



# ICCT2025 Antwerp 27-28-29 October 2025 International Conference Contextual Therapy

The need for connection. Relationship challenges in today's world.

---

## Jaap van der Meiden – keynote speaker

### Looking the beast of the past in the eyes.

#### Summary:

The emergence of couple and family therapy marked a true paradigm shift in the field of psychotherapy, and its relevance has only become more evident over time. One of the pioneers of these relationship-oriented approaches is Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, known for his contextual therapy. While he gained recognition primarily for his focus on loyalty—his first publication, *Invisible Loyalties*, was well received—he also introduced another important concept: exoneration. This concept, closely related to forgiveness, focusses on the restoration of relationships in which injustice has occurred. However, contextual theory makes a fundamental distinction between exoneration and forgiveness. Earlier this year, an article on this topic was published that explores this distinction in more depth (Van der Meiden, 2025).



Despite the undeniable value of restoring relationships, exoneration and forgiveness took a long time to receive more attention in psychology and family therapy. Even today, the question remains whether contemporary therapists actively engage with and are proficient in guiding clients through the processes of exoneration and forgiveness.

This very question is at the core of this lecture. After a brief outline of the differences and similarities between exoneration and forgiveness, I will present our research in which we interviewed 20 contextual therapists and 20 systemic therapists to explore whether and how they incorporate exoneration and forgiveness in their therapeutic work.

The lecture will begin with a brief outline of the differences and similarities between exoneration and forgiveness. This will be followed by an exploration of our findings regarding whether and how contemporary contextual and systemic therapists integrate these concepts into their practice. Ultimately, the lecture will lead to key insights and, as an extension of this, important considerations for the further development of a guideline that can support therapists in incorporating exoneration and forgiveness into the process of restoring relationships after serious injustice.

**Presenter:**

Jaap van der Meiden (1960) started out as a social worker. In 1995 he followed a one-year Masterclass Contextual Therapy by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, organized by Hahneman University Philadelphia (nowadays Drexel) in collaboration with University of Applied Sciences Amsterdam. In 2014 he founded the Institute Contextual Approach, part of the Ede Christian University of Applied Sciences, with the aim of promoting the contextual approach through education, development and research. In 2018, Jaap and colleagues organized the ICCT 2018 in Ede, the Netherlands, after which a biennial cycle of conferences started. He obtained his PhD in 2019 on the relevance and applicability of contextual theory for therapy. To this day, Jaap is still fully engaged in contextual therapy as a researcher, systems and contextual therapist, supervisor, trainer, speaker and author.

**Publications in English:**

- van der Meiden, J., Noordegraaf, M., & van Ewijk, H. (2017). Applying the Paradigm of Relational Ethics into Contextual therapy. Analyzing the practice of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 44(3), 499–511. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12262>
- van der Meiden, J., Noordegraaf, M., & van Ewijk, H. (2019). How Is Contextual Therapy Applied Today? An Analysis of the Practice of Current Contextual Therapists. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 41(1), 12–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-018-9467-9>
- van der Meiden, J. (2019). Where Hope Resides. A Qualitative Study of the Contextual Theory and Therapy of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and its Applicability for Therapy and Social Work. University of Humanistic Studies.
- van der Meiden, J., Verduijn, C., Noordegraaf, M., & van Ewijk, H. (2020). Strengthening Connectedness in Close Relationships: A Model for Applying Contextual Therapy. *Family Process*, 59(2), 346–360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12425>
- van der Meiden, J., Noordegraaf, M., & van Ewijk, H. (2020). Relational ethics as enrichment of social justice: Applying elements of contextual therapy to social work. *Qualitative Social Work*, 19(1), 125–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325018800383>
- van der Meiden, J., Lander, A., & Simon, V. (2024). Towards a fuller understanding of the healing of childhood parental wounds: An international study of adult children’s forgiveness. “No matter how deep the hurt.” *Journal of Family Studies*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2024.2332347>
- van der Meiden, J. (2025). Is the exoneration-forgiveness distinction in contextual therapy evident in practice and what can we learn from it. *Family Process*2, 64: e70019. <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1111/famp.70019>