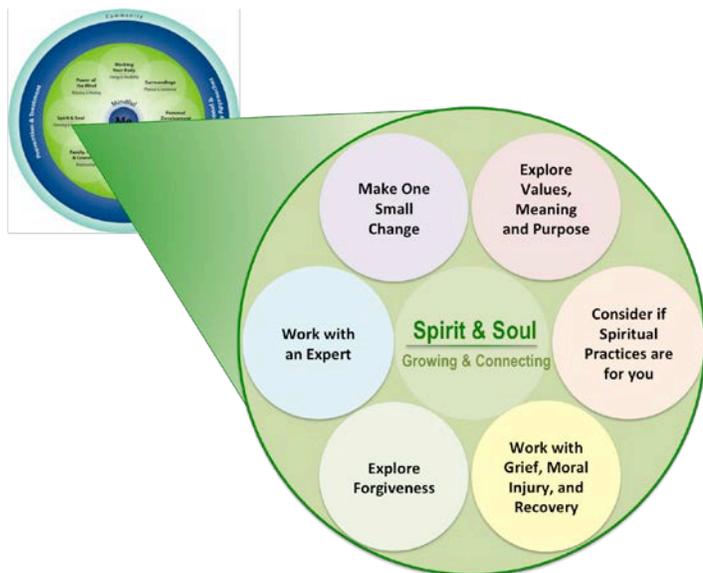


Zeroing In – Spirit & Soul: Growing and Connecting

Spirituality takes many forms. You may belong to an organized religion, find your spirituality in service to other or through being nature, or base it on your past experiences. You may be unsure of what your spirituality is. Regardless, take time to focus on what brings meaning and purpose to your life. Doing so supports good health.



Key Points

- Be respectful of others' beliefs as you consider these issues. There is NO expectation that you believe a certain way.
- Always circle back to what really matters to you and let that inform your goals. People with a sense of purpose live longer.
- It is hard to do, but working with grief and moral injury, and going through recovery for addictions is very helpful.
- Forgiveness is also challenging, but rewarding.
- Ask chaplains, clergy, and other experts for help if you need it.

Values Meaning Purpose

Explore Values, Meaning, and Purpose. Whether you are spiritual and/or religious or not, keep an eye to what matters to you, as you create your Personal Health Plan. What do you value most of all? Why do you care about your health in the first place?

- People find their spirituality in different places, and each of us is unique. What brings you a sense of something bigger than yourself? What is meaningful in your life?
- It is okay to feel like you don't have all the answers. Mystery is a part of spirituality for many people.
- Some people find their spirituality in religion, or in serving others, or in doing something they love.

Spiritual Practices

Consider if Spiritual Practices are for you. Spiritual practices are things you can do to stay connected with what really matters. They bring you a sense of peace and ease, and perhaps a sense of being part of something bigger than yourself. Some examples of practices include:

- Prayer
- Carrying something, a spiritual anchor, that reminds you to focus on the important things in your life.
- Taking part in ceremonies or holidays.
- Bringing meaning in through music and art.
- Pilgrimage; traveling to sacred places.
- Practicing compassion and generosity. Giving to others.
- Some types of meditation.
- Forgiveness

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Grief, Moral Injury, Recovery

Work with Grief, Moral Injury, and Recovery. All can lead to deep healing, but be gentle with yourself when you are dealing with these very emotional areas. Ask for help and support as needed.

- Grief is normal, unless it begins to get in the way of fully living your life. In the military, bad things happen, but people do not always get a chance to fully grieve.
- Moral injury happens when someone did something, saw something, or could not prevent something that happened that was against their deepest beliefs. Moral injury happens a lot in war.
- Recovery –healing from addictions– often requires some very deep work. Twelve step programs are helpful.

Forgiveness

Explore Forgiveness. Forgiveness is NEVER about saying something that someone did to hurt you was okay. It IS about setting yourself free.

- Forgiveness is a process. There are books about how to do it, but it is best if you have support from a health care team member, like a psychologist or a chaplain.
- It starts with being able to forgive yourself.

Experts

Work with and Expert. Because these areas can be hard to look at, it is good to ask for help and support.

- There are always chaplains available to help at the VA, and the VA has one of the best chaplaincies of any organization in the world. Chaplains can work with people from a variety of faiths and backgrounds, and if not, they can point you in the direction of someone who can help you just the same.
- If you belong to a religious group, ask clergy or others for help.
- These professionals can help with topics like death and dying, the meaning behind illness, and feelings of spiritual anxiety, anger, guilt, loss, and despair.

One Small Change

Make One Small Change. There are all sorts of possibilities. Start small with a goal you know you can reach, and build from there. Here are a few more examples of things that you could put into your Personal Health Plan:

- Join a spiritual community.
- Carry an anchor with you, like a photo of someone dear to you, a stone, a coin, a medal, a piece of jewelry – whatever reminds you of what matters most.
- Read something that inspires you, like scripture, poetry, or stories about those who have been able to rise above challenges.
- Do a random act of kindness each day. Tip well at a café. Help a person by the side of the road. Give someone flowers. Smile.
- Offer gratitude. One time to do this is as you are sitting down about to eat.
- Honor someone you have lost.
- Take time to admire something beautiful.
- Do something generous.
- Cheer someone up. Make them laugh.
- Pray, meditate, or pause to tune in to the rest of the world.

Spirit & Soul Links

You can check out the links below to learn more about Spirit & Soul:

Whole Health Library Veteran Handouts. These are indexed at <https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/veteran-handouts/index.asp#spirit-and-soul>.

- A Introduction to Spirit and Soul for Whole Health
- Deciding What Your Need for Spiritual Health
- How do you know that? Beliefs and Your Health
- Spiritual Anchors
- Chaplains
- Create a Gratitude Practice
- Forgiveness
- What Matters Most? Exploring Your Values.
- Coping with Grief Following a Death

Other VA Sites

- US Department of Veterans Affairs National Chaplain Center. <https://www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/index.asp>. Describes what chaplains can do and how to work with them.

General Spirituality Resources

- Spirituality and Health - <https://spiritualityhealth.com/>. Website for a magazine that focuses on spirituality. The website has various articles, blogs, and resources.
- Spirituality and Practice - <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/>. Open to all spiritual practices and religions, with various resources and possible practices to try.
- University of Minnesota, Bakken Center For Spirituality and Healing. <https://www.csh.umn.edu/>. Offers not just resources on spirituality but on well-being in general. Has articles, educational resources, courses, and more.
- BBC Guide to Religions <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>. Gives a background on major world religions.
- Recovering From Religion. <https://www.recoveringfromreligion.org/>. Religion can be very empowering for some, but for others it has been tied to shame or sorrow. This website has multiple resources and links for support for those wondering if and how religion fits into their lives.

Values and Purpose

- Tiny Buddha: Simple Wisdom for Complex Lives. <https://tinybuddha.com/>. Although the word Buddha is in the name, Tiny Buddha has resources relevant to people from all backgrounds. Has blog posts, quotes, and forums to help inspire, explore spirituality, explore values and ones own purpose.

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Grief

- Center for Grief Recovery and Therapeutic Services. <http://griefcounselor.org/>. Although the services are Chicago based, the Resources section has material available for everyone.
- Hospice Foundation of America - <https://hospicefoundation.org/>. Hospice is for the family as a whole and has resources for loved ones going through loss.

Forgiveness

- International Forgiveness Institute. <https://internationalforgiveness.com/>. Support for moving through the process of forgiveness.
- Spiritual Competency Resource Center. <http://www.spiritualcompetency.com/>. This website is more geared towards health professionals learning these techniques, but there's a nice article that looks at forgiveness in different religions. <http://www.spiritualcompetency.com/pdf/58.pdf>