

Trust

ROBYN PASHBY PHD

Health Psychology Partners
Washington DC



About me

Mom
Daughter
Wife
Psychologist
Speaker
Teacher
Advocate
Athlete

Time with family
Travel
Learning
Walks and Yoga



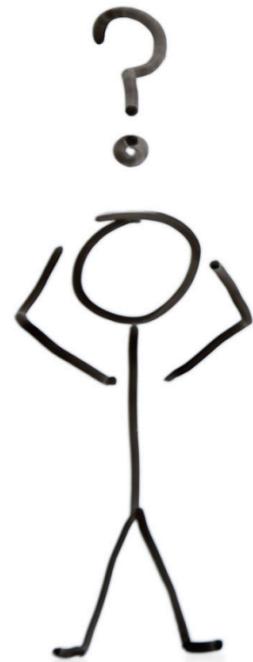
Goals

DEFINE

How trust works:
biologically,
psychologically,
and socially

CREATE

Create space for
curiosity and
questions
without
judgment

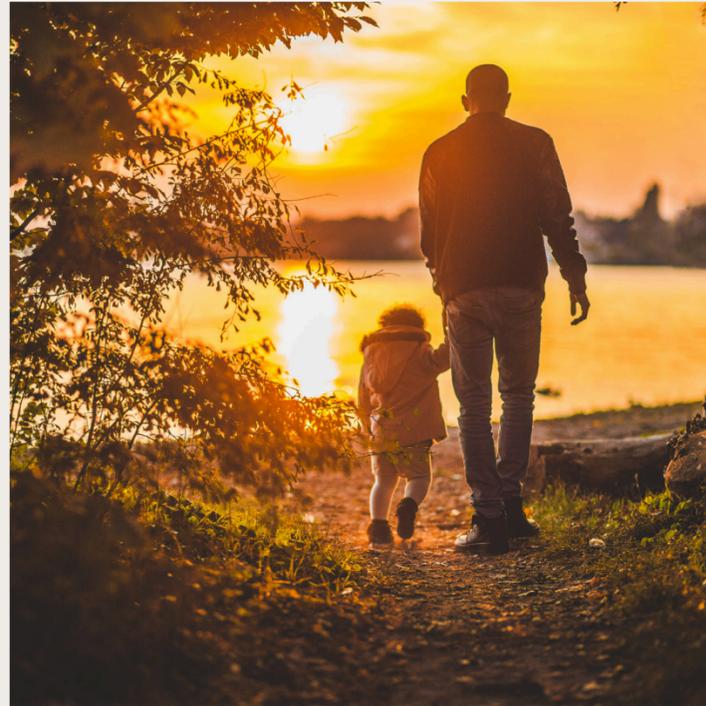


PRACTICE

Determine ways to
build trust in your
own communities

There are limitations of this talk: it is one (my) perspective.

TRUST IS THE
FOUNDATION OF
MEANINGFUL
RELATIONSHIPS.





Who do you trust the most?

Family? Government? Google? TikTok? Your pastor? Me? The person next to you?

WHY?

Worry vs. Trust – A Psychological Tug-of-War

Worry often fills the gap when trust is missing.

When we can't rely on trust, we try to control, which often shows up as overthinking, anxiety, or rigid behavior.

“BRAVING”

Brene Brown

BOUNDARIES: Make clear what’s okay and what’s not okay, and why.

RELIABILITY: Do what you say you’ll do.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Own your mistakes, apologize, make amends.

VAULT: Don’t share information/experiences that aren’t yours to share.

INTEGRITY: Choose courage over comfort; what’s right over what’s fun, fast, or easy; and practice your values, don’t just profess them.

NONJUDGMENT: Ask for what you need and express feeling without judgment.

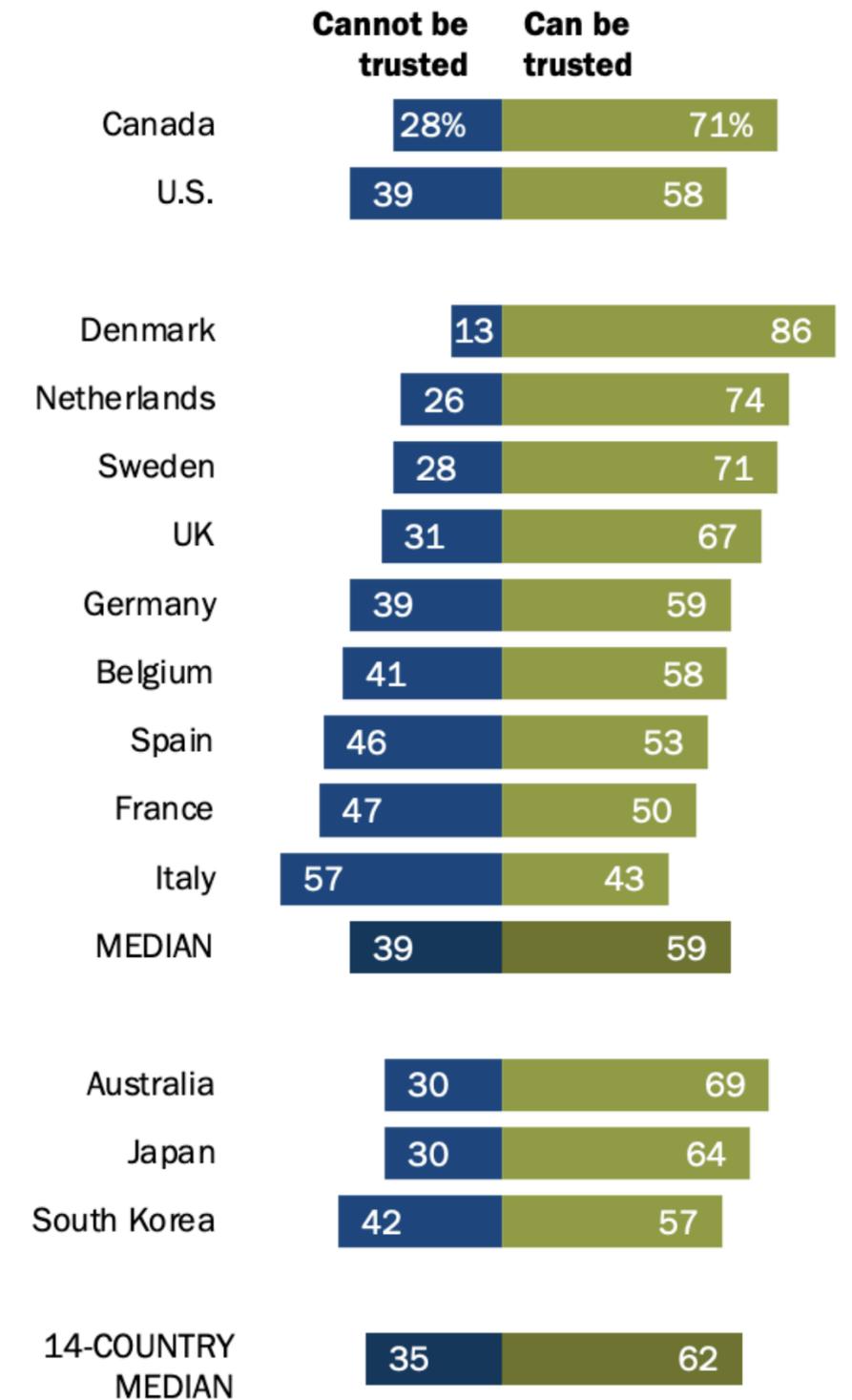
GENEROSITY: Extend the most generous interpretation to the intentions, words, and actions of others.

Social side of trust

Social trust is a belief in the honesty, integrity and reliability of others – a “faith in people.”

Majorities in most surveyed countries say most people can be trusted

% who say that, in general, most people ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

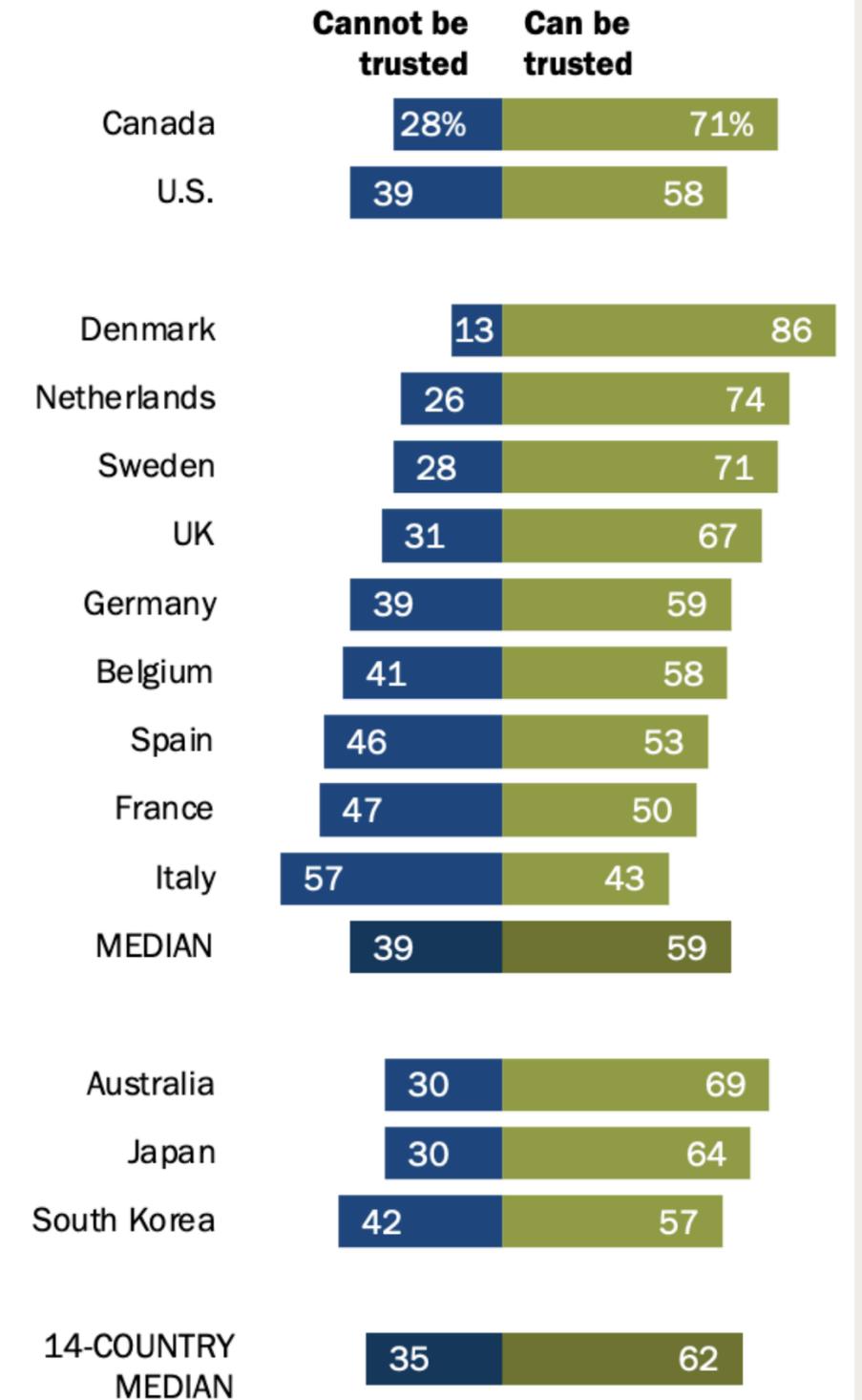
Source: Summer 2020 Global Attitudes Survey. Q5.

Social side of trust

The share of adults who said “most people can be trusted” declined from 46% in 1972 to 34% in 2024, according to the General Social Survey.

Majorities in most surveyed countries say most people can be trusted

% who say that, in general, most people ...



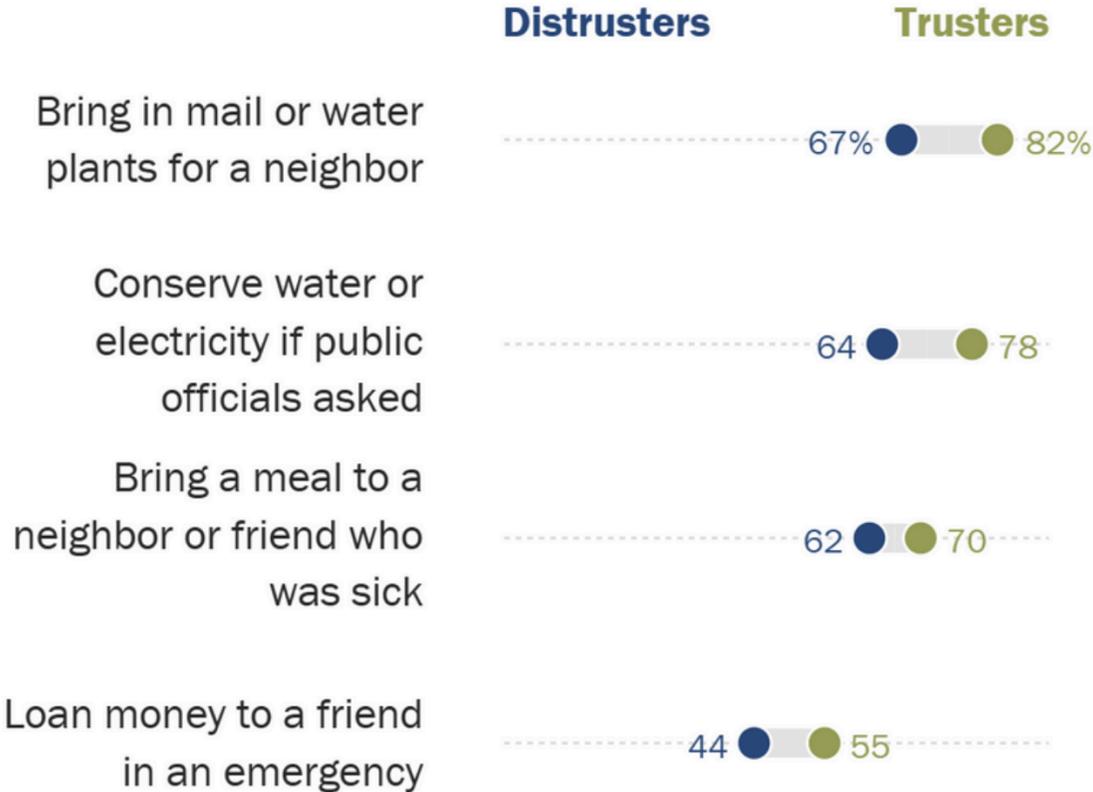
Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Summer 2020 Global Attitudes Survey. Q5.

Social side of trust

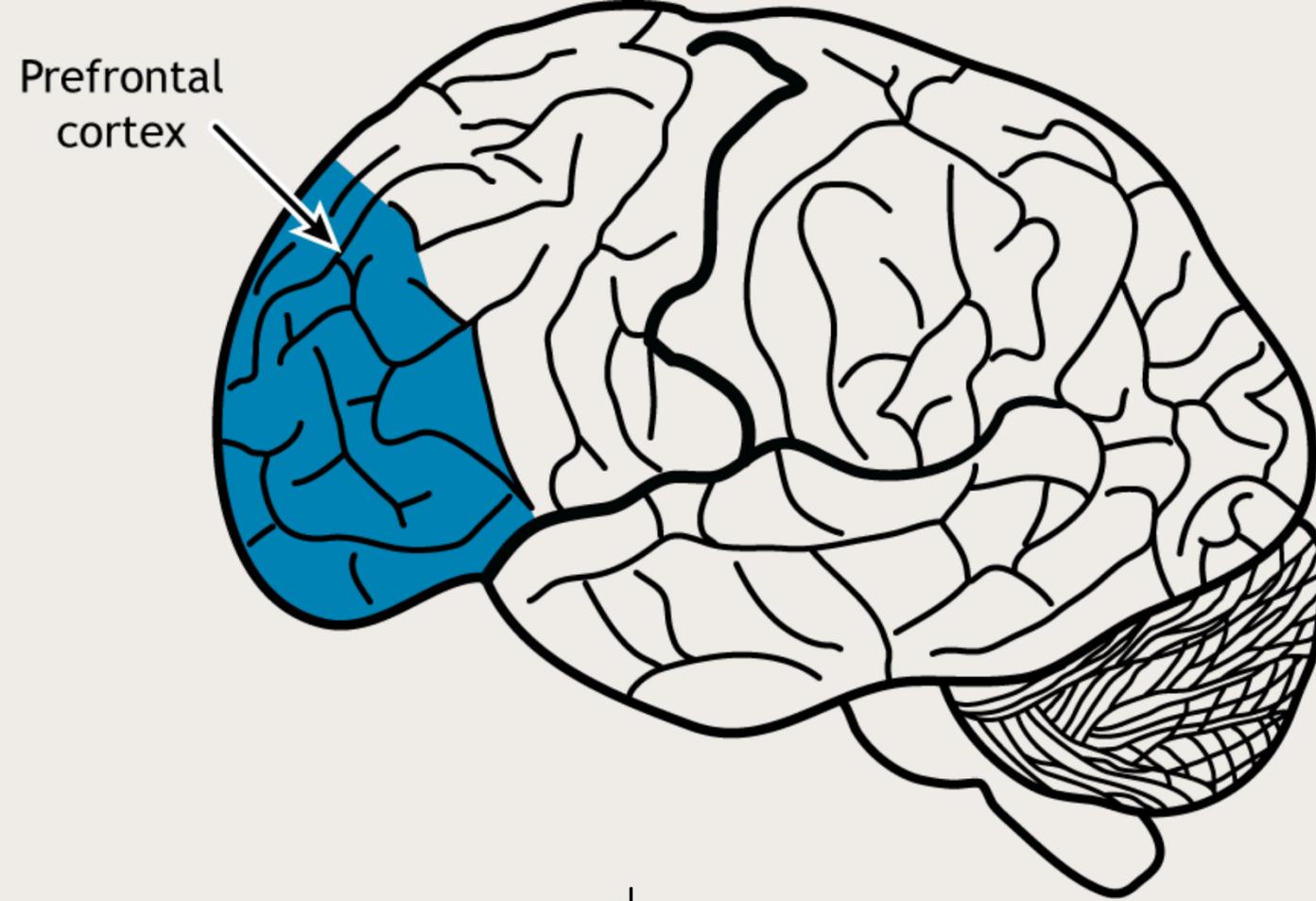
March 2025 Pew survey revealed that Americans who express trust in others are more likely to say they would help their friends and neighbors in various ways.

% who say they would be *extremely/very likely* to ...



Note: "Trusters" are those who said "most people can be trusted." "Distrusters" are those who said "most people cannot be trusted." See Topline for full question wording.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 10-16, 2025.

Biology of trust

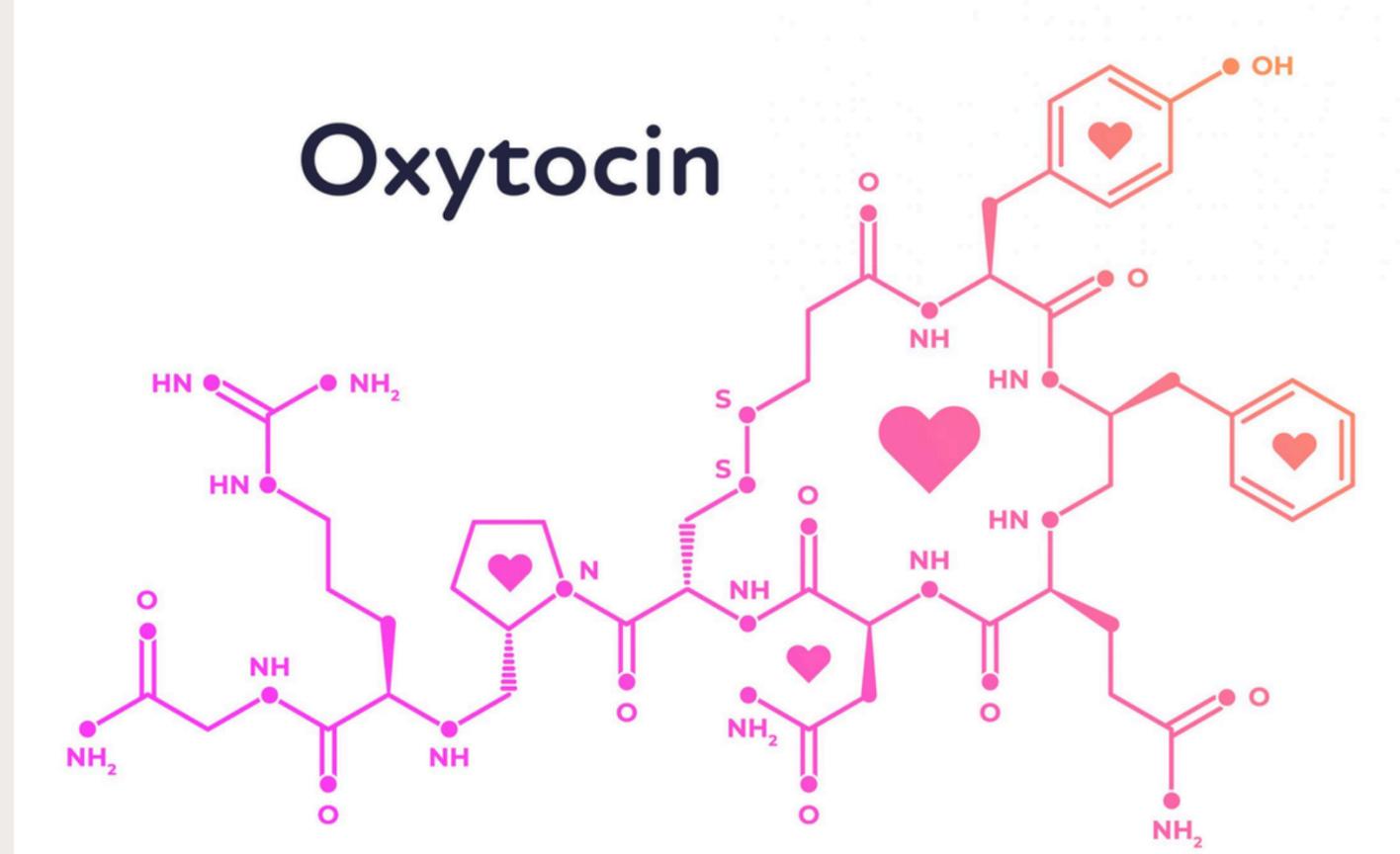


The prefrontal cortex is a critical part of the brain in assessing and managing *risk*, making sound *decisions*, and regulating *emotions* and *behavior*.

Trust: “an individual’s calculated exposure to the risk of harm from the actions of an influential other.”

(Hancock et al., 2011)

Biology of trust



Nicknamed “The Trust Hormone”

A quick on/off system

Involved in parent/infant bonding and
romantic attachment

Released after a concrete event/experience

A tip of a hat

A small smile

A door held open

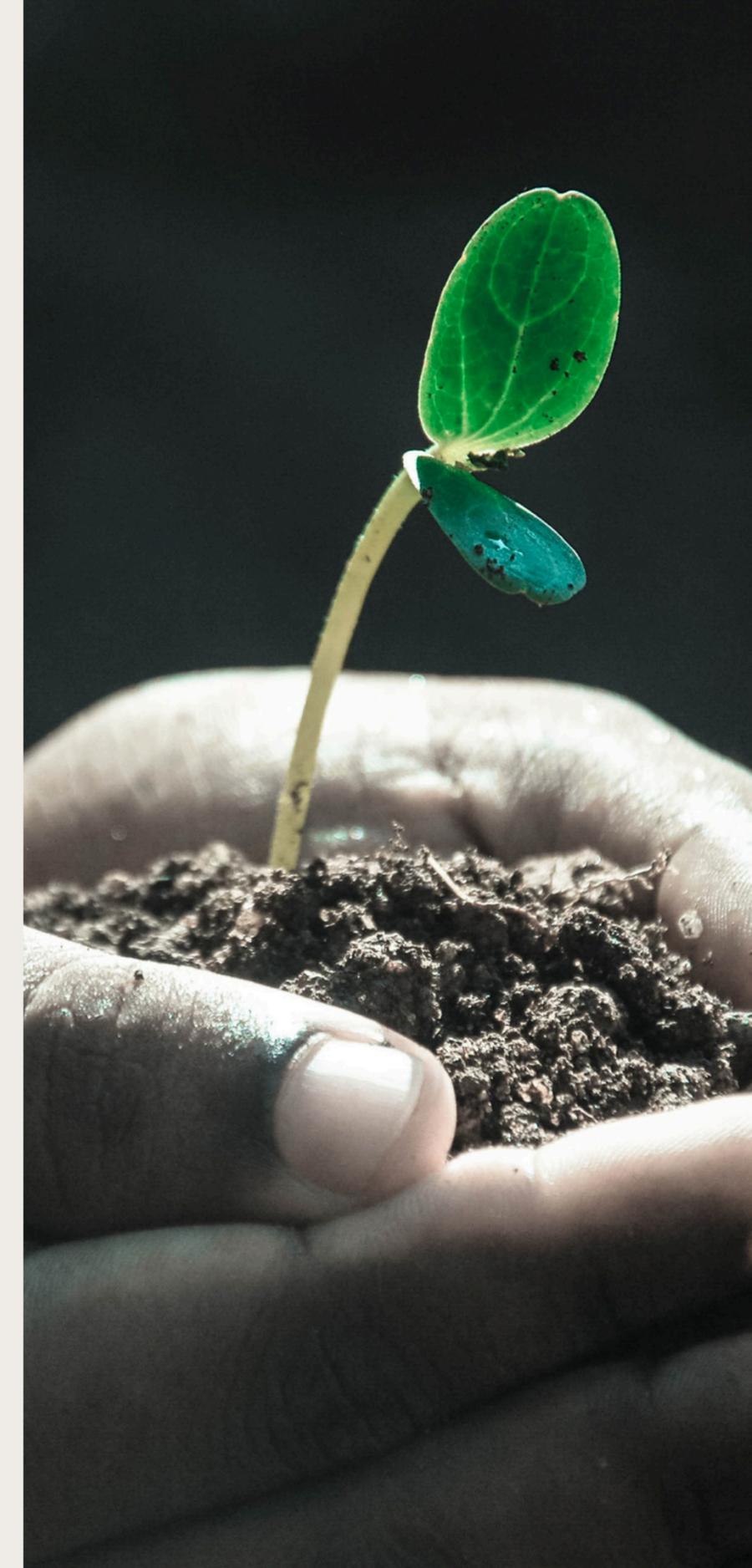
Psychology of trust

WHY DO PEOPLE TRUST?

Previous life experience

WHY DO PEOPLE DISTRUST?

Previous life experience



Psychology of trust

WHY DO PEOPLE TRUST?

Previous life experience

WHY DO PEOPLE DISTRUST?

Previous life experience

You can't give away something you
never received.



Psychology of trust

CONFIRMATION BIAS

We tend to trust sources that align with our beliefs.

AUTHORITY BIAS

We tend to believe those in power or with credentials.

FAMILIARITY EFFECT

We trust what we've heard repeatedly, even if it's false.

THE HALO EFFECT

We trust our initial impression of a person (beauty bias).



Psychology of trust

POSITIVE EMOTIONS
INCREASE TRUST

Happiness, gratitude

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS
DECREASE TRUST

Anger, anxiety

Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005



What erodes trust?

Unpredictability

Avoidance/secretcy

Defensiveness

What builds trust?

Consistency

Transparency

Vulnerability



Practice

BUT HOW?

- By creating spaces for open dialogue rather than expecting conformity.
- By encouraging questions and critical thinking instead of assuming unquestioning belief.
- By engaging in “emotional acknowledgment” especially for negative emotions. (Yu et al., 2021)



Practice

BUT HOW?

- By sharing about yourself (healthy self-disclosure)
- By being authentic
- By having self-trust and self-confidence

IT IS A PROCESS

Building trust is a dynamic process that requires intentional effort.

It builds over time in small increments, but can be ruined in one moment.



Remember



We're all just
walking each
other home.

Ram Dass

CONTACT

rpashbyphd@healthpsychologypartners.com

**T H A N K
Y O U**

