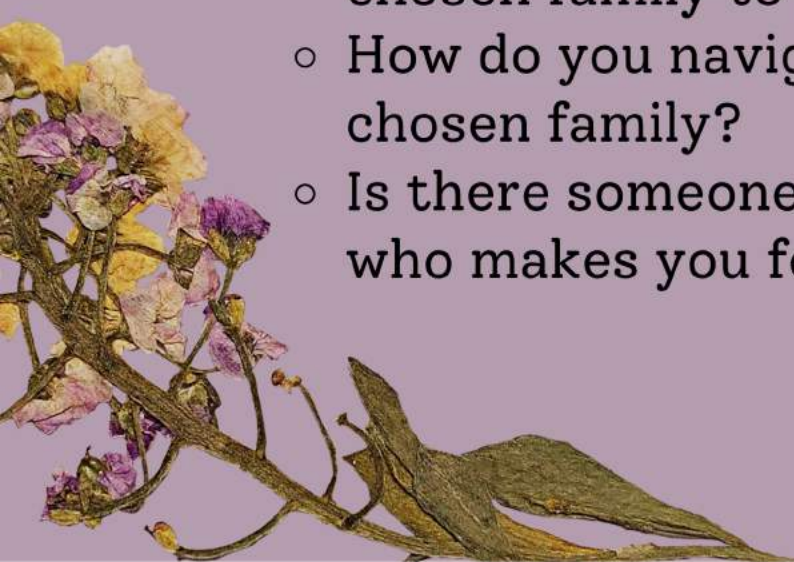
A SPACE TO SAY YES! AND NO!





WHAT IS CONSENT?

- Consent is the foundation for all relationships
- Consent is variable, and making space for people to say no is powerful.
- Our conversations talked about consent with chosen families through the ability to dip out, or unchoose, and to feel safe to say no.
- “Your no makes way for your emphatic yes”
– adrienne maree brown
- Not assuming we know how each other feels
– checking in

- 
- What expectations do you have in your chosen family to practice consent?
 - How do you navigate consent with your chosen family?
 - Is there someone in your chosen family who makes you feel safe?

CONSENT IS



F REELY GIVEN
R EVERSIBLE
I NFORMED
E NTHUSIASTIC
S PECIFIC



"BOUNDARIES

ARE THE

DISTANCE

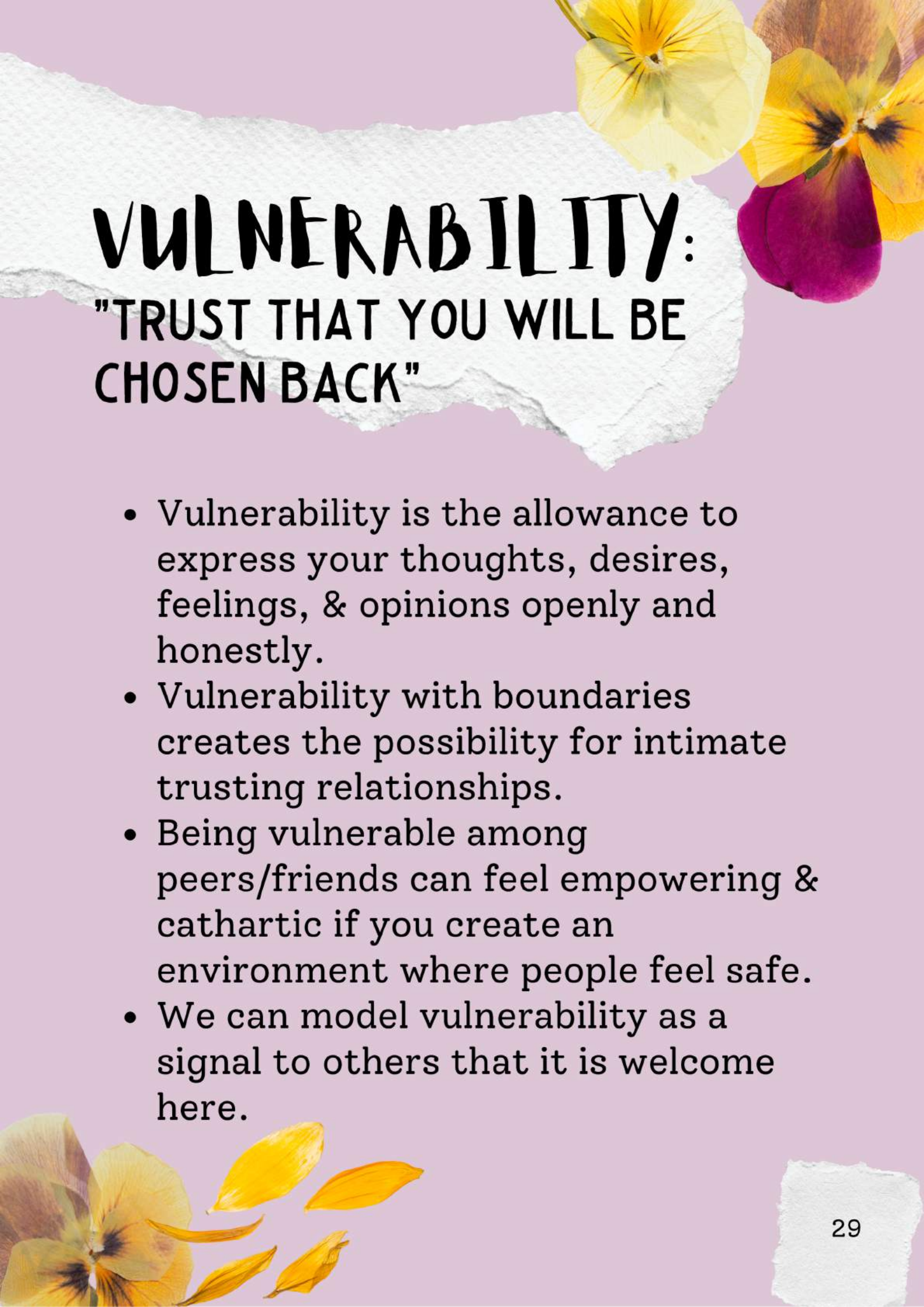
AT WHICH I CAN

LOVE YOU
AND ME

SIMULTANEOUSLY"

~ PRENTIS HEMPHILL ~

- We need to hold ourselves and each other accountable and keep each other safe.
 - When we cause harm, chosen family can be people who hold us accountable in a loving way.
 - We keep each other safe by checking in, and cultivating spaces for conversation when things are hard.
 - Coming to solutions as a group, “what will keep us safe?”



VULNERABILITY:

"TRUST THAT YOU WILL BE CHOSEN BACK"

- Vulnerability is the allowance to express your thoughts, desires, feelings, & opinions openly and honestly.
- Vulnerability with boundaries creates the possibility for intimate trusting relationships.
- Being vulnerable among peers/friends can feel empowering & cathartic if you create an environment where people feel safe.
- We can model vulnerability as a signal to others that it is welcome here.

WHERE ARE YOU
HOLDING SPACE
FOR OTHERS
VULNERABILITY?



WHERE ARE
SAFE PLACES
FOR YOU TO
PRACTICE
VULNERABILITY?

IMAGINE
WRITE
DRAW



IMAGINE
WRITE
DRAW



Move at the Speed of Trust



- adrienne maree brown



HEY PAL-
DID I OVERSTEP IN
OUR CONVO ABOUT
YOUR PARENTS?

I WAS UPSET THAT
YOU FORGOT THAT I
DON'T LIKE TO TALK
ABOUT MY
BIOLOGICAL FAMILY

THAT HURT

THANK YOU
FOR BRINGING
IT UP.

I'M SORRY-
I SHOULD NOT HAVE
DONE THAT. I WILL
BE MORE CAREFUL
& RESPECT YOUR
BOUNDARIES






I APPRECIATE
YOUR APOLOGY

IT MIGHT TAKE
ME A MINUTE TO
FEEL READY TO
HANG OUT AGAIN

I RESPECT THAT

IS IT OK IF I
CHECK IN WITH
YOU NEXT WEEK?

THAT
SOUNDS
GOOD.



Loving accountability looks at changing ways we are in relationships, while centering community values of safety, connection and interdependence.

Sometimes, conflict can feel scary and we avoid it out of fear of being hurt.

Transformative Justice activist Mariame Kaba says “that conflict is a relationship” meaning that a conflict can be a space where we can build trust and grow together.

Even when we mess up there is room for repair in liberation.







THIS IS SO YUMMY!

I NEEDED TO GET OUT OF THE HOUSE!

ME TOO...



COME HANG!
I WILL COOK.
DM IF YOU NEED RIDES.
BRING YOUR KIDS.
BE HOW YOU ARE.
WEAR WHAT'S COMFY.
LOVE YOU CHOSEN FAM. ♡♡



IT'S SO GOOD TO CATCH UP.





WILL YOU LEND
ME AN OUTFIT
FOR MY EVENT?

WILL YOU
HELP ME
SHOP FOR A
BINDER?

WILL YOU
EDIT MY
PAPER?

WILL YOU
COOK WITH ME?
I'D LIKE TO
LEARN MORE.



DO YOU WANT
HELP WITH YOUR
MAKE UP?

WOULD YOU LIKE
ME TO COME WITH
YOU TO YOUR
APPOINTMENT?

I CAN HELP YOU
RE-POT YOUR PLANTS
IF YOU WANT...





WHAT SEEDS ARE YOU
PLANTING FOR CHOSEN FAMILY?
YOUR NEEDS & DESIRES

