

HEARING THE SPIRIT OF TRAUMA

SPIRITUALLY INTEGRATED INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE
RESILIENCE, HEALING, AND GROWTH AFTER TRAUMATIC EVENTS

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GOALS FOR TODAY

- PART I: LISTENING

- Definitions:
 - The Sacred Domain
 - Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth
- Red Flags & Guide Posts:
 - Spiritual Coping to Promote Resilience
 - Spiritual Coping that Can Impede Growth

- PART II: LEANING IN

- Interventions to Facilitate Healing and Growth
- Case Examples:
 - EXPLICIT Religious Language
 - IMPLICIT Spiritual Language

WHAT ARE *NOT* GOALS FOR TODAY



- Ontological questions regarding the existence of God
- Theological questions
- Specific denominational perspectives

SECTION I: LISTENING



DEFINITIONS

- Religiousness: *Formal institutional doctrines and membership*
- Spirituality: *Personal experiences with something greater than oneself*
- Sacred: *Concepts of transcendent reality, the Universe, God - **that which is set apart** – a sense of boundlessness, ultimacy, and transcendence*
(Pargament & Mahoney, 2002)

EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE



WHAT IS TRAUMA?

A psychological response to an experience or an event that is deeply disturbing or distressing

- Mentally and emotionally reliving the experience or loss
- Lead to isolation or avoidance of triggers
- Intense or unpredictable emotions (sadness, anger, shame, guilt, despair)
- Physical symptoms (“on edge” or nausea, headaches, etc.)
- Change view of oneself, others, the world (*including that which we hold sacred*) across many domains: Trust, Safety, Power/Control, Intimacy, and Esteem

WHEN TRAUMAS PIERCE THE SACRED REALM

“A betrayal of what is right”

“Moral injury is an essential part of any combat trauma that leads to [...] psychological injury. Veterans can usually recover from horror, fear, and grief once they return to civilian life, so long as “what’s right” has also not been violated.” (Shay, 1994, p. 20)

RESILIENCE & POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

- **A positive change resulting from the struggle with a distressing event:**
 - New opportunities emerge through the event
 - Positive changes in relationships and improved connection with others
 - Greater respect for one's own internal strength
 - More appreciation for life in general
 - Deepening in spiritual or religious beliefs, which may be a result of intentionally changing overall belief system*

SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE (POSITIVE SPIRITUAL COPING)

Ways to draw upon spirituality to facilitate recovery after adversity *(Faigin & Pargament, 2011)*

- **Collaborative spiritual coping:** Seeking a partnership with the universe/the divine in problem-solving
- **Spiritual purification:** Searching for spiritual cleansing through ritual
- **Benevolent spiritual reappraisals:** Redefining a stressor through spiritual or religious belief system that can be beneficial (meaning-making) – e.g., “The Universe will take care of me” or “God has my back”
- **Seeking spiritual support:** Searching for love and care from the sacred
- **Seeking support from clergy/congregation members:** Seeking connection with clergy and/or congregation members
- **Spiritual helping:** Attempting to provide spiritual support to others
- **Spiritual emotions:** Engendering feelings of forgiveness, purification, purpose, or gratitude

Adapted from Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (2000); Pargament, 2007

POSITIVE SPIRITUAL COPING

- Greater Posttraumatic Growth (*Park et al., 2017; Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009*)
- Decreased Depression (*Ronneberg, et al, 2016*)
- Decreased Anxiety (*MacKinlay & Burns, 2017*)
- Less Chronic Pain (*Wachholtz, Pearce, & Koenig, 2007*)
- Greater Life Satisfaction (*Doolittle, Courtney, & Jasien, 2015*)
- Increased Happiness (*Martinez & Scott, 2014*)
- Greater Wellbeing (*Yonker, Schnabelrauch, & Dehaan, 2012*)
- Greater Mental and Physical Health (*Koenig, 2015*)
- Greater Psychological Adjustment to Stress (*Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005*)

NEGATIVE RELIGIOUS COPING (SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES)

- DISINTEGRATED SPIRITUALITY: Lack of depth, breadth, flexibility or accessibility during times of crisis (Pargament, 2007)
- DEFERRING SPIRITUAL COPING: Responsibility for coping passively deferred to God (Pargament, 1997)
- SMALL GODS: Images of the divine that do not encapsulate the complexity of human relationships and life stressors (Phillips, 1997)
 - **Grand Old Man**: Great in His day but is disconnected with modern world
 - **Absolute Perfection**: Insists on complete and total flawless performance and loyalty
 - **Heavenly Bosom**: Provides unlimited solace and comfort without asking anything in return
 - **Resident Policeman**: Threatens ultimate punishment and frowns upon pleasure

SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES


1. INTRAPERSONAL STRUGGLES

- Ultimate Meaning (existential concerns, finding deeper meaning/purpose in life)
- Spiritual Doubt (confusion, instability, or questioning one's beliefs about spiritual matters or organized religion)
- Moral (wrestling with desires, perceived wrongdoings, moral/religious standards, guilt and worry)

2. INTERPERSONAL STRUGGLES

- Interpersonal (negative experiences with others related to sacred matters)

3. SUPERNATURAL STRUGGLES

- Struggles with perceptions of or relationship with the divine (feeling anger at God, or feeling abandoned, alienated or punished by the divine)
 - Supernatural Evil (feeling tormented, tempted, or attached by evil forces)
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SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES

- Higher PTSD Symptoms and Lower Posttraumatic Growth (*Park et al., 2017*)
- Greater Depressive Symptoms (*Abu-Raiya et al., 2015; Exline et al., 2014; Park et al., 2017*)
- Greater Anxiety (*Abu-Raiya et al., 2015; Exline et al., 2014*)
- Negative Affect (*Park et al., 2017*)
- Higher Levels of Stress and Lower Quality of Life (*Henslee et al., 2015*)
- Less Life Satisfaction (*Abu-Raiya et al., 2015*)
- Poorer Physical Health (*Krause, Pargament, & Ironson, 2017*)
- Poorer Psychological Adjustment to Stress (*Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005*)
- Increased Mortality (*Pargament, Koenig, & Tarakeshwar, 2001*)

SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES AS A SIGN OF WEAK FAITH?

*“I am told God lives in me –
and yet the reality of
darkness and coldness and
emptiness is so great that
nothing touches my soul.”*

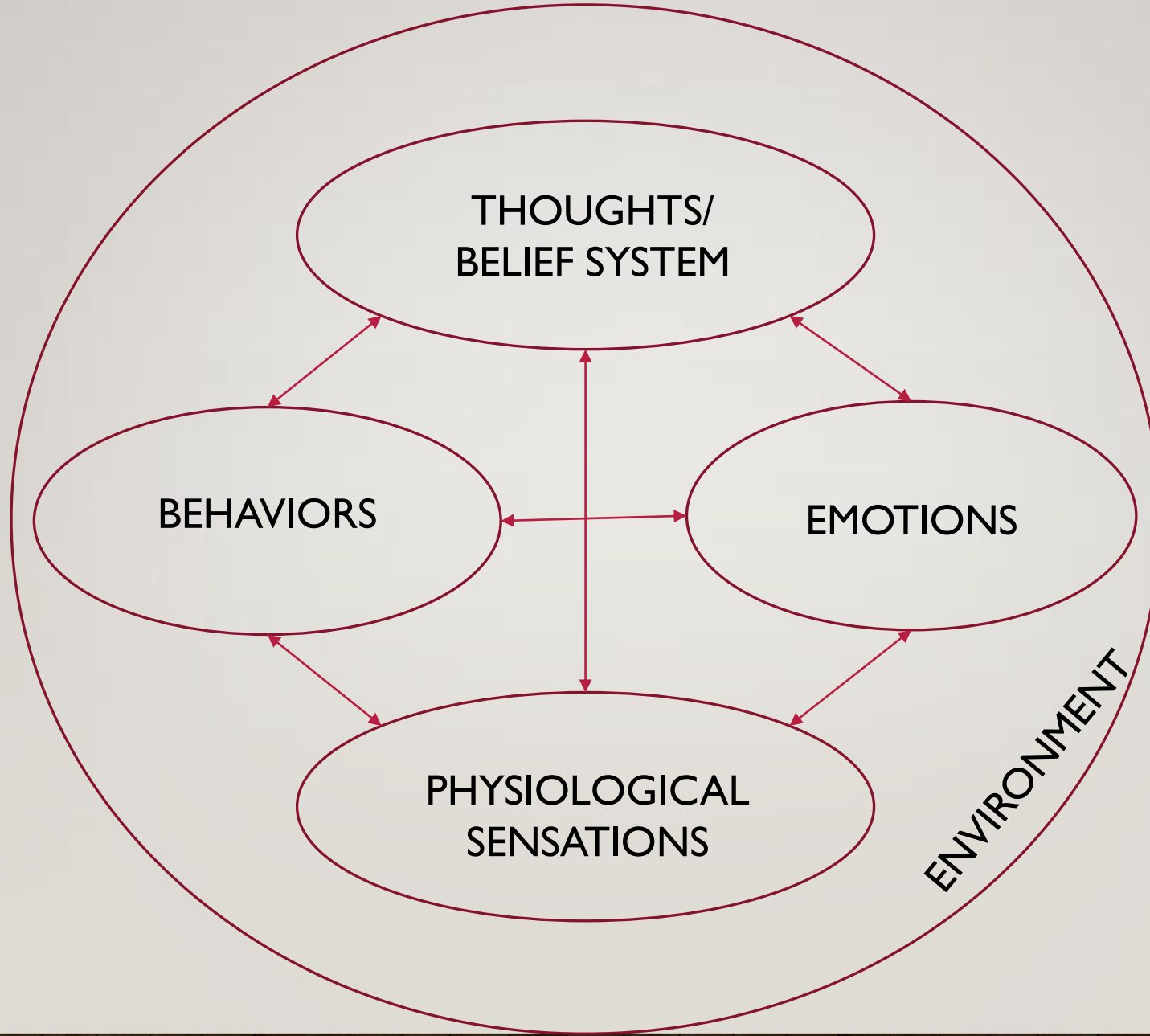


CROSSROADS FOR GROWTH OR DECLINE



SECTION II: LEANING IN





COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY: 5-FACTOR MODEL OF EXPERIENCE

SPIRITUALLY INFORMED INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

- **ASSESSMENT:** What do you hear? Positive spiritual coping? Tenuous and shifting spiritual beliefs? Red flags? Clarify spiritual orienting system – how they view the world, others, a divine force(?), their place in the world.
- **EDUCATION:** Share observations, name it, normalize the struggle, explicitly outline crossroads, provide hope!
- **TARGETED INTERVENTIONS:** Articulate, explore, challenge belief system and promote helpful beliefs that reflect holistic integration of self and experience. Reconstruct meaning from events and shift in identity (e.g., from Wounded Warrior to Wise Elder)

SPIRITUALLY INFORMED INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH (CON'T)

- **SUPPORTIVE INTERVENTIONS:** Promote behaviors such as spiritual practices, emotional expression (e.g., lament), positive visualizations (e.g., 3-S therapy), purification rituals, altruism, social connection, forgiveness, creativity (art, movement, etc.), positive affirmations/daily mantras.
- **CLOSURE:** Reflect on growth, shifts in beliefs, behaviors, emotions. Celebrate transformation (meaning-making ritual, art to symbolize growth, sharing one's narrative publicly, etc.) and make plans for future steps towards growth, and when challenged – outline the roadmap.

CASE EXAMPLES



THANK YOU!

