



## SRRT: Assessment Guide for Afterlife Beliefs in Psychotherapy

*This guide is derived from the work of Beth Christopherson, LCSW, and Julie Beischel, PhD, as published in Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies: Christopherson, B., & Beischel, J. (2018). Assessing Afterlife Beliefs in Psychotherapy. Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies, 2(1), 50–74.*

### Introduction for Clinicians

The Significance, Relationships, Resources, and Treatment (SRRT) assessment guide is designed to help mental health professionals (MHPs) explore clients' afterlife beliefs in a structured yet conversational manner. These beliefs can significantly impact grief processing, relationships, meaning-making, and overall well-being. The SRRT was created by Christopherson and Beischel (2018) using the latest research on grief, trauma-sensitive care, and ethical guidelines for mental health professionals. It is designed to be a helpful starting point for therapists to work together in understanding and addressing afterlife beliefs and spiritual experiences in a supportive and informed way. The SRRT is not a diagnostic tool but rather a framework to guide discussion in a client-centered, culturally sensitive way.

With use of clinical judgement on timing and use, this guide can offer insight and meaning-making in bereavement, anticipatory loss, trauma recovery, and existential concerns surrounding death and the afterlife. Clinicians are encouraged to modify these questions to fit each client's unique belief system, ensuring a safe and nonjudgmental space for exploration.

By using the SRRT approach, clinicians can:

- Assess whether afterlife beliefs are relevant to the client's healing process.
- Support clients in integrating these beliefs into their meaning-making process.
- Identify and address distressing aspects of afterlife beliefs or spiritual experiences.
- Provide appropriate resources and interventions based on the client's needs.

A two-phase RS (Religion and Spirituality) assessment approach is recommended:

- Preliminary assessment: Brief questions to determine if afterlife beliefs are relevant to therapy.
- Comprehensive assessment: In-depth exploration of the impact of afterlife beliefs on grief, coping, relationships, and well-being.

*“Human relationships do not end when one person dies; the relationship continues and can evolve over time. This is evident in the various ways continuing bonds with the deceased may manifest.” (Christopherson & Beischel, 2018, p. 51)*



## **SRRT Sample Questions**

The following questions in bold italics were quoted directly from the cited article.

### **Significance: Assessing if Afterlife Beliefs are Relevant in Psychotherapy**

- 1. I want to make sure I use the language that feels right or true for you. Do you like the word 'afterlife,' or is there another word you prefer?  
and/or  
Are there any other words you would like me to be mindful of using that best fit your belief system?***  
(For example the use of the words visits, experiences, karma, enlightened, heaven, hell, or passed away vs died)
- 2. Do you have any beliefs about the afterlife or about what happens after we die that you feel are important or that you would like to share with me?***  
(Sends the message to the client the MHP is open to further discussions, regardless of the client's initial response)
- 3. Are afterlife beliefs important to you in your grieving process?  
and/or  
How do your beliefs about the afterlife affect your beliefs or feelings about death/euthanizing your pet/your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_?***  
(Offers the openness to explore all areas including anticipatory loss or unresolved issues with the deceased, including spiritual experiences and afterlife beliefs)
- 4. Some people report receiving a visit from the deceased in their dreams or experiencing a sense of presence when awake. Some have experiences in which they glimpse the afterlife, such as in a near-death experience or at the bedside of a dying person. Have you had any spiritual experiences that you would like to share with me?***  
(Normalizes and validates the experience)
- 5. Are there any aspects of your beliefs in an afterlife with which you are struggling?***  
(For example, those who die by suicide do not go to heaven. This question identifies internal conflicts and needs to be addressed)



## **Relationships: Exploring the Relationship of Beliefs and the Deceased**

6. ***What kinds of gestures or rituals, if any, do you use to continue a relationship with the deceased or to keep their memory alive?***  
(For example: prayer, speaking to the deceased, looking for signs, visiting a gravesite, lighting candles, observing cultural or religious rituals, keeping personal mementos, creating a memorial, writing letters, seeking pastoral counseling, consulting a medium, recalling shared memories, and honouring their legacy through acts of service or tradition.)
7. ***Are there many times when you want to stop thinking about your deceased loved one, but you can't?***  
***and/or***  
***Are you having any distressing memories or thoughts come up about your deceased loved one or the relationship you had? If so, how are these distressing thoughts affecting your sleep, diet, or the way your body feels?***  
(This screens for intrusive thoughts/images/body sensations that may signal trauma, and is an opportunity to normalize bereavement experiences)
8. ***Would you like to brainstorm with me ways that you can continue a relationship with your deceased loved one while continuing to get the most out of your relationships at work, with family and friends, and with your passions and hobbies?***  
(Normalizes that continuing the bond is part of nonpathological grieving, which can be one-way or reciprocal)
9. ***How does your relationship with the deceased inform or inspire your choices? Your relationships?***  
(Informs how attachment patterns and the relationship with the deceased impacts the client's past, present, and future)
10. ***Do your beliefs about the afterlife help you to make sense of or obtain meaning from (event)?***  
***and/or***  
***What meaning do you give to the visit you received from the deceased/the spiritual experience you had?***  
***and/or***  
***Has the visit from the deceased/spiritual experience/mediumship reading created any struggles for you?***  
(Promotes meaning-making alongside validation)
11. ***How have your beliefs in an afterlife changed over time?***  
***and/or***  
***Who or what experiences influenced your beliefs?***  
***and/or***



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***Have there been any changes in your beliefs that you think are important to share with me?***

(Offers opportunity for narrative exploration and identifies influences within their worldview)



## **Resources: Determining if Additional Supports Would be Helpful**

- 12. Do you have friends or family or a clergy person with whom you can discuss your beliefs about the afterlife?  
and/or  
Do you have friends or family or a clergy person with whom you can discuss your spiritual experience(s)?**  
(Explores external support network)
- 13. Do your beliefs in an afterlife bring you comfort or strength?  
and/or  
Did your spiritual experience(s) bring you comfort or peace?  
and/or  
Did your reading with a medium bring you comfort or peace?**  
(Explores internal resources)
- 14. Would you like resources on scientific research that supports the existence of an afterlife?**  
(Asked when appropriate to validate and normalize the client's experience)
- 15. Would you like religious resources that address the afterlife?**  
(Asked when appropriate to validate and normalize the client's experience. Referring to an appropriate faith-based leader may be more helpful)
- 16. Would you like non-religious resources for grief support and education groups that acknowledge an afterlife?  
and/or  
Would you like non-religious education and support resources for persons who have had spiritual experiences similar to you?**  
(Asked when appropriate; offers the option of a wider support network)



## **Treatment: A Path for Treatment Planning**

**17. How may I best support you in our work together regarding your afterlife beliefs?**

**and/or**

**How may I best account for your afterlife beliefs while we work to alleviate some of the distress you have about (event)/your relationship with your \_\_\_\_\_ who died?**

(Client-centred treatment planning approach)

**18. How can I incorporate the wisdom you obtained from your spiritual experience into our work together?**

**and/or**

**How can I best support you in the struggles related to your spiritual experience?**

(Client's may not know what they need; specialized clinician training on how to support client's in this area may be helpful)