



## Frequently Asked Questions Therapist Specific

**We invite therapists to review the Participant FAQs specific to the BreakThrough and Wisdom Years for additional information.**

### **1. Who attends the BreakThrough Weekend?**

This weekend is attended by men from all backgrounds regardless of race, age, religion, sexual orientation, or economic status. The ages of the men who attend this weekend typically range from the late 20's to the 70's, minimum age is 21.

### **2. Who attends the Wisdom Years Weekend?**

This weekend is attended by men who are at least 50 years old and from all backgrounds regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, or economic status. The ages of the men who attend this weekend typically range from the early 50's into the 70's. There is no maximum age.

### **3. What is the difference between the BreakThrough and the Wisdom Years Weekends?**

The BreakThrough Weekend is open to adult men of all ages and is concerned with broader life issues. The Wisdom Years weekend is specifically designed for men over 50 who wish to explore the issues of aging, retirement, death, loss, and renewal. These weekends are not mutually exclusive, and many of our graduates have attended both weekends.

### **4. Who refers men to the Weekends?**

Most participants are referred to us from a therapist, marriage counselor, or life coach. Others are referred by previous participants, partners, spouses, relatives, friends, or loved ones.

### **5. Is this therapy?**

No. Victories does not offer psychological or psychiatric services, and our programs are no substitute for the ongoing services of a mental health professional. We do see our weekends as an excellent complement to psychotherapy because they offer men the benefit of a peer-support group that can help them further practice the tools of communication, honesty, accountability, and emotional intelligence.

### **6. Why do men attend these weekends?**

Men attend these weekends for all different reasons. Some men want to change something in their life, but they don't know where or how to start. Some men have done previous personal growth experiences and want to try something new. Some men want to connect with other men in order to feel less isolated. Some men want to learn how to better communicate with their loved ones. Each man comes with a different story.

### **7. How do I know if a client is ready to attend a weekend?**

Attending a weekend that addresses ingrained attitudes or beliefs can be physically and emotionally challenging even when it occurs in a safe and supportive environment. We do offer a screening criteria list that may help you determine if a client has the ability to be open, honest, and stable on the weekend.

Before the weekend, we send participants a pre-weekend questionnaire that asks them about their medical, mental, and emotional health. Participants are also asked to list their therapist and counselor. If we find that a registered participant has potential concerns, such as addiction issues, past or recent suicide attempts or ideation, etc, we will ask for their permission to contact their mental health professional, if the contact details are provided. We will then have a conversation about these issues to determine if the man is ready for the weekend. Weekend Leaders always have the final say in whether a man with potentially serious issues will be permitted to attend the weekend.

Victories weekend leaders are always available to speak with referring professionals to answer questions about the program and the appropriateness of referrals.

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### **8. Are these weekends safe for Gay and Trans men?**

Yes. In every program, Victories welcomes and celebrates all who identify as men across the whole spectrum of sexuality. Our gay, trans, and straight graduates have reported how healing it was to participate together in an experience that reduces fear and promotes mutual respect. Sexuality is central to the identity of all men and frequently arises as a topic on weekends. If you wish to discuss this further, please call the office and ask to speak with one of the leaders.

### **9. Is this weekend appropriate for someone in a 12 step program?**

Victories programs are not specifically designed to address the issue of addiction. This weekend is not appropriate for men who are struggling with active addiction. However, men who are in a 12 step program and/or are working with a therapist or counselor will find the weekend to be an additional space of compassion and support. In completing the forms for the weekend, men are asked a series of questions regarding substance use and abuse. If we find that a registered participant has potential addiction issues, we will ask for their permission to contact their mental health professional, if the contact details are provided.

### **10. As a male therapist/counselor, can I attend the weekend as a participant?**

We understand that before you refer a man to the weekend, you may want to experience it for yourself. Male mental health professionals are invited to attend the BreakThrough or Wisdom Years Weekend at a discounted rate of \$250. Individuals with LCSW, LCPC, LMFT, and licensed Psychologists are eligible to receive 15 CEUs for attending the weekend. There is an additional \$25 fee for a CEU certificate.

### **11. How is confidentiality addressed on the weekend?**

All men attending the weekend — participants and staff — are asked to sign a confidentiality agreement stating that they will not disclose the statements or experiences of another man. Participants are always free to discuss their own feelings, insights, experiences, etc. with whomever they choose. The leadership team is obligated to maintain confidentiality except in the case of an imminent threat of harm to self or others. The agreement also contains an acknowledgement that the structure and components of the training arc the property of Victories of the Heart and may not be copied or used without written permission.

### **12. What happens on the BreakThrough Weekend?**

All activities occur in the context of a group of approximately 22-28 men, consisting of about 18 participants and 10 staff. The weekend incorporates communication exercises, journaling, role-playing, and discussions. After completing this weekend, men find greater understanding and compassion for themselves and others. The program enables men to explore underlying core issues of depression, abandonment, betrayal, abuse, loss, shame, guilt, low self-esteem, and powerlessness. While this program is serious, humor and laughter play an important part throughout the weekend.

Friday night's program begins with a discussion of safety and confidentiality. We remind the men that their participation in any of our processes is voluntary and that they can choose not to participate without being pressured or shamed. Friday is devoted to communications exercises and the chance to explore what they wish to begin to change about themselves. Saturday's activities begin with an invitation to identify issues that he wants to face. The rest of the day is primarily role-playing exercises that allow him to examine his road blocks and provide him with the insight and emotional tools to begin to breakthrough.

Shame, guilt, and secrets are the subject of Sunday morning's processes. It is here that men confront the deeper issues within themselves and begin to understand and heal the pain they may have caused others. Men complete this exercise with greater compassion for themselves and others.

The weekend concludes with a discussion of the return home and other opportunities to continue the work of the weekend. The men are reminded of their agreement regarding confidentiality, but encouraged to share their own feelings and experiences with their loved ones at an appropriate time and place.

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### **13. What happens on the Wisdom Years Weekend?**

All activities occur in the context of a group of between 20-26 men, consisting of up to 18 participants and 8 staff. The environment is comfortable, safe, and private. On this weekend, men have the chance to learn how to communicate deeply and honestly, to explore the most important issues they face at this stage of their lives, to identify what may be blocking them from moving in the direction they really want to go, and to learn how to emerge into greater fulfillment, satisfaction and meaning. While the work we do with each other can be very serious, our activities also include music, song, and ample doses of good-natured humor.

Friday night's program begins just before dinner with introductions, some thoughts about what it means to have reached this age and the coming years of our lives, and a discussion of safety and confidentiality. After dinner, the balance of the evening is devoted to a variety of interesting and heartfelt exercises in both a large and small group setting. Men have the chance to think "out of the box," learn how to communicate deeply and honestly, and explore the most important issues they face at this stage of their lives.

Much of Saturday's work happens in small groups of up to six participants and two experienced staffers. We create a safe place where they can learn from each other about the important issues of aging – whether related to health, retirement, occupation, intimacy, or any other question that uniquely affects men in the second half of adult life. We also explore our feelings about death. Saturday typically ends with a campfire, singing, joke telling, or simply quiet conversation in an unstructured setting.

After breakfast on Sunday, we discuss how to take home what we've learned about ourselves on the weekend and turn our intentions into reality. We acknowledge the work done by each man and discuss opportunities for continuing the work of the weekend, including participation in a personal growth group (described below). After lunch, the weekend concludes with a farewell ceremony. The men are reminded of their agreement regarding confidentiality, but are encouraged to share their own feelings and experiences with their loved ones as deeply and openly as possible.

### **14. What happens after the weekend?**

After the weekend, the participants are encouraged to continue with the Personal Growth Group that forms. Victories will provide trained facilitators for six months, and we recommend that participants make a six-month commitment to the group process. The group will meet every other week for three hours. After the facilitation period, most groups continue meeting on their own; many Victories groups have been meeting for five, ten, even twenty years. There is a modest additional fee for participation in the group.

### **15. Are there other opportunities for men to participate, other than a weekend program?**

We understand that men may want to get to us, to have a "taste" of a program before doing a full weekend. Our Open Circle is a support group for men that is held in Evanston (every Monday) and Oak Park (twice monthly). These drop-in circles give men a chance to share their current struggle and support other men. No registration is required in order to attend. More information on the Open Circles is available online.

We also hold Introduction to Victories sessions throughout the year. These informational sessions are led by weekend leaders and staff and give men (and women) a chance to ask any questions about the weekends.

All are welcome to attend our Weekend Celebrations, which are held the week after every BreakThrough Weekend. These celebrations give men a chance to hear from recent participants about their weekend experiences, as well as meet other people in the Victories community.

### **16. Who started Victories?**

This program was started in 1985 by two psychotherapists, Bob Mark and Buddy Portugal. Their personal and professional experiences led them to believe that men were seeking deep, honest, and meaningful relationships. Our weekends were developed out of this belief, giving men a space to work together as they encounter life's surprises and challenges.

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