

SESSION 1 COURSE NOTES SEEING CLEARLY – RECOGNISING EARLY SIGNS OF GBV, BULLYING, COERCIVE CONTROL & FAMILY STRESS SPILLOVER

Hi there,

Welcome to your easy-to-follow notes for Session 1. Think of these as your friendly companion for today's learning, whether you read them before we gather, keep them open during the session, or look back at them afterwards. They're written in a simple, conversational way, just like we're chatting together.

This session is about sharpening the most powerful skill we have: noticing early. Not as experts or investigators, but as ordinary South Africans who care about the children and families in our workplaces, schools, and communities. When we see clearly and act early, we often prevent bigger problems before they grow. This is practical ubuntu in action; "I am because we are." We look out for one another's children as our own.

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Identify at least five early, often subtle warning signs across home, work and community settings.
- Understand how family stress and workplace pressure can spill over and increase risks to children and teens.
- Recognise the link between early noticing and protecting vulnerable children in South Africa's real context.

These are practical skills you can use the same day, whether you're a team leader in a factory, a teacher, a parent balancing work and home, a colleague in an office, or a community member who wants to make a difference.

BEFORE WE BEGIN – A QUICK PRIVATE REFLECTION (5 QUESTIONS)

Take two minutes now to answer these in your head or on a scrap of paper. There are no right or wrong answers, this is simply to help you see where your thinking is at and get the most from our time together.

1. What is one early change you've noticed in someone at work or at home that made you wonder if they were okay?
2. Do you think pressure at work can affect how patient or present a parent is with their children at home? Why or why not?
3. In your community or workplace, how do people usually show they care for each other's children or teammates?
4. Can a child be affected by adult stress or tension even when there is no physical violence happening in front of them?
5. Right now, how confident do you feel spotting subtle signs of controlling behaviour or bullying in everyday situations?

(Rate yourself 1–5, where 1 is “not confident at all” and 5 is “very confident”.)

Hold onto your answers. You'll be surprised how much clearer and more confident you feel by the end of the day.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN SESSION 1

We keep things interactive, emotionally safe, and hopeful. Participation is completely voluntary, you can listen, observe, or step out at any time. No one is asked to share personal stories.

Here's how the session flows:

- We start with a powerful 5-minute introduction video featuring real South African voices and situations (a factory supervisor in Gauteng, a teacher in the Eastern Cape, a mother in the Western Cape). It shows you exactly what you'll gain and why early noticing protects children.
- A short pair chat about what stood out.
- Clear input on the South African context, real examples, and the early signs we can all learn to recognise.
- One hopeful story from a real workplace that shows the difference one person's noticing can make.
- A simple, steadying breath together (the kind many of our elders used before important family conversations) to help us stay clear and compassionate.
- Pair work on two realistic South African scenarios, one from a workplace, one from family or community life.
- A group debrief where we share insights (only what feels comfortable).
- Three quick verbal questions to lock in the learning.
- A warm close and transition to the next session.

Everything is designed to feel safe and practical. We focus on hope and solutions, never on blame or graphic detail.

THE HEART OF SESSION 1: WHY EARLY NOTICING MATTERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Recent national studies show that around one in three South African women aged 18 and older have experienced physical violence in their lifetime. Behind every number are real families, real colleagues, and real children who feel the effects.

The encouraging truth is that most difficult situations begin with small, early changes, shifts we can notice if we train our eyes and hearts. When we see clearly and check in early, without judgment or jumping to conclusions, we often prevent escalation. This protects children and strengthens families in the true spirit of ubuntu.

Here are some of the early signs that research and lived experience across our country highlight. We'll explore them with practical, everyday examples.

BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL SHIFTS IN ADULTS

Someone who was usually warm and engaged becomes withdrawn, anxious, or suddenly very quiet. They may avoid eye contact, cancel plans often, or seem fearful or overly compliant around one particular person.

Example: A usually chatty team member in the factory now keeps their head down and avoids the morning jokes.

CHANGES IN CHILDREN

Children may become more clingy, withdrawn, aggressive, or show sudden changes in schoolwork, drawings, or sleep. They might flinch at unexpected touch or seem afraid to go home.

Example: A normally confident child at school starts having nightmares or clings to the teacher at pickup time.

WORKPLACE AND PERFORMANCE SIGNS

A reliable team member starts arriving late, making uncharacteristic mistakes, or seeming distracted and exhausted. This happens in factories, offices, schools, clinics, and retail - anywhere people work under pressure.

Example: A shift worker's quality drops and they seem exhausted every morning, even though they used to be steady and reliable.

RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS AND CONTROL

One person in a relationship or household seems to make all the decisions, about money, movements, who the other can see or speak to. There may be put-downs disguised as jokes, or the other person appears isolated from friends, family, or support.

Example: A colleague's partner controls every rand they earn and threatens consequences if they speak up.

FAMILY AND WORKPLACE STRESS SPILLOVER

Many South African families and workplaces face real economic pressures, long hours, job insecurity, or shift work. This stress often travels home as shorter tempers, less emotional energy for children, or arguments little ones overhear. Family worries can affect concentration and safety at work. It is all connected. When we notice the signs early, without jumping to conclusions, we can offer a caring check-in or connect someone to support before children carry more of the burden than they should.

A HOPEFUL SOUTH AFRICAN STORY

Let me share a story from a manufacturing plant in Gauteng. Lerato, a team leader, noticed that Bongani, one of her operators and a young father, had changed. He arrived late more often, his work quality slipped, and he stopped joining the usual morning jokes with the team. He avoided eye contact.

Lerato didn't accuse or pry. One quiet afternoon she simply said, "Bongani, I've noticed things seem heavy lately. If you ever want to talk over a cup of tea, my door is open, no judgment."

Two weeks later he came to her. His partner was controlling every rand he earned and threatening to take the children if he spoke up. With the company's confidential support and a warm referral to a local family organisation, they received help early. Today Bongani is back to being the steady team member he always was, and his little ones are in a safer, more stable home.

One gentle check-in, rooted in care, made the difference. That is the power of seeing clearly.

THE CENTRING PAUSE

Before we move into practising together, we'll take one steady breath together, in through the nose, out through the mouth. This simple pause helps us stay clear-headed and compassionate, just as many of our elders did before important family or community conversations. It's a small, practical tool you can use anytime you feel pressure rising.

YOUR PAIR ACTIVITY

You'll work in pairs on two short, realistic South African scenarios, one from a workplace and one from a family or community setting. You'll discuss what signs you notice, what might be happening underneath for the adults and any children involved, and what early, caring noticing could achieve. Observers are welcome and often give the best insights. No one has to share personal stories.

AFTER SESSION 1 – WHAT YOU TAKE WITH YOU

You will have strengthened your ability to see clearly, the foundation for everything we build today. You'll understand how early noticing connects directly to protecting children in our workplaces and communities. And you'll be ready for Session 2, where we learn five safe, practical options for stepping up when we notice something concerning.

Remember: Your Certificate of Attendance and the full resource pack (with more examples, phrase ideas, action-plan templates, and national support numbers) will be emailed to you after the entire workshop. Everything is created professionally and sent directly to the email address you provided. No printing is required from you.

You have taken an important first step today. Thank you for the care and openness you're bringing.

10 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SESSION 1

1. **What if I notice something but I'm not 100% sure it's GBV, bullying, or coercive control?** That's completely normal and exactly why we start with "seeing clearly." You don't need to diagnose or be certain. Noticing a change and offering a gentle, non-judgmental check-in is often enough to open a door. Session 2 will give you safe, practical options for what to do next.
2. **Is noticing the same as interfering in someone's private life?** Not at all. In our South African culture we have always looked out for one another's children and families. Early, respectful noticing is caring, it prevents escalation and shows the person they are not alone. It is ubuntu, not interference.
3. **How can stress at work really affect children at home?** When adults are exhausted, short-tempered, or distracted by pressures, they have less emotional energy for their children. Little ones might overhear arguments, receive less warm attention, or feel the tension in the home. Early support for the adult often means more stability and connection for the child.

4. **Can children show signs of family stress even when there is no violence happening in front of them?** Yes, absolutely. Children are very sensitive to changes in the adults around them, a parent who is suddenly withdrawn, less patient, or carrying heavy worry. These can show up as clinginess, aggression, sleep changes, trouble at school, or drawings that reflect tension.
5. **What's the difference between coercive control and normal disagreements in a relationship?** Normal disagreements involve mutual respect and the possibility of compromise. Coercive control is a pattern where one person consistently makes all decisions about money, movements, friends, or work, often with threats, isolation, or put-downs. The other person often seems fearful or overly compliant. It is a pattern, not a one-off argument.
6. **I work in a busy factory, office, or school — will I really have time to notice these things?** The beauty of early signs is that they often appear in everyday interactions: how someone greets the team in the morning, their energy levels during the day, or small changes in behaviour you already see. It doesn't require extra time, it's about training your eyes to notice what is already there.
7. **What if the person I notice is my manager or someone senior? Does that change what I should do?** It can feel trickier, but the principle stays the same: notice clearly and choose the safest next step. You are never expected to confront anyone directly, especially if there is a power difference. Documenting safely or speaking to HR or a trusted colleague can be appropriate options. Your safety and the other person's safety always come first.
8. **Why is early noticing especially important in South African communities and workplaces?** Because we face real economic pressures, shift work, and strong family and community ties. When one person struggles, it ripples outward to children, teammates, and neighbours. Early noticing and caring action build the protective village around our children and reduce risks such as increased vulnerability or family breakdown.
9. **Will I be asked to share personal or traumatic stories during the session?** No. Participation is completely voluntary. You can listen, observe, or share only general thoughts if you wish. We focus on practical skills and hopeful stories, never on anyone's personal trauma. The space is designed to feel safe and empowering for everyone.
10. **How does learning to notice early signs today help reduce teen pregnancy risks or child vulnerability later?** When adults notice stress or controlling patterns early and respond with care, families often get support sooner. Children grow up with more stable, emotionally available caregivers. Protective adults around teens model healthy relationships and reduce isolation — both important factors in lowering risks of early pregnancy and increased vulnerability.

Thank you for the care, thoughtfulness, and courage you are bringing to this session. By sharpening our ability to see clearly, we become part of the solution for South Africa's children and families, one small, hopeful step at a time.

See you in the room. You're already making a difference by being here.