

BEYOND THE MEDICAL MODEL:
SOUL EXHAUSTION & SOUL CARE

SARAH GAER, MA

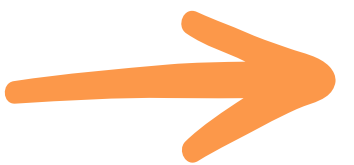


soulcare

AGENDA

Defining the Soul
Soul Exhaustion
Soul Care
Soul Care Planning

LET'S GET STARTED



MY DISCLAIMERS

Religion vs Faith vs Soul

³ Soul Exhaustion term

The concept of “Soul Exhaustion” is in early development

We talk about the soul a lot....

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired and success achieved.”
Helen Keller

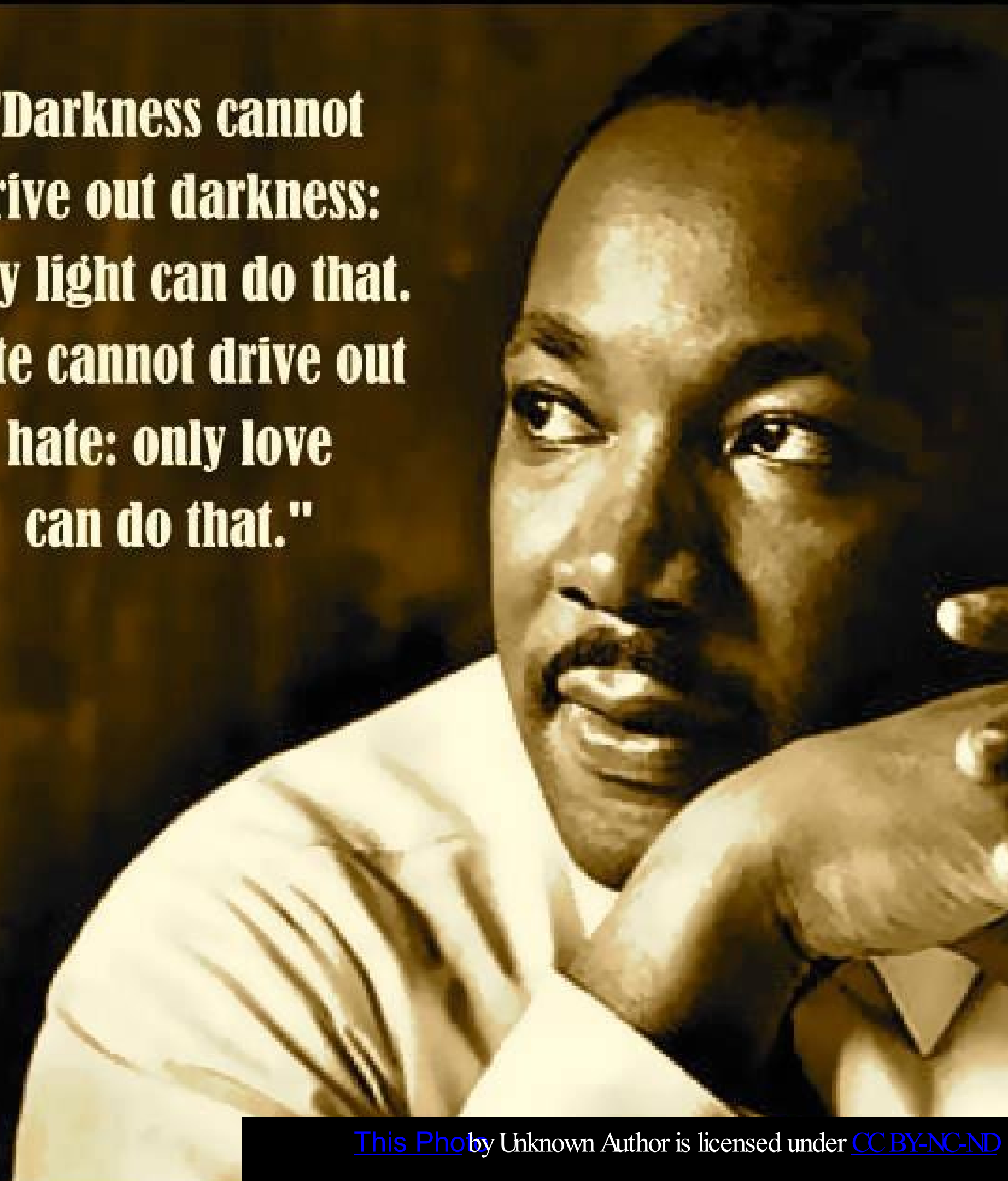
“Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul.” Mahatma Gandhi

“For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?” Jesus Christ

“Not everybody can be famous but everybody can be great because greatness is determined by service, you only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love.” Martin Luther King Jr

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

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But what is the Soul?

Soul, in religion and philosophy, the immaterial aspect or essence of a human being, that which confers individuality and humanity, often considered to be synonymous with the mind or the self. In theology, the soul is further defined as that part of the individual which partakes of divinity and often is considered to survive the death of the body. Encyclopedia Britannica. (2026).

Soul. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/soul-religion-and-philosophy>



Construct Testing, Survey Distribution & Analysis

Exploratory Analysis

- Investigate the “proof of concept” and application to work
- “Context of discovery” vs. “Context of justification”

Study Aims

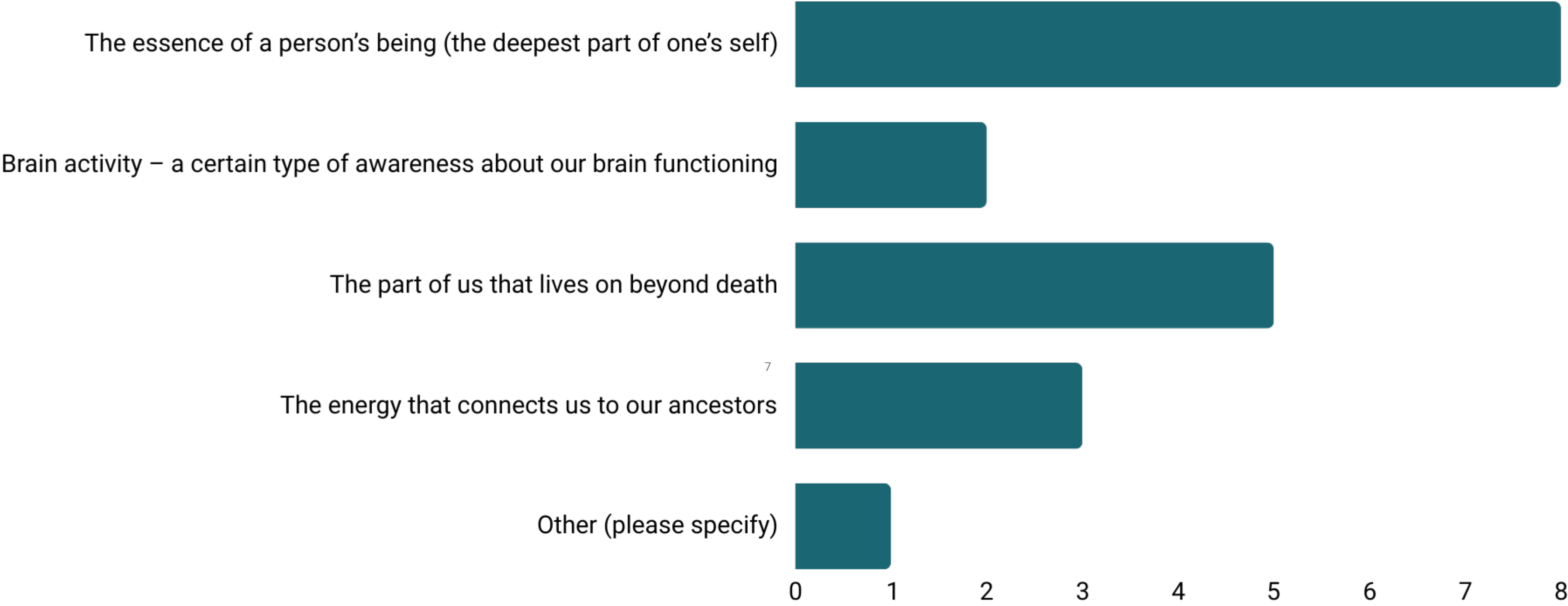
1. Gain initial consensus on definitions of the “soul”, “soul care” and “soul exhaustion.”
2. Understand how suicide loss has impacted people’s experiences of their “soul”.
3. Describe how workplaces have offered “soul care” or contributed to “soul exhaustion”.

Mixed methods

- Interviews
- Survey 27 questions (10 minutes)
 - Snowball through IASP SIG and Workplace Committee (US); social media/newsletters
 - Two investigators reviewed data independently and arrived at a consensus for the data included here.

109 people, 89 of whom were people impacted by suicide loss

Which of the following definitions of the word SOUL do you relate to? (Check all that apply)

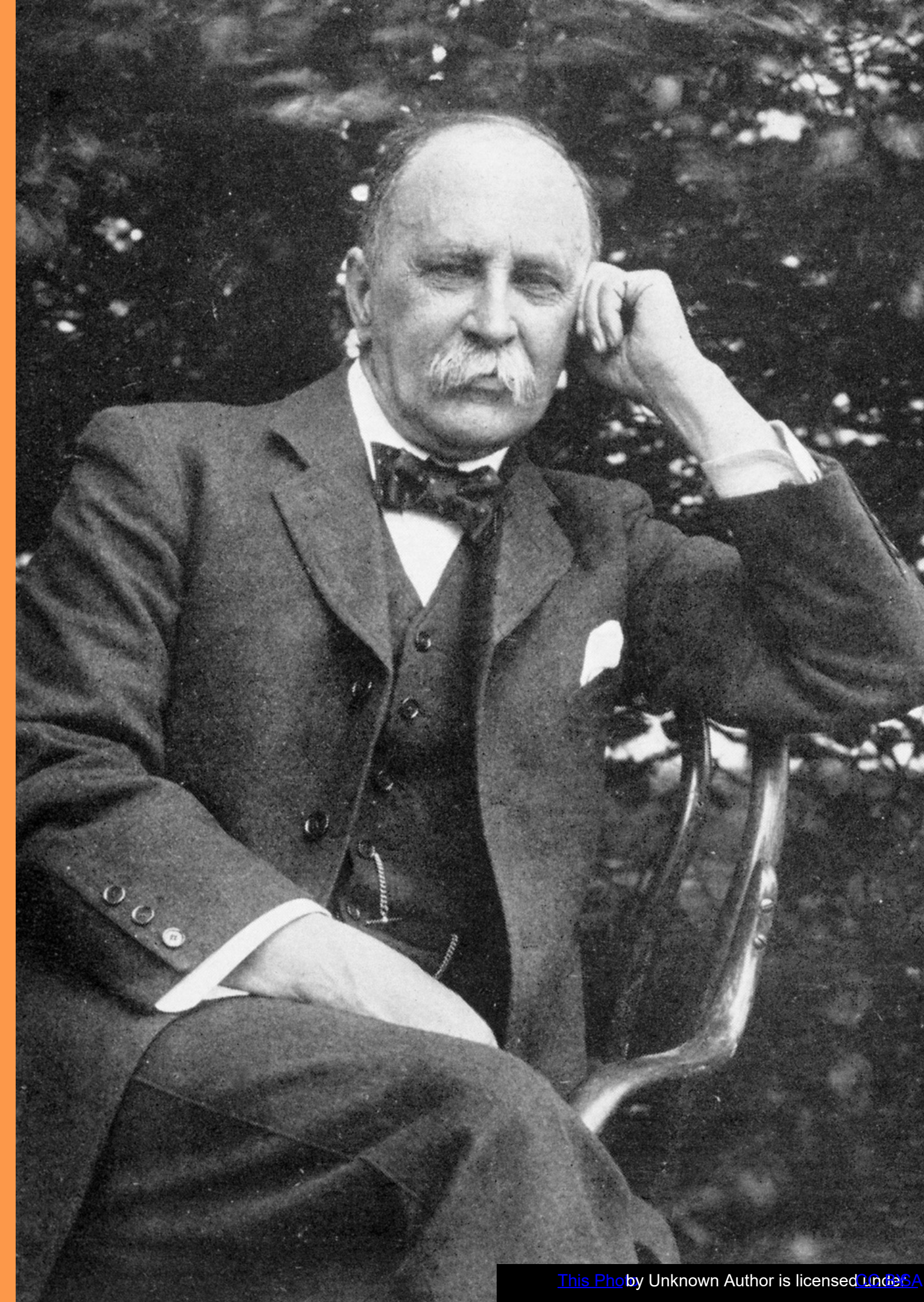


1904

“ Modern psychological science dispenses altogether with the soul... The new psychologists have ceased to think nobly of the soul, and even speak of it as a complete superfluity, science minimizes to the vanishing point the importance of the individual.”

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William Osler, *Science and Immortality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1904), 25, 26, 33



Wilhelm Wundt



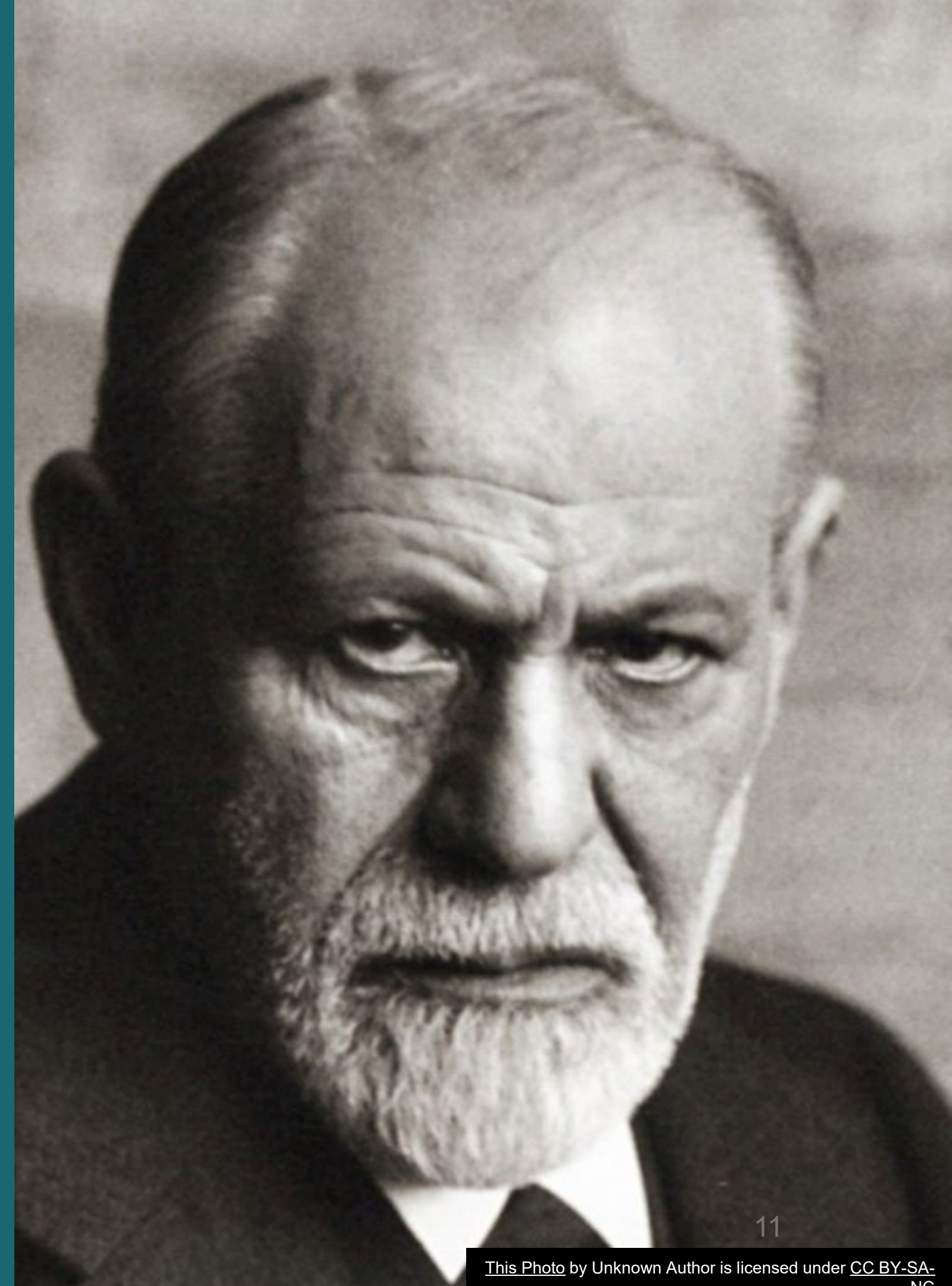
This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

- Often referred to as the “Father of Psychology” and credited with moving Psychology away from Philosophy and toward a “science”. He opened the Institute for Experimental Psychology at the University of Leipzig in Germany in 1879. He was the first to call himself a “psychologist”.
- 1911: "The soul can no longer exist in the face of our present-day physiological knowledge."

Wundt, W. (1902–1903). *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie*. Leipzig: Engelmann. (Paraphrased in secondary sources as rejecting the concept of “soul” in light of physiological science.)

“Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity” (Freud, S. (1927/1961). *The future of an illusion*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.)

- Blame Freud. **Not** Psycho-Analysis – but Freud
- (Joking. Not really)
- Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud parted ways in 1926 after having worked closely for 20 years.
- Freud disowned Rank who later wrote the book “Psychology and the Soul”.
- Freud largely dismissed this work as a “sign of mental illness”.
- Greatly shifting the conversation of the Soul within the field, although Carl Jung was often a continued advocate.
- Psychology and The Soul, Otto Rank 1930



My own very un-official research

Linked In Poll Screenshot



Sarah Gaer • You

Mental Health, Suicide Prevention & Trauma
Recovery Consultant & Trainer. Author, Storyt...

6d • 🌐



Prepping my keynote on the concept of "Soul
Exhaustion" and would appreciate hearing from you.

[...see more](#)

Do you believe in the concept of the soul?

You can see how people vote. [Learn more](#)

12
Yes

85%

No

7%

I'm not sure

7%

54 votes • 1d left • [Hide results](#)

Is the mental health field missing the mark?

(LinkedIn Poll screenshot)

(hint: The answer is yes)



Sarah Gaer • You

Mental Health, Suicide Prevention & Trauma Recovery Consultant & Trainer. Author, Storyt...

5d • 🌐



2nd question

[#SoulExhaustion](#) [#soulcare](#)

IF you believe in the soul, do you think the mental health field effectively incorporates it into its research, teaching & treatment.

You can see how people vote. [Learn more](#)

Yes¹⁴

7%

No

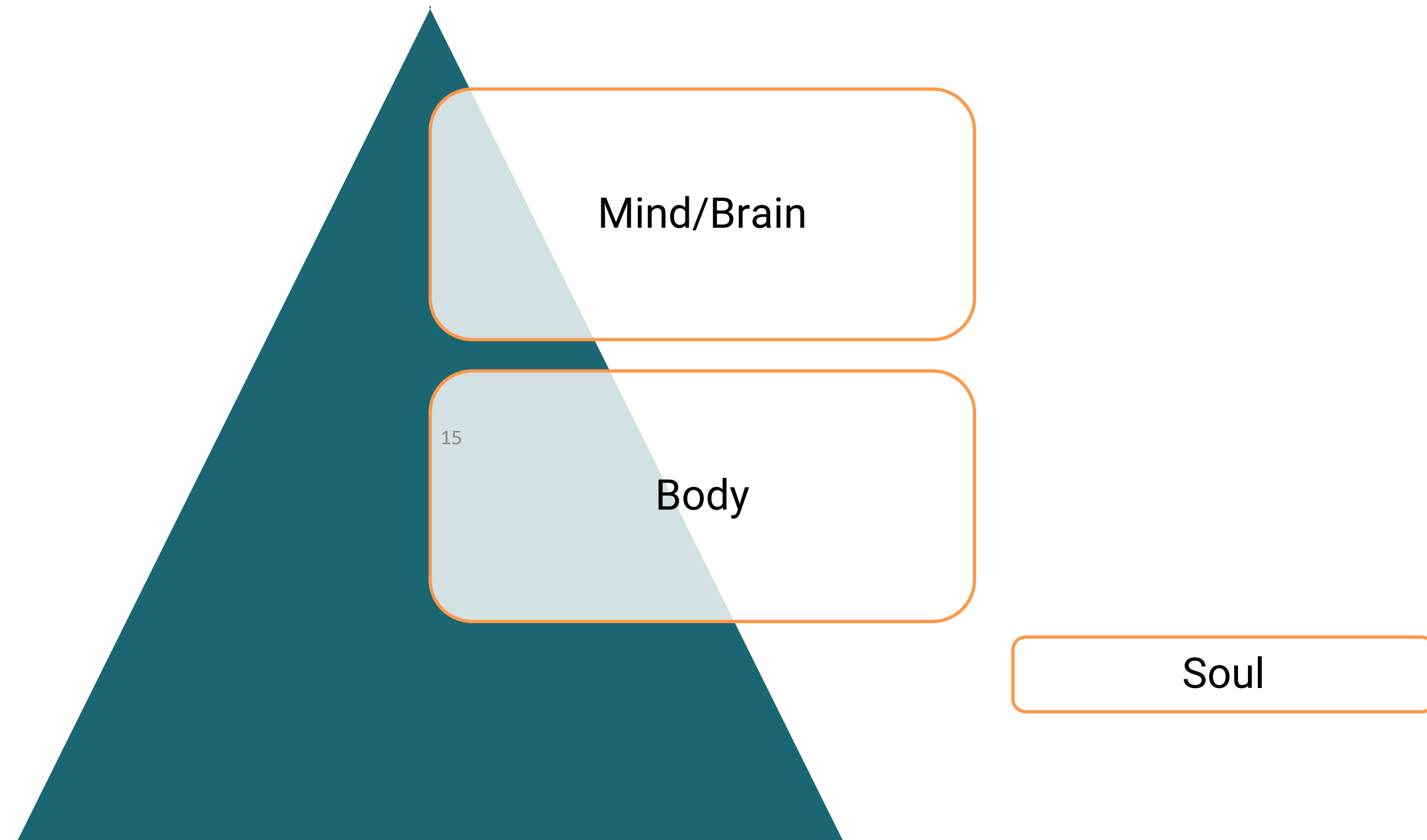
86%

I'm not sure

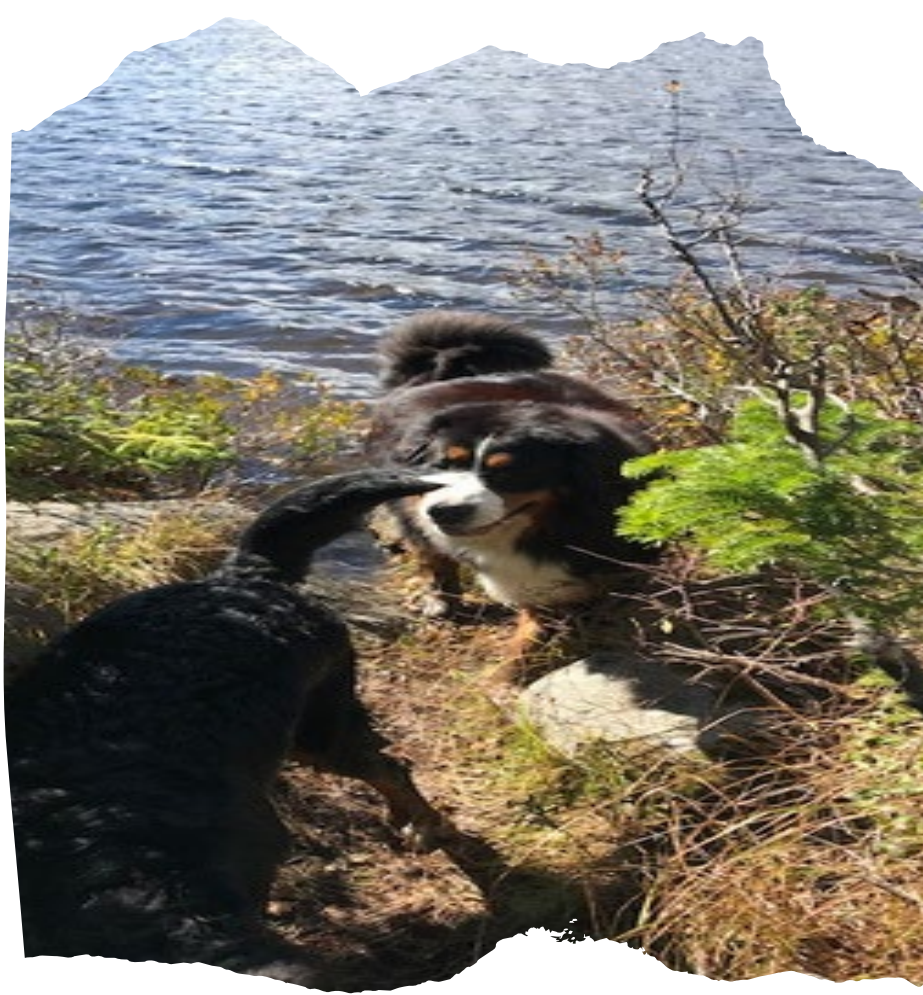
7%

42 votes • 1d left • [Hide results](#)

Psychology/Western Medicine: And here we are



LONESOME LAKE FRANCONIA, NH



hikeratheart.com

Hiker At Heart

Two short but sweet New Hampshire hikes: Lonesome lake and The Basin Cascade Trail

What is “Soul Exhaustion” as I am defining it?



Soul exhaustion is when every aspect of who you are is exhausted. The essence of your being has been depleted.

Soul exhaustion can resemble depression except that its cause is environmental and experiential, not neurological or biological.

Depression and other mental health conditions can increase the risk for soul exhaustion and vice versa.

Soul exhaustion shares much in common with what is often called burn-out, except instead of being career related, it is life related.

Soul Exhaustion in children

What causes soul exhaustion in children?

What would the symptoms of soul exhaustion be in children?

How would the mental health field perceive these symptoms?

What would the treatment be?



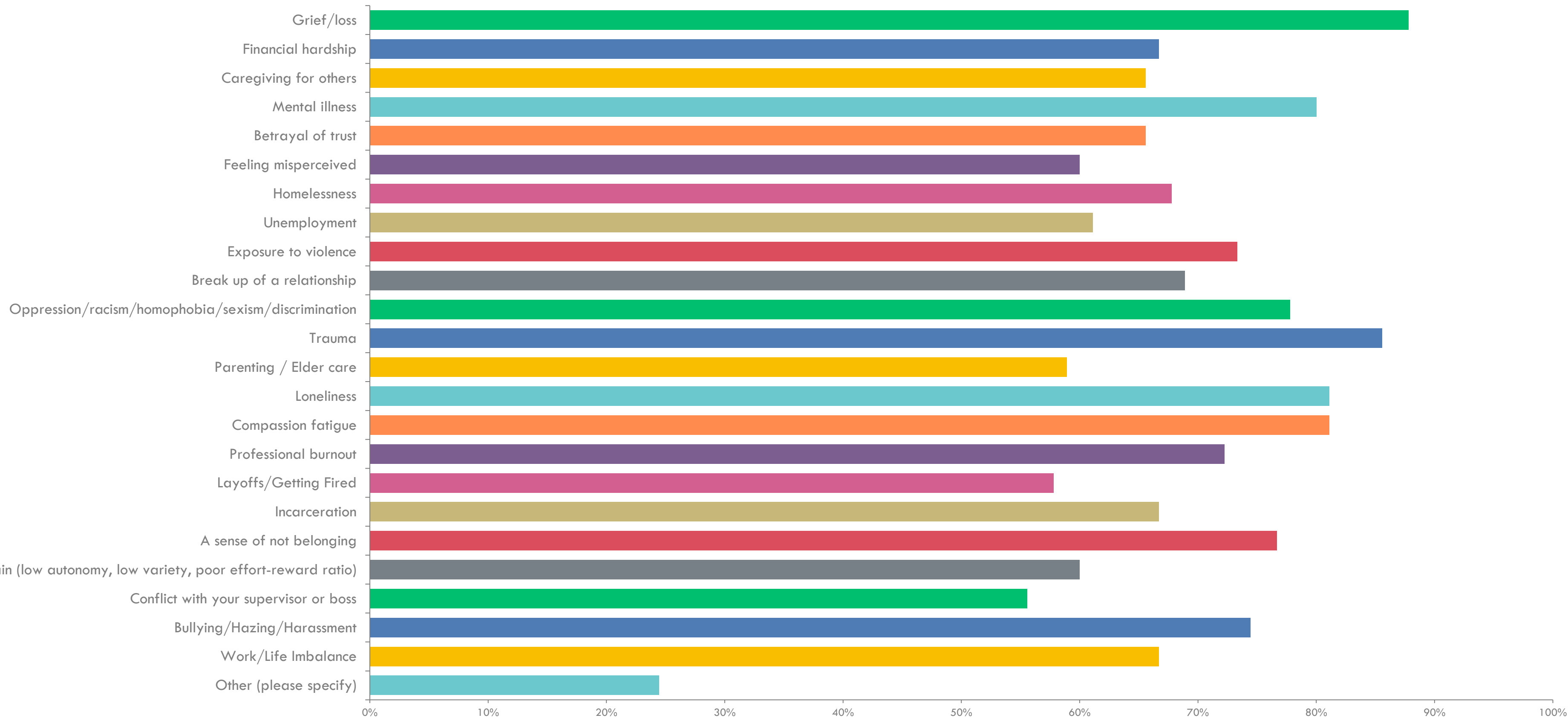
What does Soul Exhaustion look like? Adults in substance use treatment

“What would soul exhaustion look like?” Asked during a group at a partial program for substance use disorders.

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“Our intake picture.”

WHAT TYPES OF EXPERIENCES DO YOU THINK COULD CAUSE SOMEONE TO EXPERIENCE “SOUL EXHAUSTION”?



Suicide

Violence

Substance use-related deaths

Incarceration

Discrimination

Poverty

War

Political divide

Professional ego/competition

Climate Change – “There is no salmon.”

What else?



LET'S LAY THE FOUNDATION:
OUR COMMUNITIES ARE HURTING

“Soul Exhaustion” as a model of conceptualizing the human condition


A trauma informed concept. Asks “what has happened to you” instead of “what is wrong with you.”



Will prove to be more culturally relatable than the medical model.

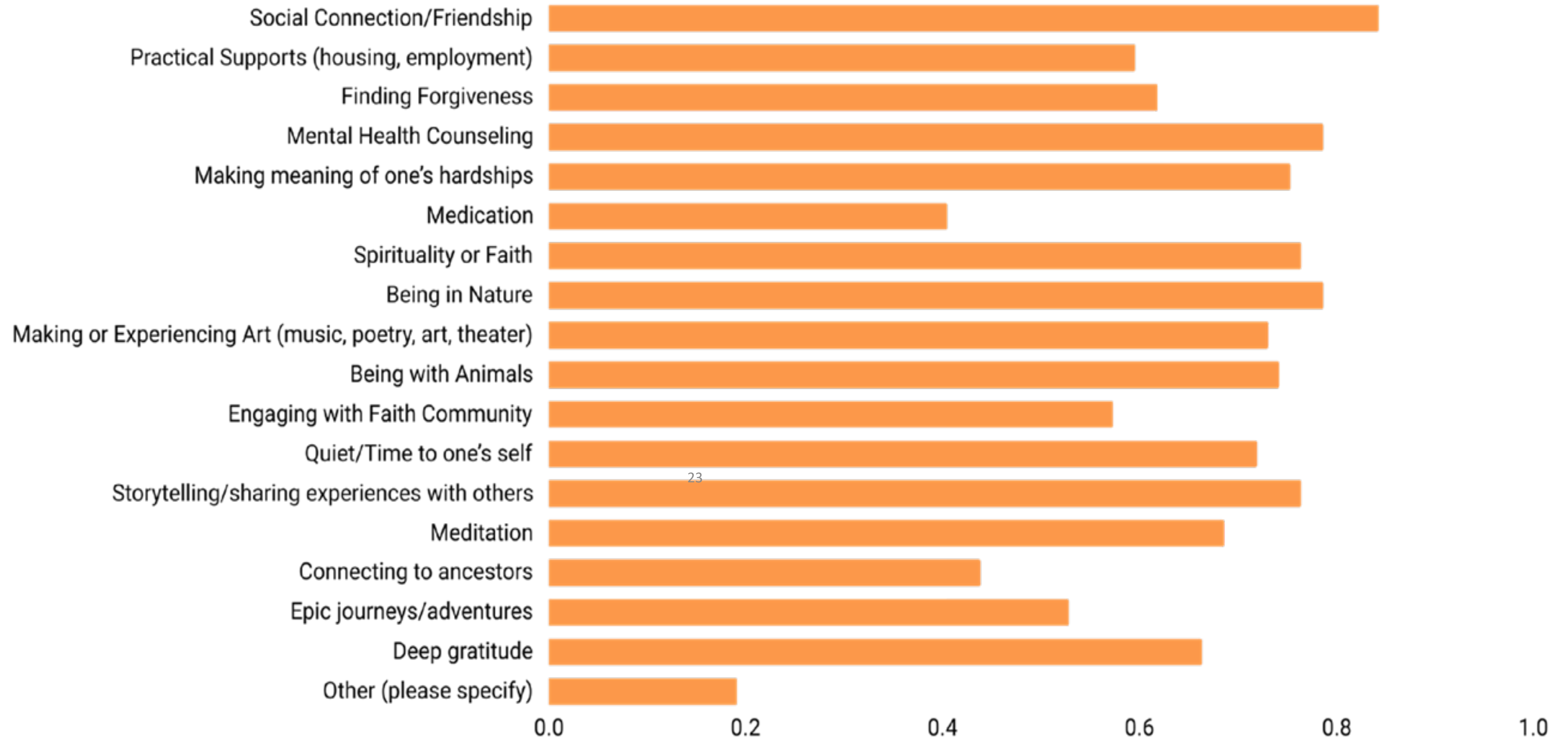


Increases the possible solutions to a person's suffering.



Inherently acknowledges the complexity of humanity and human suffering.

What repairs Soul Exhaustion?



Meaning Making

“In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment that it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.” Viktor Frankl

- Volunteering
- Paying it Forward
- Activism
- Storytelling
- Peer Support

Image from Canva

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Human Connection

- Identify your Anam Cara (Gaelic) Soul Friend
- Animals
- Peer Support
- Support Groups

25



@Mandy_Hunter TikTok

Time as Your Most Valuable Currency

Lessons learned from walking beside my dying father.

Today's society is built around transaction. Time is one of the things we give away and we may or may not always feel like we are getting anything in return for it. But time is also finite, and precious, and your amount of it can change based on your socioeconomic status, your age, or just where you are in life. It's important to recognize the factors that may be contributing to your lack or abundance of time and whether you are willing or able to give it. Sometimes our availability is out of our control. Regardless, it is about making the most of the time you have and protecting it with your Soul.

For this exercise, first establish the five things that matter most to you. Then think about all of the things that take your time, even personal care, driving, or texting/calling others. Then use the box below to list three ways you can refocus your time on the things you most want to. Throughout this process of time budgeting, remember it's about reflection, so try not to be burdened by shame, guilt, pride, or anger.

5 Things that Matter Most to You

5 Things that You Spend the Most Time On

3 Ways you can Create more Balance with your Time

1.

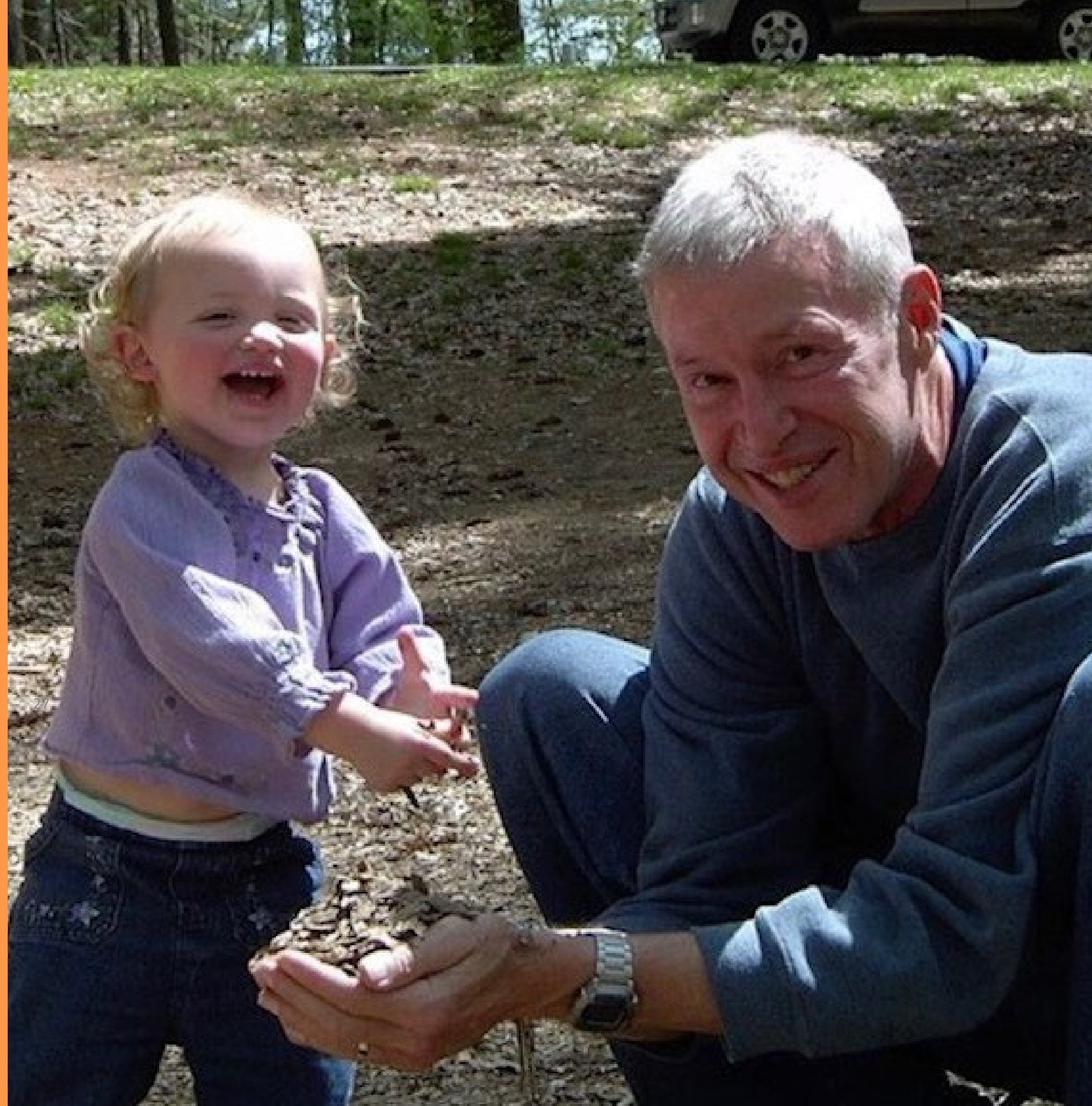
2.

3.

FORGIVENESS

“Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon.” Nelson Mandela

Recommended Reading:
Why Forgive Johann
Christoph Arnold



The 3 Areas of Forgiveness

Forgiving

Forgiving others

Asking

Asking for forgiveness when we have harmed others

Ourself

Forgiving ourselves



Forgiveness of Others

- **Perspective Taking:**
- **Pressures:** what situational pressures made the person behave the way they did?
- **Past:** What background factors played a role in their behavior?
- **Personality:** What events led to them having the personality that they have?
- **Provocations:** What were my own provocative behaviors (optional – N/A abuse)
- **Plans:** What were the person's intentions vs outcome?

Souders, B. (2019) 24 Forgiveness Activities, Exercises, Tips & Worksheets – [PositivePsychology.com](https://www.positivepsychology.com)

(Image from Canva)



Asking for Forgiveness

- C: Confession without an excuse**
- O: Offer a genuine apology**
- N: Note the pain you have caused**
- F: Forever value the relationship**
- E: Equalize through restitution**
- S: Say we will never do it again**
- S: Seek Forgiveness – “Can you forgive me?”**

Worthington, E. (2003) Forgiving & Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness & Hope

(Image from Canva)



Forgiveness of Ourselves –

- I am worthy of forgiveness.
- I am human, and sometimes I make mistakes.
- I can learn from my mistakes.
- I forgive myself for what I did.
- No one is defined by one mistake or one incident.
- I can let go of feelings of guilt and shame.
- I can forgive myself, as I would forgive others.
- I deserve to treat myself with compassion and kindness.
- I love, forgive, and accept myself with all of my imperfections.
- I am worthy of others' love and acceptance, just as I am.

<https://positivepsychology.com/self-forgiveness/>

(Image from Canva)



Gratitude

- 1) Improved Mental Health
- 2) Improved physical health
- 3) Stronger Social bonds
- 4) Reduces stress
- 5) Improves sleep
- 6) Increases empathy
- 7) Reduces aggression/anger
- 8) Improves Self Esteem

Image from Canva



Time to think about your daily Soul Care

soul care DAILY PLAN

Name: _____

Choose 2 practices you can weave into your daily life

- Time in nature
- Connecting with loved ones
- Practicing gratitude
- Education
- Budgeting my time
- Meaning making
- Other: _____

My Daily Reminder

Practice List

Daily Soul Care Practice 1:

How will you incorporate this into your daily life?

Daily Soul Care Practice 2:

How will you incorporate this into your daily life?

Goals for My Soul Care – think about what outcomes you hope to achieve through your Soul Care practice

Goal 1:

Goal 2:

Goal 3:

Where we need to go.



Mind

Body

Soul



Soul Strength

We can heal our soul but first we must appreciate that it exists. We must listen to it. We must comfort it and feed it, whatever that means to each one of us.

OUR TEAM



SARAH GAER



CASSIE KELLY



KAREN CARREIRA



GRACE DURBIN



JENNIFER KELLIHER



CHRISTINA LORENZO



MARSHA OSS



DR. PATA SUYEMOTO



JILL WALLACE

THANK YOU!



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