



Pacific Southwest

RURAL OPIOID TECHNICAL

ASSISTANCE REGIONAL CENTER

The Power of Purpose: Sustaining Meaning in Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Work

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Grounding in Today

- *Making Space for What You Feel in the Work of SUD Care*
 - *A reflective pause for those who hold hope every day*



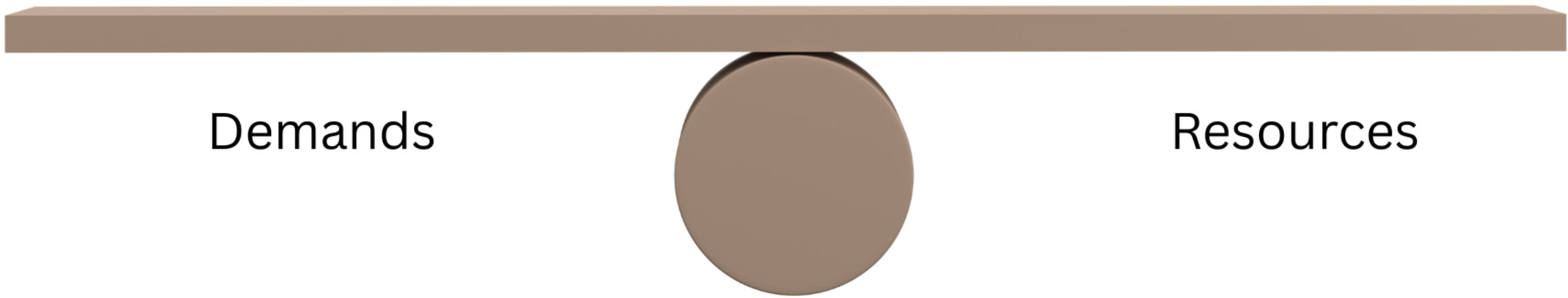
What am I holding today—
emotionally, mentally, physically—
and what do I need to feel even just
a little more grounded?



The Job-Demand Resource Model (JD-R)

Excessive documentation and compliance requirements, high caseloads, insurance billing, audits and regulatory demands, working in under-resourced or siloed systems, chronic underfunding, high staff turnover and team instability, lack of adequate support, limited opportunities for advancement, regular exposure to trauma, relapse, and client death, holding space for intense grief, and feeling personally responsible for client outcomes.

Manageable caseloads, training and education, access to mental health support, adequate staffing and funding, peer support, mentorship, supervision, autonomy, task variety, time for reflection, a mission-driven work culture, access to community resources, self-awareness, healthy boundaries, self-regulation skills, confidence in one's role and competence, stress management skills, a sense of purpose, and optimism.



Demands

Resources

The Emotional Toll of Helping Roles — Research-Based Overview

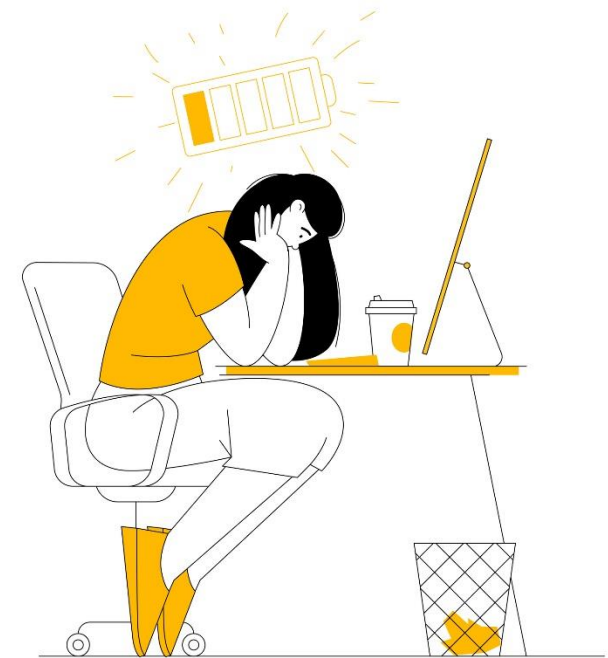


- Burnout
- Compassion Fatigue (Secondary Traumatic Stress)
- Moral Distress & Systemic Frustration
- Vicarious Trauma



When Purpose Fades: Reconnecting with What Matters

- Even purpose-driven work can feel disconnected over time
- Chronic stress and emotional labor wear down our sense of meaning
- Common causes of “purpose drift”:
 - Relentless workload, no time to reflect or recover
 - Administrative demands eclipse relational connection
 - Trauma exposure and loss without space to process
 - Systemic frustration leads to disillusionment
 - Over-identification with the helper role
- This isn't failure—it's a human response to long-term stress
- Reconnection happens in small, intentional moments



Defining Purpose

- A sense of purpose is the **internal experience** of having a meaningful reason for living, working, or striving—a guiding direction that gives your actions coherence, significance, and motivation beyond the present moment.



The Science of Purpose

- Purpose is more than passion—it's psychologically grounded
- Key psychological components:
 - **Goal orientation:** Future-directed motivation
 - **Meaning-making:** Making sense of challenges
 - **Identity integration:** Aligning work with values and self-concept
 - **Self-transcendence:** Connecting to something larger than oneself
- Purpose supports resilience in high-stress roles



Health & Well-Being Benefits of Purpose

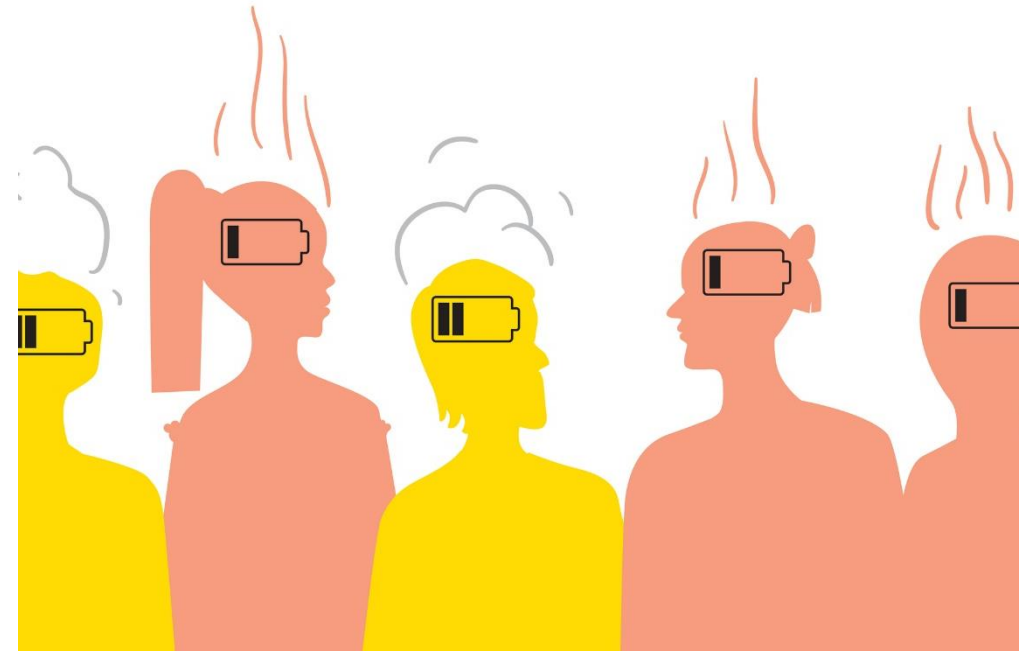
- Reduced risk of **chronic diseases** (e.g., heart disease, stroke)
- Lower risk of **early mortality**
- Fewer **sleep disturbances**
- Reduced symptoms of **depression**
- Lower levels of **loneliness**
- Increased **optimism** and positive outlook
- Greater **engagement in physical activity**
- Higher levels of **positive emotions (affect)**
- Reduced feelings of **hopelessness**



Why Purpose Matters at Work

Purpose is linked to:

- Lower rates of burnout
- Greater resilience and mental health
- Lower turnover
- Higher engagement and job satisfaction
- Functions as a **protective factor** against emotional exhaustion
- Especially powerful in high-demand, low-resource settings



Core Elements of Purpose

- **Direction** – A clear sense of where you're headed and why it matters
- **Significance/Meaning** – Feeling that your actions matter to something larger than yourself
- **Commitment/Intentionality** – A sustained dedication to goals or values, even through difficulty
- **Contribution/Beyond-the-Self Focus** – A desire to positively impact others or the world

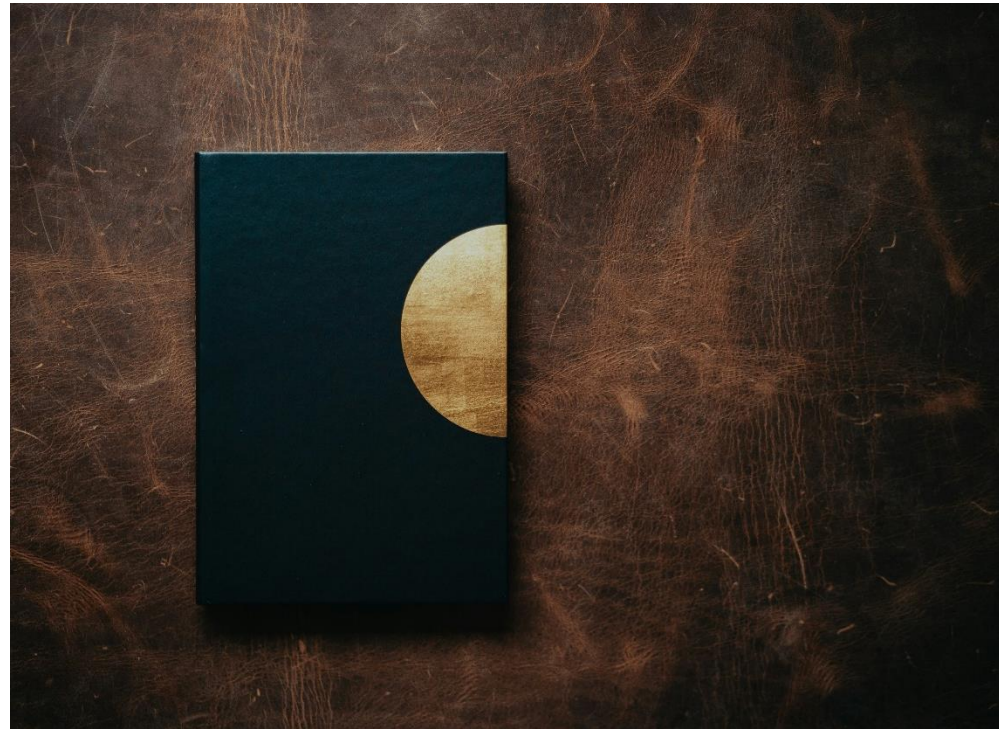


Emerging Elements

- **Identity Integration** - Purpose is often linked to how people see themselves—"I am someone who..."
- **Growth Orientation** - Purpose can evolve; it's dynamic rather than fixed.



Defining Your Purpose



Element 1: Direction

Clarity about where you're going and why.

Reflection Prompts:

- What motivates me to get out of bed in the morning?
- What gives me a sense of direction in life right now?
- What goals or dreams feel deeply aligned with who I am becoming?
- What path am I on? What gives my life structure and intention?
- What core values are guiding the direction I'm choosing to move in?



Element 2: Significance/Meaning

Significance/meaning is about personal fulfillment—what matters most and why.

Reflection Prompts:

- What makes my life feel rich and meaningful?
- What experiences have shaped what I care about most?
- When do I feel most connected to something bigger than myself?
- What personal challenges have helped me find meaning?
- What core beliefs give my life depth?



Element 3: Commitment/Intentionality

Ongoing dedication, even when it's difficult.

Reflection Prompts:

- What am I willing to stand up for or protect?
- Where in my life have I demonstrated real perseverance?
- What keeps me going when things get hard?
- What values do I uphold even when no one's watching?
- What practices or disciplines help me stay anchored in purpose?



Element 4: Contribution/Beyond-the-Self Focus

Desire to make an impact beyond the self.

Reflection Prompts:

- Who or what do I want to help heal, uplift, or support?
- What kind of impact do I want to have in my relationships, community, or world?
- What strengths or experiences do I have that can benefit others?
- Where do I feel most useful or needed?
- What change would I be proud to contribute to, even in a small way?



Values, Identity, and Growth

Values

- What values feel non-negotiable in how I live and work?
- Where do I feel misaligned with my values—and how does that affect me?
- When have I felt most proud of how I acted?

Identity Integration

- How does my purpose reflect who I am at my core?
- What identity do I carry that feels deeply connected to my life's purpose?
- In what roles do I feel most like myself?

Growth Orientation

- How has my sense of purpose evolved over time?
- What moments in life have reshaped what matters to me?
- What am I still learning about myself and my purpose?



Review Your Reflections

Take a few quiet moments to re-read what you wrote in each section. Highlight or underline words, phrases, or insights that feel especially true, energizing, or clarifying. Look for patterns or connections between your values, direction, commitments, and the ways you want to contribute.

- What themes showed up across multiple areas?
- What words or ideas feel “alive” and energizing?
- What direction am I heading, and why does it matter?
- What values and experiences are shaping who I am becoming?
- How does my purpose serve something larger than myself?
- What truth do I want to live into every day?



Write Your Personal Purpose Statement

You can utilize the following sentence stems to guide you—or create your own:

Template 1 – Narrative Style

- *“My purpose is to live in alignment with my values of [values], by using my strengths in [strengths or commitments] to pursue [direction], create meaning through [significance], and contribute to [who/what you want to impact]. This purpose reflects who I am and continues to evolve as I grow.”*

Template 2 – Simpler and Action-Oriented

- *“I am here to [contribution], by [commitment or action], grounded in my values of [values]. This gives direction and meaning to my life.”*

Template 3 – Declarative (Mission Statement Style)

- *“To [verb] + [who/what] + [how/why], so that [desired outcome or deeper impact].”*

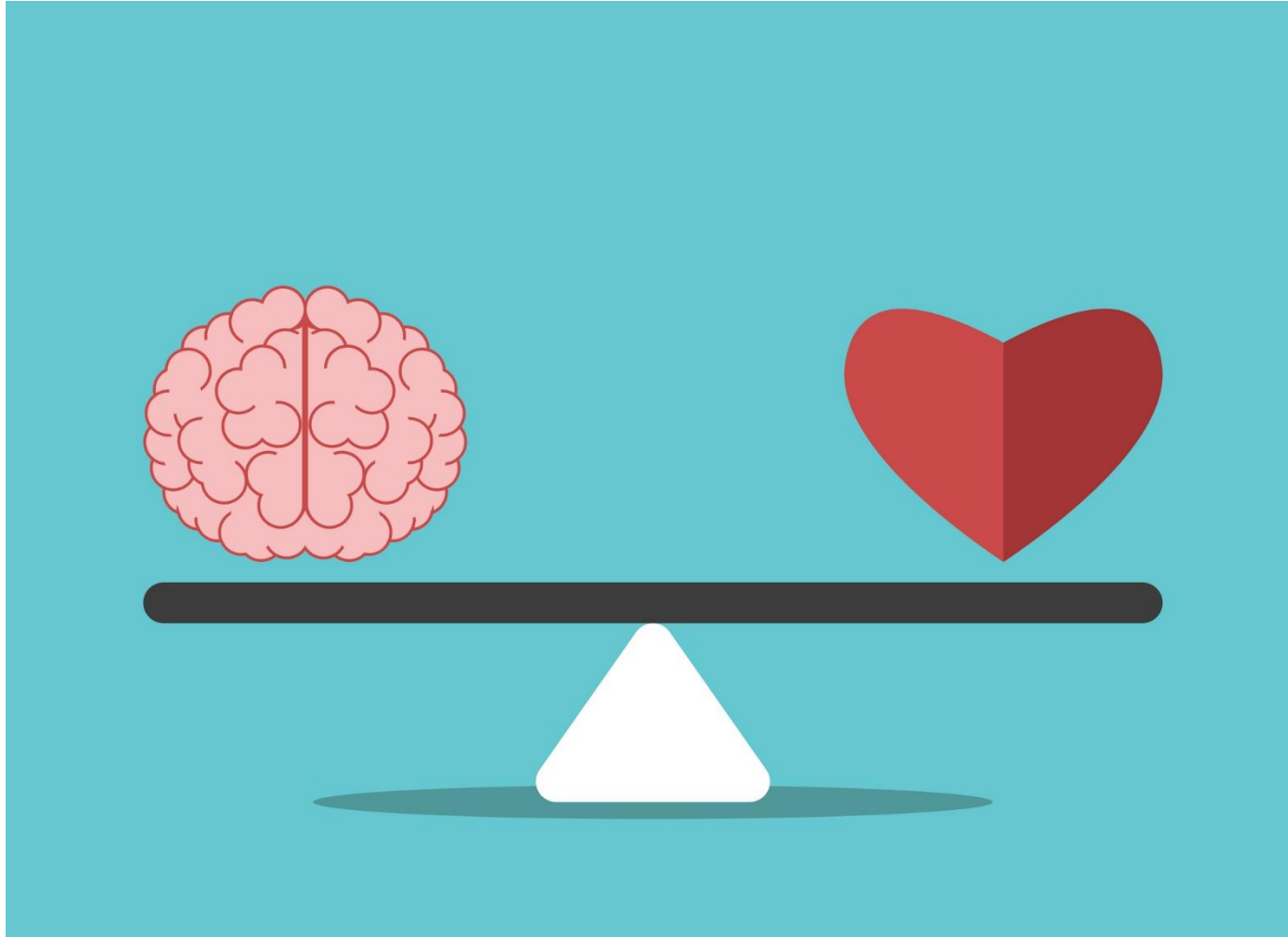


Integration Ideas

- **Visualize It** – Imagine a day lived in full alignment with your purpose
- **Create a Vision Board** – Use images/words that reflect your purpose
- **Design a Purpose-Aligned Day** – Plan one day that reflects your values and goals
- **Write to Your Future Self** – Reflect on who you want to become
- **Speak It Out Loud** – Share your statement to deepen connection
- **Do a Life Alignment Check** – Assess purpose alignment in work, relationships, etc.
- **Take Purposeful Action** – Choose one small step to live your purpose this week
- **Revisit Often** – Update as you grow and life evolves



Closing Reflection





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