

FACT SHEET:

Assessing Afterlife Beliefs in Psychotherapy



Afterlife Beliefs and Spiritual Experiences

A positive association between spirituality and health has been established^{e.g., 1} and the topic of religion and spirituality (RS) can be ethically integrated into psychotherapy.^{e.g., 2}

Afterlife beliefs and spiritual experiences are common^{e.g., 3, 4, 5} and may be relevant to meaning-making around dying, bereavement, and unresolved issues with deceased persons.

It is important for mental health professionals (MHPs) to assess clients' afterlife beliefs and experiences when they are significant to the presenting issue or the clients' well-being.

Assessing Afterlife Beliefs

Clients may be hesitant to bring up RS topics or their afterlife beliefs and spiritual experiences.

MHPs may feel reluctance toward and/or lack training/education for assessing and addressing spirituality in general.^{6, 7}

It is often recommended that a two-phase RS assessment, divided into preliminary and comprehensive segments, be used in the psychotherapy setting.^{e.g., 8, 9}

Unfortunately, afterlife beliefs are often neglected in the psychospiritual literature and in most published RS tools and assessments.

The SRRT Afterlife Assessment Guide

The SRRT two-phase afterlife assessment guide for MHPs¹⁰ provides introductory guidelines for assessing and addressing afterlife beliefs and spiritual experiences in the psychotherapy setting.

The SRRT consists of sets of sample questions organized around four concepts (Significance, Relationships, Resources, and Treatment).

The SRRT can be used by MHPs to determine if any afterlife beliefs or experiences of *significance* may be impacting the client's well-being or *relationships*; the MHP can then assess possible afterlife-related *resources* and tailor specific forms of *treatment*.

The development of the SRRT was informed by current bereavement models, trauma-informed approaches, and ethical practice guidelines for MHPs.

Ideally, the SRRT will also serve as an initial resource for MHPs to collaborate and reach consensus regarding assessing and addressing afterlife beliefs and spiritual experiences.

Example SRRT Questions

S: “Do you have any beliefs about the afterlife that you would like to share with me?”

R: “How does your relationship with the deceased inform or inspire your choices/relationships?”

R: “Would you like resources on scientific research that supports the existence of an afterlife?”

T: “How can I incorporate the wisdom you obtained from your spiritual experience into our work?”

References

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Download the full peer-reviewed journal article, “Assessing Afterlife Beliefs in Psychotherapy”¹⁰ which includes the full sets of SRRT sample questions and lists select after-life resources and organizations, from the free, online-only, open access journal *Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies* (TJICS) at:

<http://www.tjics.org/index.php/TJICS/article/view/29/24>

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