



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN
SCIENCES

THE POWER OF MEANINGFUL ACTIVITY AND SOCIAL CONNECTION

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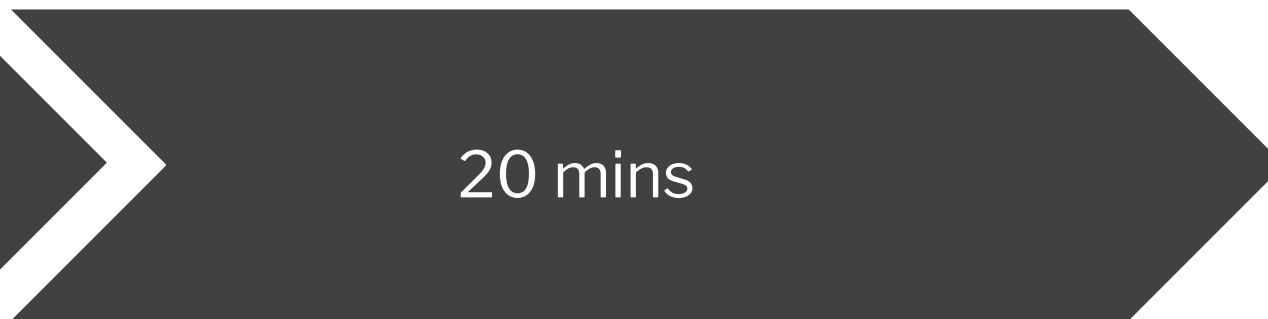
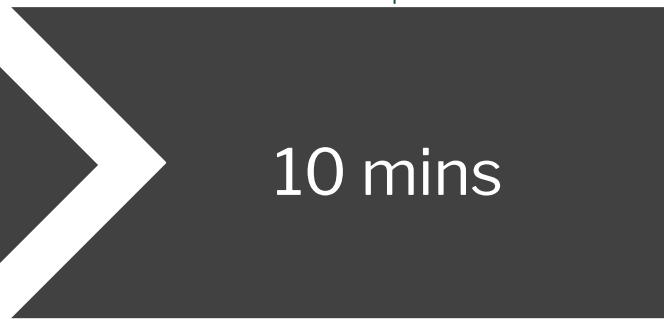
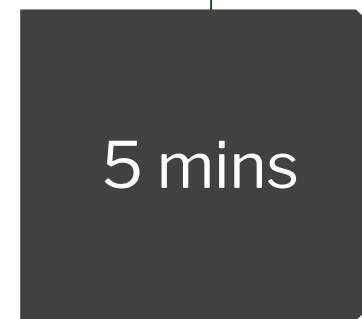
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BECCA WILLMAN, PHD STUDENT, OTD, OTR/L



Importance of
Meaningful
Activity

Modified
Interest
Checklist



Importance
of Social
Connection

Small Group
Activity

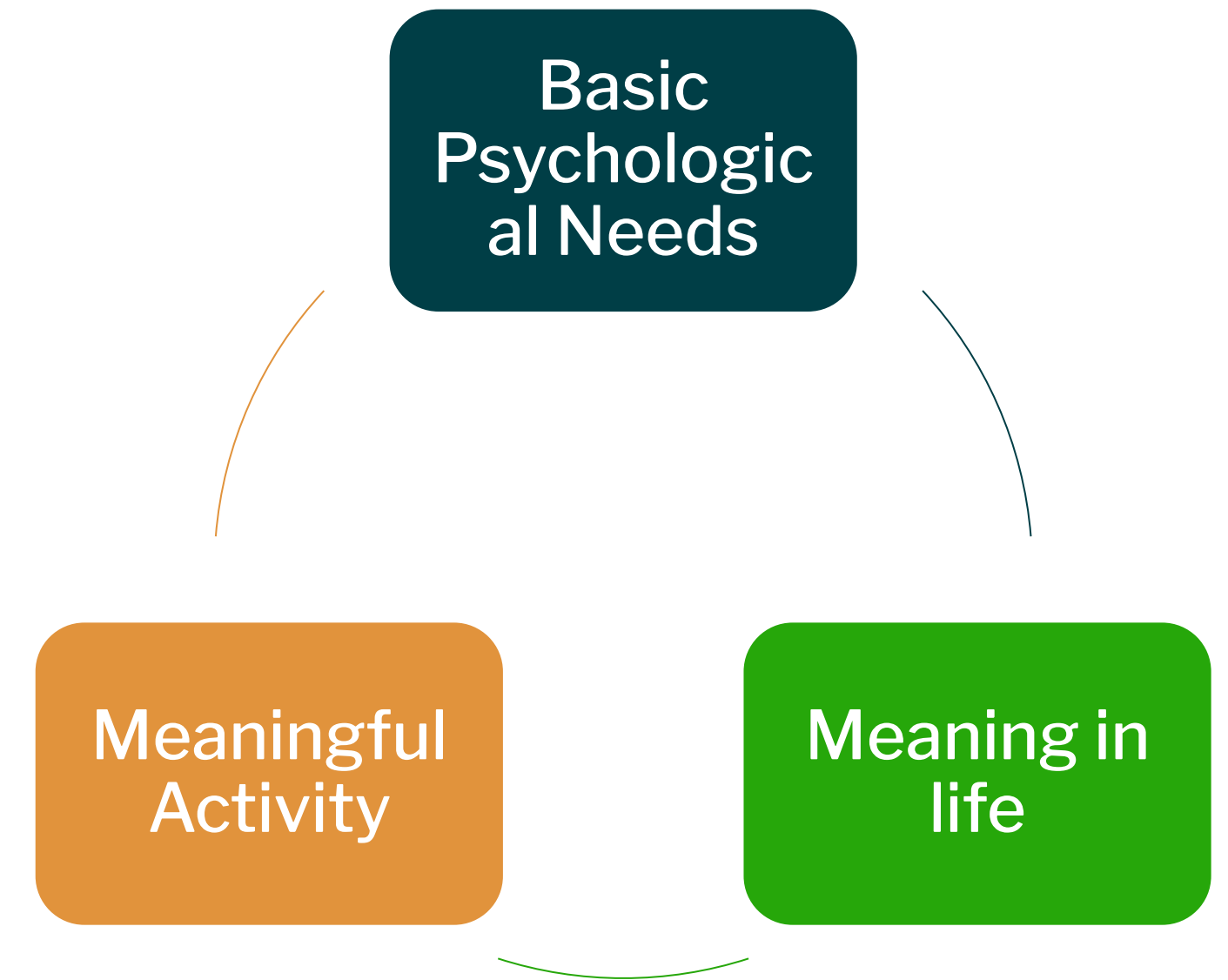




MEANINGFUL ACTIVITY

- Self-initiated and individualized
- Goal-directed, purposeful
- Personally satisfying and meaningful
- Often influenced by social and cultural context
- Helps meet biologically driven need to participate in the environment, to explore, satisfy curiosity, create, achieve, experience competency

(Eakman, 2013; Yerxa et al., 1990)



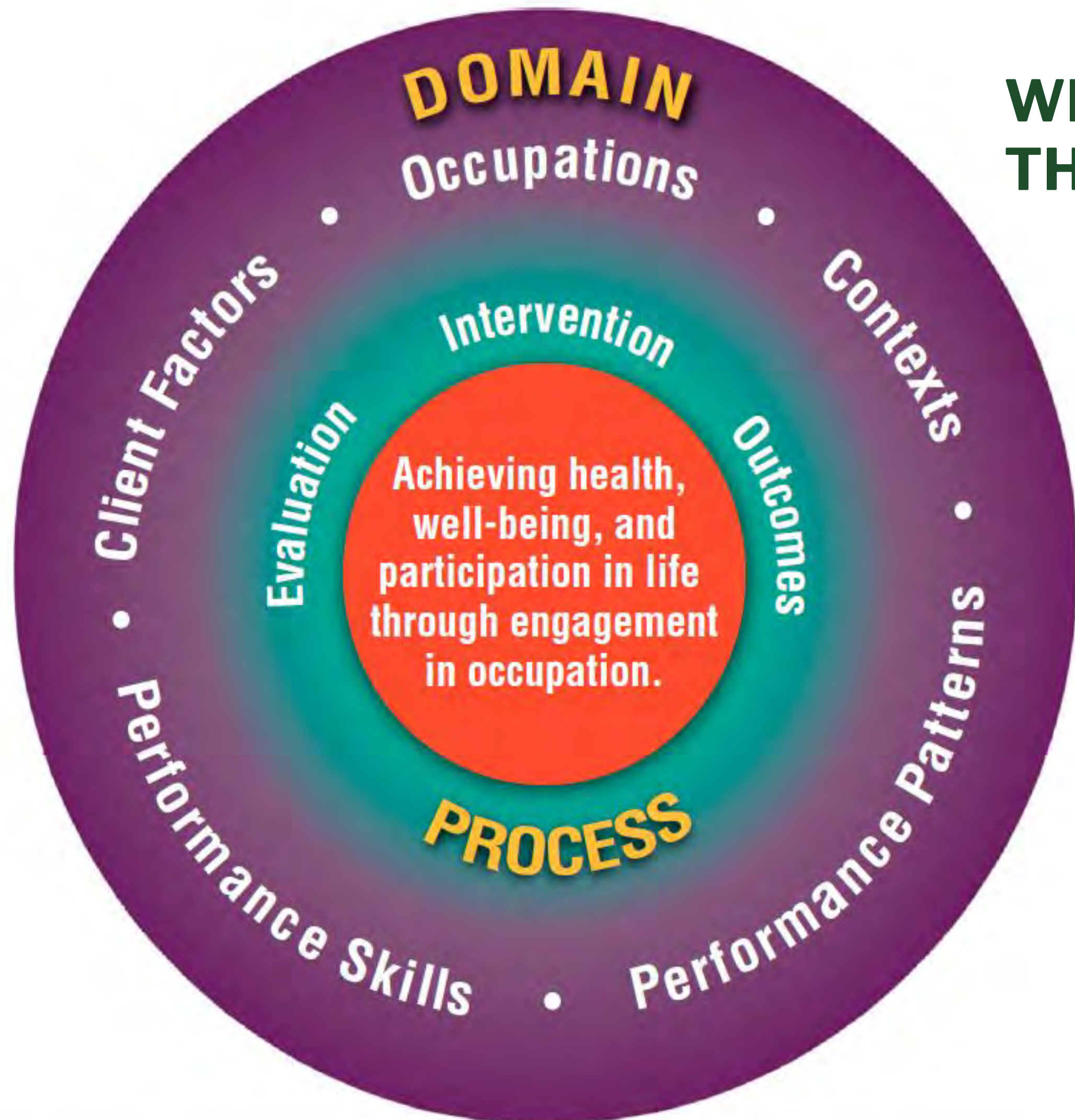
MEANINGFUL ACTIVITY

- Promotes physical and mental health, well-being, and quality of life
- Supports personal identity and relationships with others
- Gives a sense of meaning and purpose



(Fogel-Grinvald et al., 2025; Kennedy-Behr & Hatchett, 2017)

WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

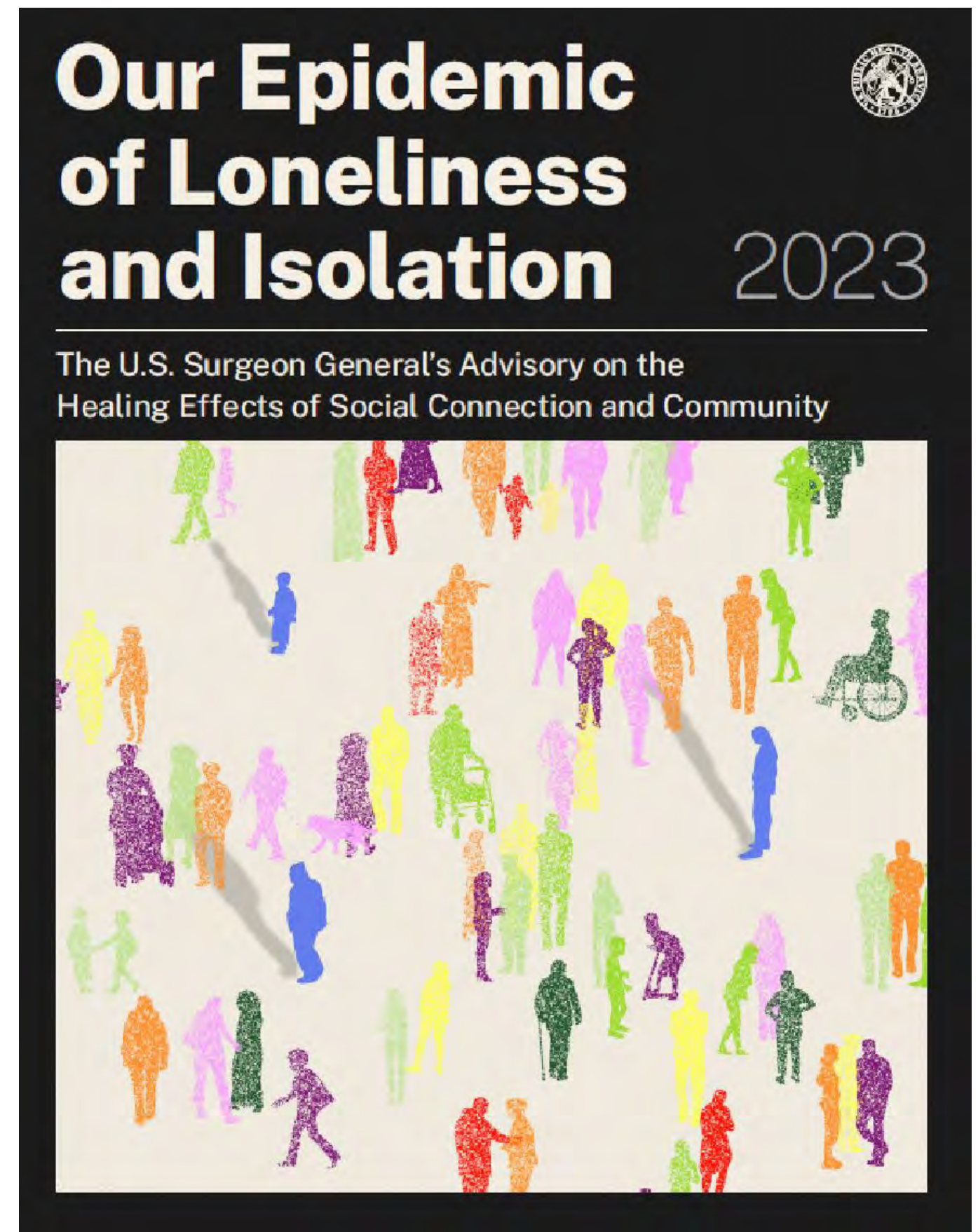


- Therapeutic use of everyday life occupations to enhance participation
- Occupations: activities of daily living, instrumental activities of daily living, health management, rest and sleep, education, work, play, leisure, social participation

(AOTA, 2020)

SOCIAL CONNECTION

- A large part of meaningful activity is the social connection that makes an activity meaningful!
- Activities that are shared and connected to your identity are often those that can help with belonging
- 50% of US adults report experiencing loneliness
- Social connection is a biological need, and loneliness can result in many negative health consequences
- 16% of people in the US say they are attached to their communities
- Older adults have the highest rates of isolation



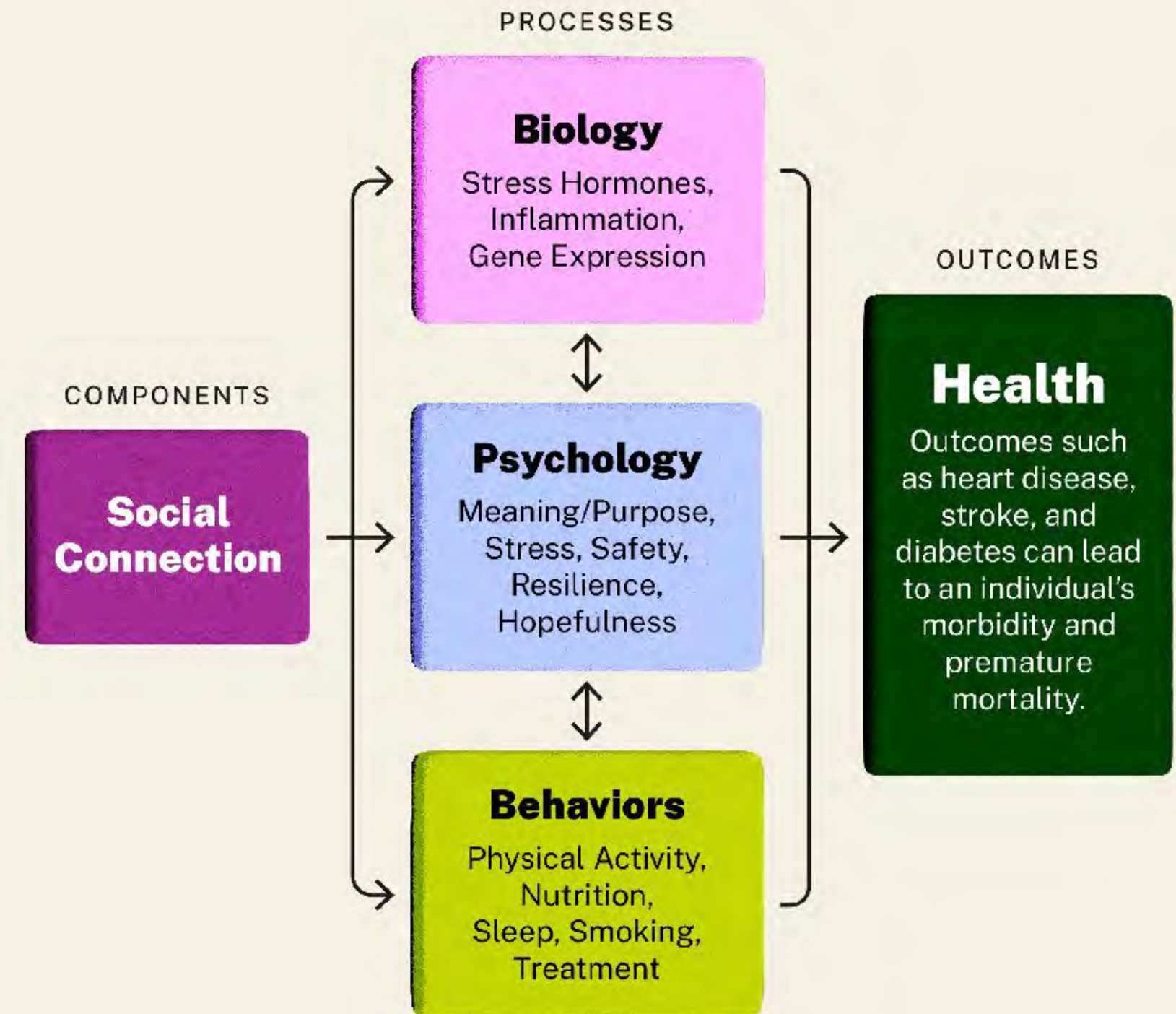
(US Surgeon General's Advisory,
2023)

SOCIAL CONNECTION

- People who are socially connected live longer
- Lower risk for other serious health outcomes
- We won't talk about this direction as much, but increased loneliness is correlated with increased risk of developing PD

How Does Social Connection Influence Health?

Social connection influences health through **three principal pathways**: biology, psychology, and behavior.



(Terracciano et al., 2023; US Surgeon General's Advisory,

2023)

LONELINESS IN PEOPLE WITH PD

- Reported rates of loneliness vary from 24%-54%
 - In those studies, compared to people without PD, loneliness was higher for people with PD
- PD-specific symptoms can impact social functioning
 - Facial masking
 - Dysarthria
- Changes in participation and social functioning impact social roles for people with PD

(Perepezko et al., 2019; Prell et al., 2023; Prenger et al., 2020)



UCLA 3-ITEM LONELINESS SCALE

1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?

1 Hardly Ever

2 Some of the Time

3 Often

2. How often do you feel left out?

1 Hardly Ever

2 Some of the Time

3 Often

3. How often do you feel isolated from others?

1 Hardly Ever

2 Some of the Time

3 Often

Scoring:

Sum the total of all items (range 3-9). Higher scores indicate greater degrees of loneliness.

INTERVENTIONS THAT CAN HELP!

- Meditation/mindfulness
- Improving social skills
- Social Cognitive Training and/or Addressing Maladaptive Social Cognition
- Social Support
- More opportunities for social contact
- Interdisciplinary interventions in the community
- Social Prescription

(Masi et al., 2011; Paquet et al., 2023;
Subramanian et al., 2021; Veronese et al., 2021)



WHAT IS SOCIAL PRESCRIPTION?

- Rx: Go for a walk with a friend
- An evidence-based method to reduce loneliness
- Infrastructure and availability varies in each country, each community, etc
- Oftentimes in primary care, then a “link worker” assists in identifying a social prescription and connecting the person

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY LED SOCIAL PRESCRIPTION

Our OT-led social prescription program will include three parts:

1. participant identification for the social prescription intervention program by a health professional or community member (e.g., PAR staff)
2. Evaluation with an occupational therapist to co-design a social prescription within local organizations and based on participant interests,
3. Follow-up with the occupational therapist/OT doctoral (OTD) student on the co-designed social prescription

(Dingle & Sharman, 2022; Nowak & Mulligan, 2021)



Figure 1. Representation of the adult education types and associated adult basic education levels. (U) indicates unclassified/university training.



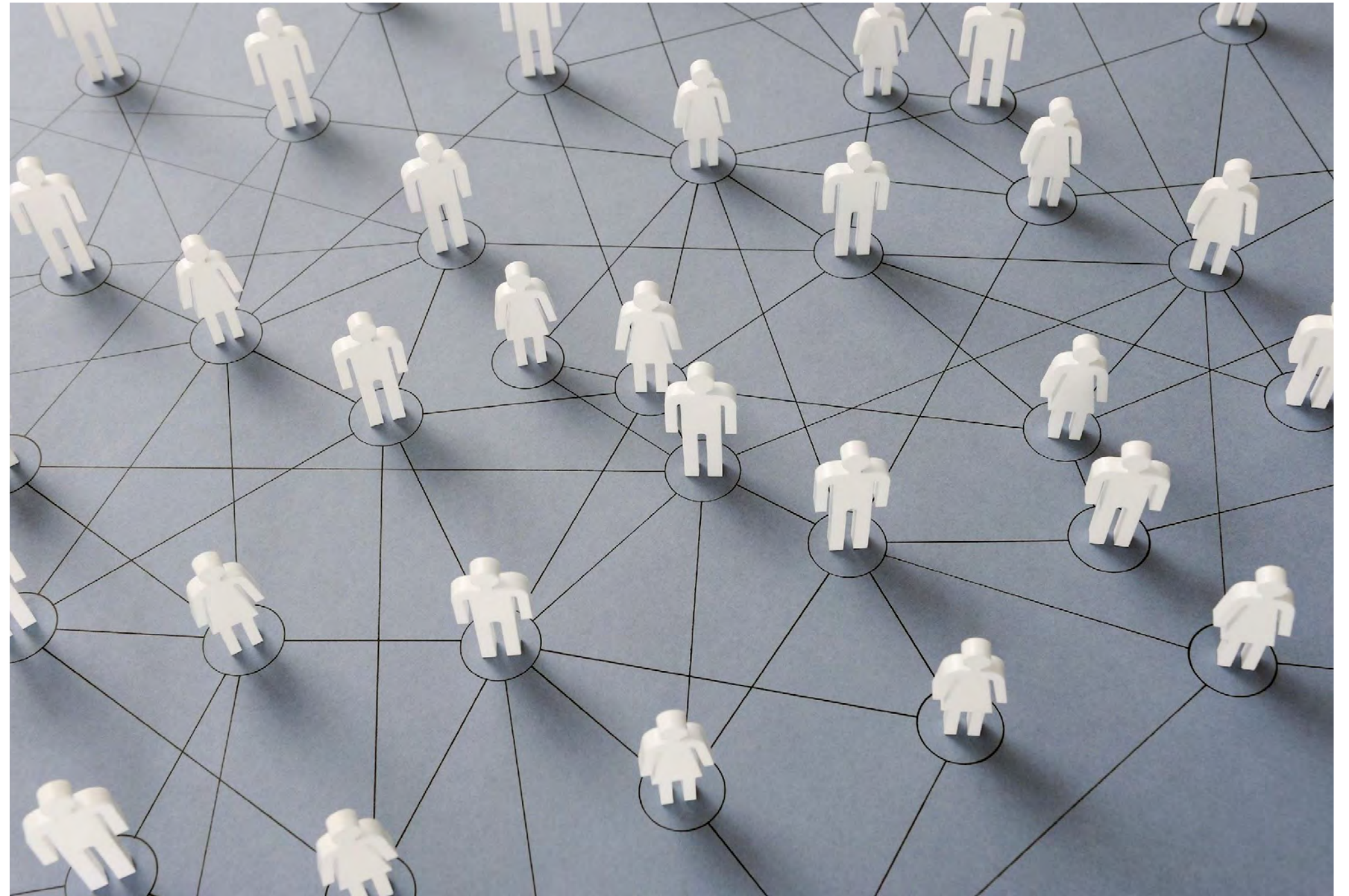
Increasing Adult Literacy
 Increases with the broad nature of society and
 technical skills and digital computing capabilities and
 the need for basic skills and literacy training.

and continues to improve (C) training in working
 adults with the ability (1) (19) as well as the nature of
 work of working citizens (11-16) or non program
 (17) and generally being plus a lot of everyday life

(Paquet et al., 2023)

EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL PRESCRIPTIONS

- Attend Moving Through Parkinson's 1/week
- Attend NeuroPong 1x/week
- Call xxx friend and conduct 1:1 book club weekly
- Participate in virtual Pedaling for Parkinson's class 1x/week
- Participate in a weekly beginner art class through the senior center
- Participate in Power Punch weekly
- Participate in online independent support group for people with PD
- Participate in weekly singing group



OT-LED SOCIAL PRESCRIPTION

- Funded by the American Occupational Therapy Foundation
- Inclusion/Exclusion criteria
 - Adults
 - Diagnosis of Parkinson’s disease
 - Score 5+ on the Loneliness Assessment
 - Participated in a PAR exercise class or support group in the past year
 - Agree to 6-month program including monthly follow-ups
 - No diagnosis of dementia
- Loneliness so far...
 - 13 improved
 - 5 crossed our threshold to not lonely!
 - 2 no change
 - 2 worsened
 - Average didn’t cross the loneliness threshold we set, but many improved!

UCLA_PRE	UCLA_POST
5	3
7	6
5	5
5	6
6	5
8	6
6	4
7	7
8	6
7	5
7	8
7	5
6	4
7	4
7	4
8	5
7	5
6.647059	5.176471

TODAY

- Walk through a modified version of social prescribing
- Identify meaningful activities
- Connect to your emotions and values
- Brainstorm connecting to this activity or a similar one





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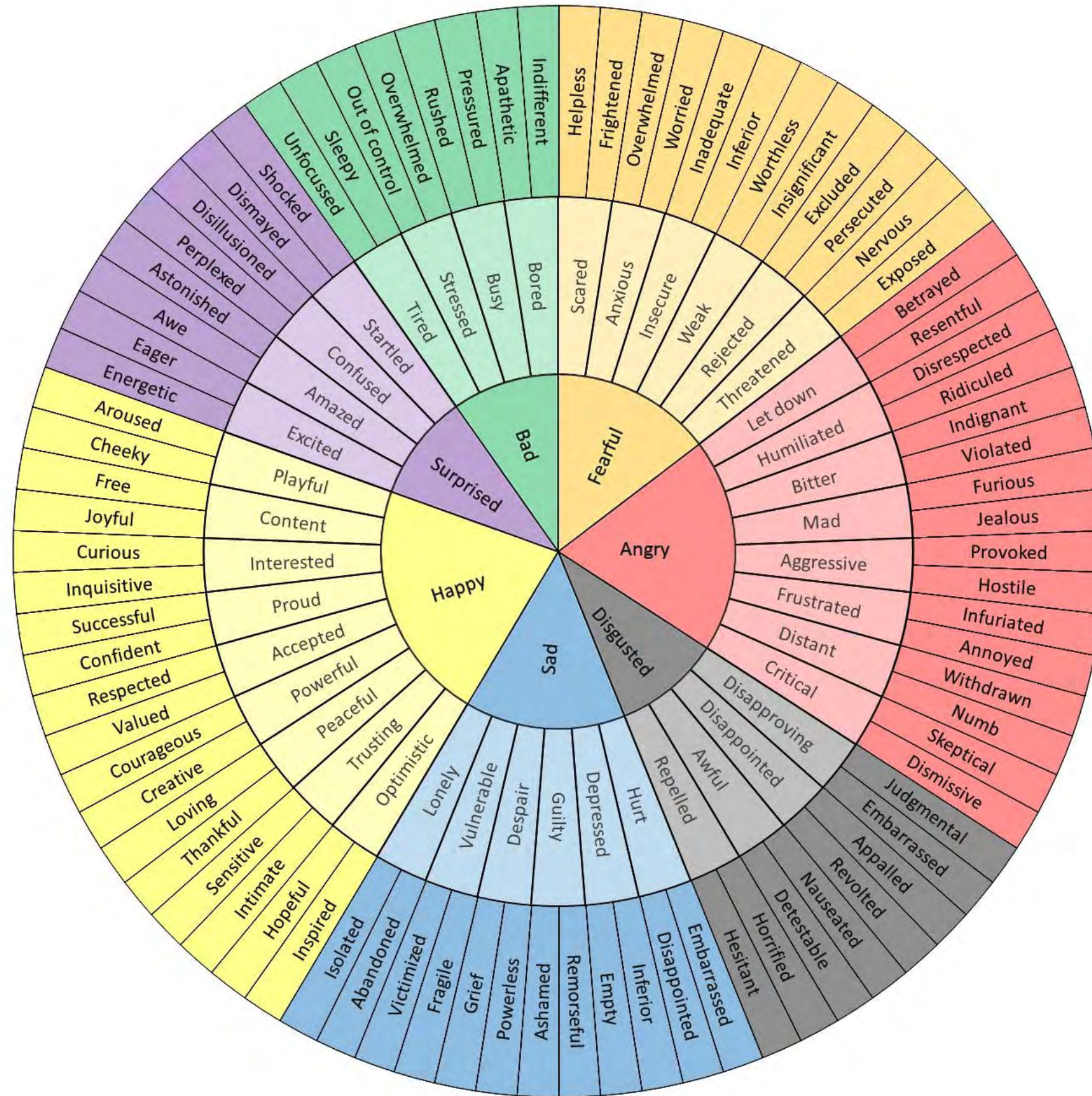
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INDIVIDUAL



INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT— MODIFIED INTEREST CHECKLIST (10 MINUTES)

1. Complete the Modified Interest Checklist.
2. Find an activity with **strong interest** in the past year or past ten years.
 - Go through the emotions wheel and **identify the emotions** you feel doing this activity.
3. Find an activity you would like to **pursue in the future**.
 - Identify the **strengths** that may support your pursuit of this activity and any **barriers** that may get in the way.
4. Identify your **personal values** that support and are reflected in your participation in these activities.
 - See the back of the page for help with identifying your values!



**Developed by Dr Gloria Willcox, The Gottman Institute

Adapted for use by Kirsten Wulfsberg, LPC, Regional Behavioral Health Specialist
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SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY



SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY (~20 MINUTES)

5. **Share** about your activities with the group, the emotions you feel, and the values embedded in your chosen activities.

6. What are some **challenges** you anticipate in the activity you want to pursue in the future? How could you modify the activity to **overcome those barriers**?

- o **Brainstorm** with your group how you might engage in this activity or a similar one that still allows you to access the values that are important to you

7. **Reflection:** How do meaningful activities like these impact your mental health and well-being? Consider connections between these activities and your emotions.

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QUESTIONS?



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