

ATTC HHS REGION 10 Northwest



Thank you for joining us! The webinar will begin shortly.

Northwest ATTC presents:

Beyond the Medical Model: Soul Exhaustion and Soul Care

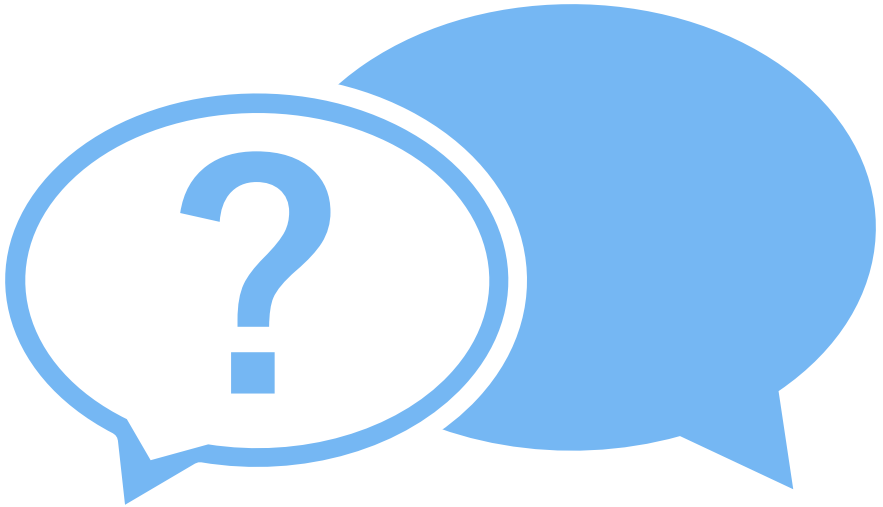
- **Participants are automatically muted during this presentation**
- **Got questions?** Type them into the chat box at any time and they will be answered at the end of the presentation.
- An ADA-compliant recording of this presentation will be made available on our website at: http://attcnetwork.org/northwest

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Q&A

Questions?

Please type them in the chat box!



Surveys

Look for our surveys in your inbox!

We greatly appreciate your feedback! Every survey we receive helps us improve and continue offering our programs.



It only takes **1 minute** to complete!

Certificates of Attendance are available for live viewers!



Viewing Groups:
Please send each individual's **name** and **email address** to **northwest@attcnetwork.org** within 1 business day.

Your certificate will be emailed within a week to the address you registered with.

Today's Presenter



Sarah W. Gaer, MA, Soul Care Collective, LLC is a nationally recognized suicide prevention and trauma response specialist, speaker, author, and educator with more than 25 years of experience supporting individuals, organizations, and communities impacted by trauma, suicide, and profound loss. Her work spans behavioral health, public safety, healthcare, and high-risk industries, with a particular focus on the emotional and psychological demands placed on those who care for others.

A national trainer in Psychological First Aid and a QPR Master Trainer, Sarah brings extensive experience in crisis response, suicide prevention, postvention, and workforce well-being. Drawing on her professional expertise and the importance of lived and living experience, she developed the Soul Exhaustion and Soul Care framework to explore dimensions of human suffering and recovery that extend beyond symptoms and diagnosis.

Sarah is the author of the Soul Exhaustion & Soul Care Workbook and founder of Soul Care Collective, LLC, where she helps individuals and organizations reconnect with meaning, purpose, identity, and one another.

BEYOND THE MEDICAL MODEL: SOUL EXHAUSTION & SOUL CARE

Northwest ATTC

November 18, 2026

SARAH GAER, MA
Suicide Prevention & Trauma Response Specialist

AGENDA

Our path through Soul Exhaustion and Soul Care

01 Why Soul Exhaustion?

02 Defining the Soul

03 Soul Exhaustion

04 Soul Care

05 Soul Care Planning

LET'S GET STARTED →

LONESOME LAKE FRANCONIA, NH





hikeratheart.com

Hiker At Heart

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

hikeratheart 4 years ago

BETHANY

JANUARY 6, 1976 – JANUARY 13, 1998



“I feel like a part of my soul has loved you since the beginning of everything.

Maybe we are from the same star.”

— Emery Allen

DISCLAIMERS

01 Religion vs Faith vs Soul

02 Soul Exhaustion term

03 The concept of “Soul Exhaustion” is in early development

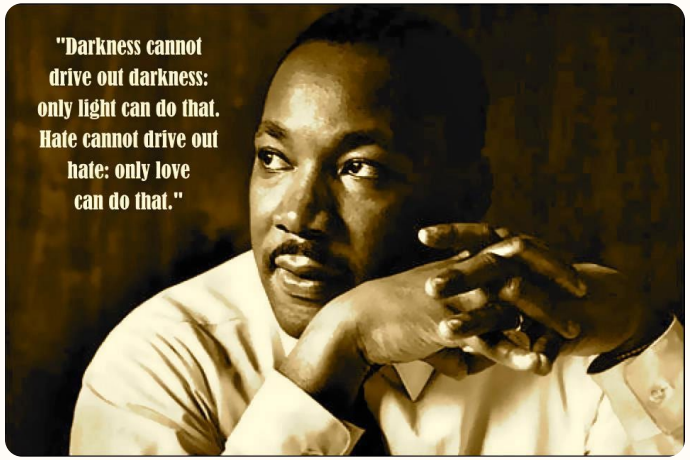
We talk about the soul a lot...

“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



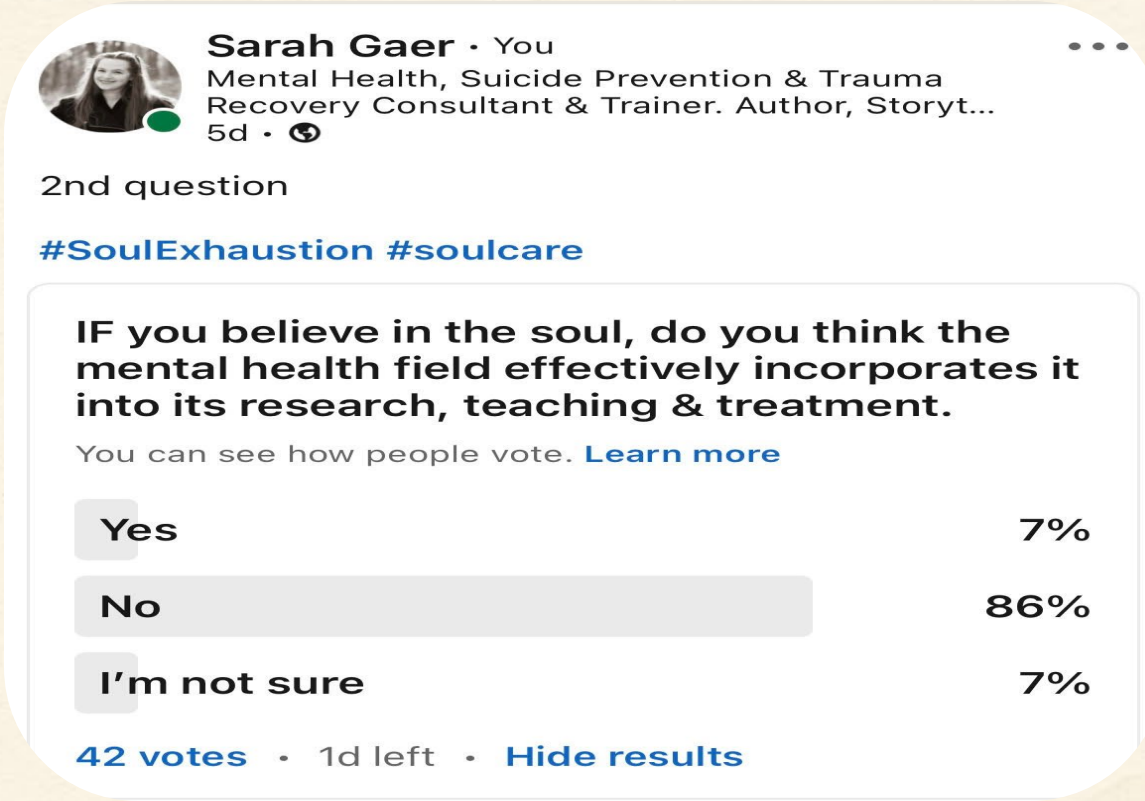
But what is the Soul?

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.

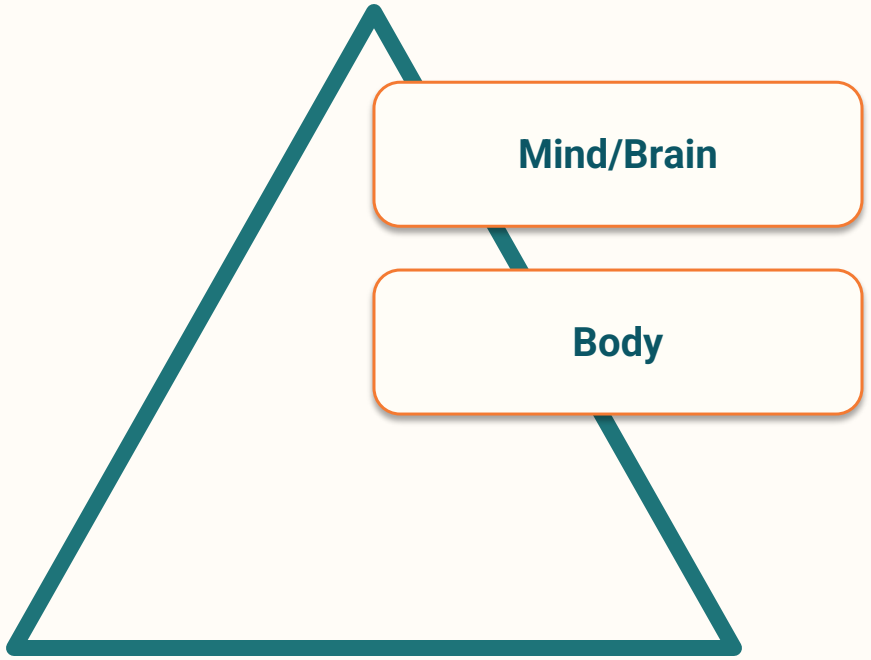
In theology, the soul is further defined as that part of the individual which partakes of divinity and often is considered to survive the death of the body.

Is the mental health field missing the mark?

(hint: The answer is yes)



Psychology/Western Medicine: And here we are



Soul

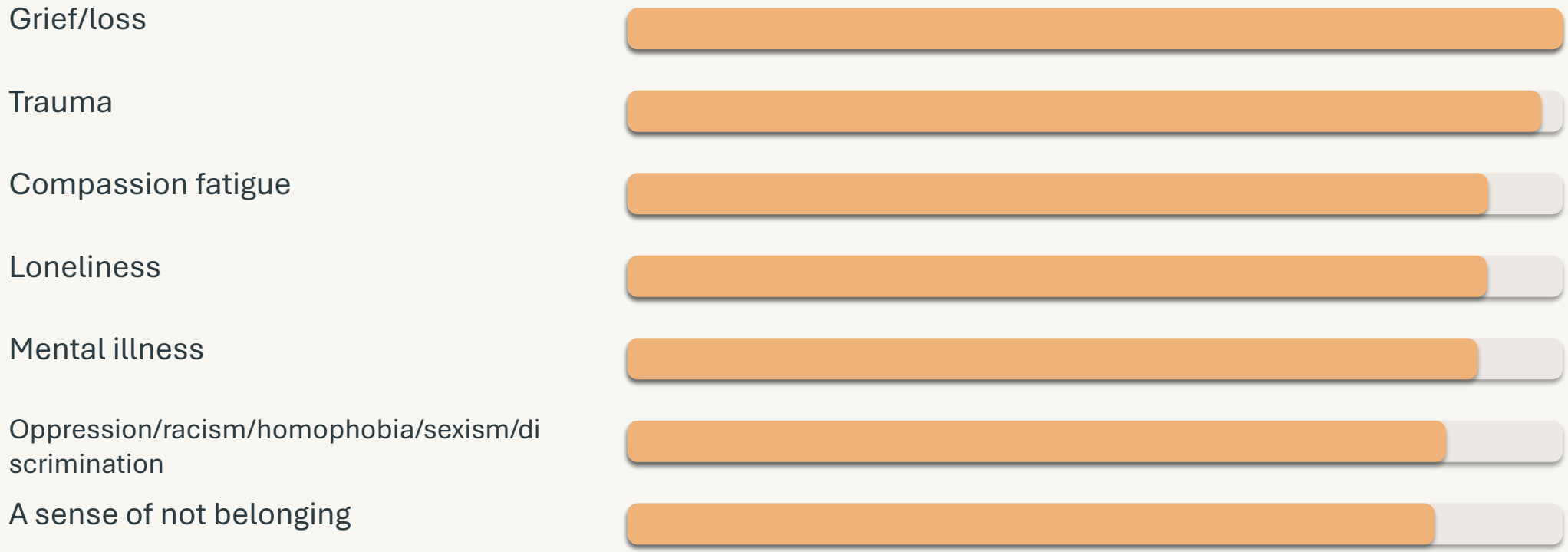
What is “Soul Exhaustion” as I am defining it?

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

- Soul exhaustion can resemble depression except that it’s 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.

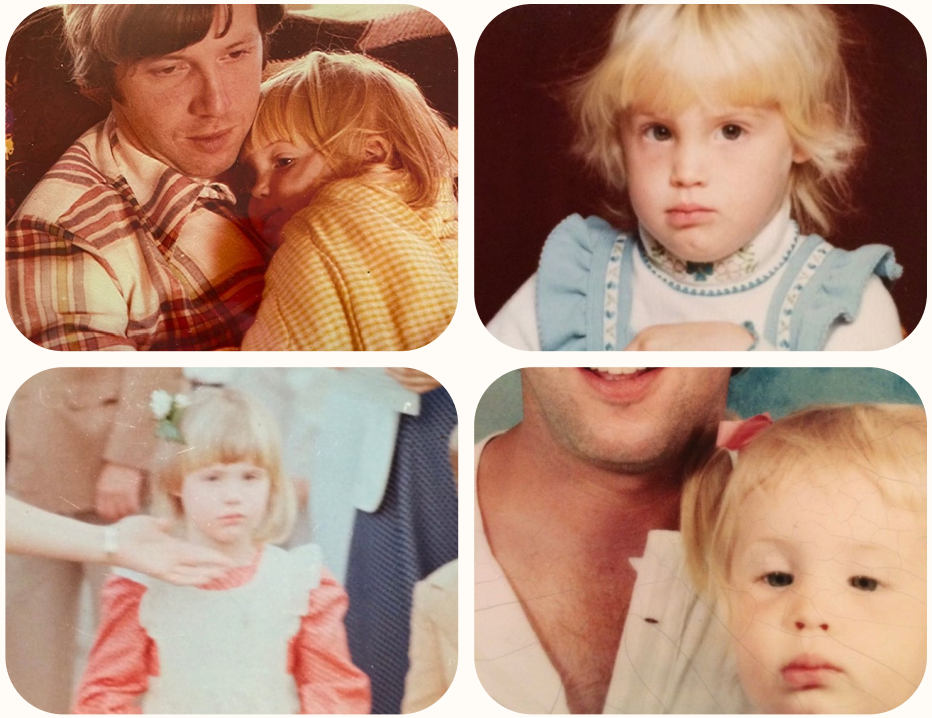
What types of experiences could cause “Soul Exhaustion”?

Top 7 participant responses



Top seven participant responses, ordered by the original chart; bar lengths are approximate.

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.

“Our intake picture.”

Chronic Health Problems



Feeling that your identity is defined by your medical conditions

- Physically feeling unwell
- Chronic Pain
- Chronic worry about health outcomes and future
- Feeling powerless to health issues and within the system
- Life becoming absorbed with health care needs (appointments etc)
- Losing sense of individuality within the system
- Fighting insurance issues

Professional Burnout

When work loses meaning and connection



- Loss of meaning in your work
- Difficulty finding motivation
- Becoming cynical about the people that you work with or support
- Loss of faith in the systems you are working in
- Desensitization
- Compassion Fatigue

Grief

Grief can involve far more than death



Anticipatory grief, a common experience for most people, is soul exhausting.

- Traumatic Grief – Soul Exhaustion combined with trauma. A “double whammy”

- Understanding grief & loss to be beyond death. It could include incarceration of a loved one, abandonment, deployment of a military member etc.

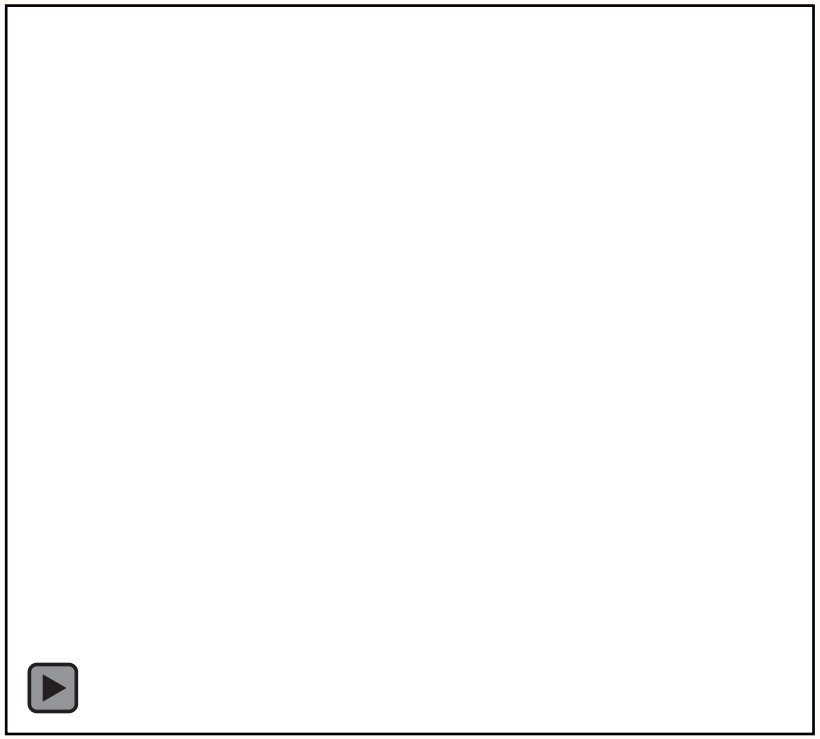
What helps repair Soul Exhaustion?

Top 7 participant responses



Top seven participant responses, ordered by the original chart; bar lengths are approximate.

Human Connection



Identify your Anam Cara (Gaelic) Soul Friend

- Animals
- Peer Support
- Support Groups

FRIENDS & FAMILY

Meaning Making

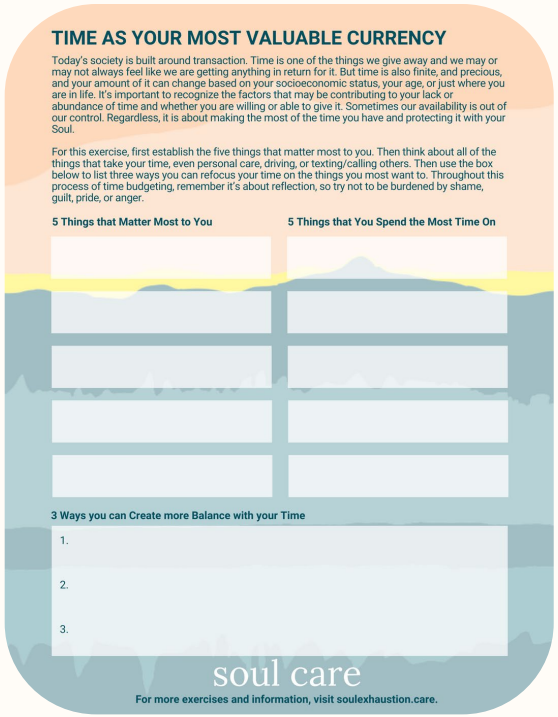


“In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment that it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.”
Viktor Frankl

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

Time as Your Most Valuable Currency

Lessons learned from walking beside my dying father.



TIME AS YOUR MOST VALUABLE CURRENCY

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.

soul care

For more exercises and information, visit soulexhaustion.care.

This worksheet can be found on the website.

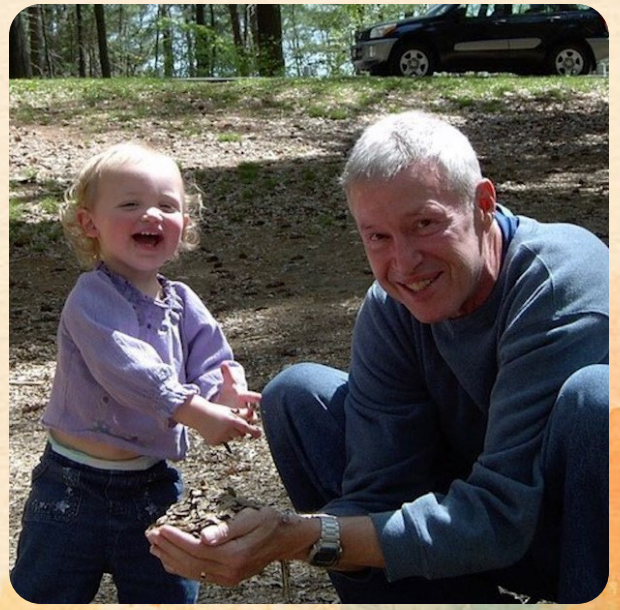
SoulExhaustion.care

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

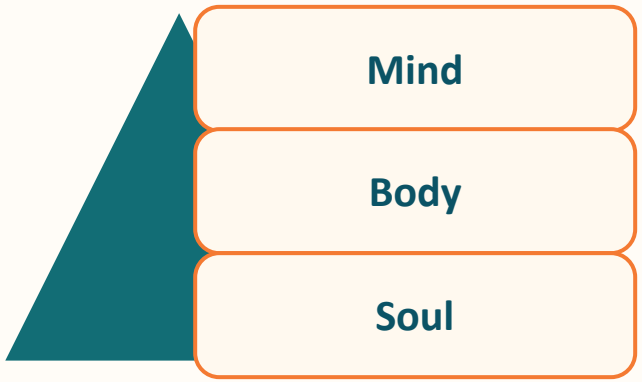


Gratitude



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

Where we need to go.



OUR TEAM

The people who helped shape this work



Sarah Gaer



Cassie Kelly



Karen Carreira



Grace Durbin



Jennifer Kelliher



Christina Lorenzo



Marsha Oss



Dr. Pata Suyemoto



Jill Wallace

This work was shaped by a multidisciplinary team.

THANK YOU!

♡

SarahGaer.com
sarahgaer@gmail.com
Facebook & LinkedIn: Sarah Gaer
Instagram: SW_Gaer

Surveys

Look for our surveys in your inbox!

We greatly appreciate your feedback!

Every survey we receive helps us improve and continue offering our programs.

https://bit.ly/Soul_Nov2026

It only takes **1 minute** to complete!