

FACILITATION GUIDE

Module 4: Wairua – mental and spiritual health and resilience

Spiritual health and resilience is the fourth cornerstone of Te Whare Tapa Whā model of health¹. Spirit and spirituality can mean different things to different people. A person's spirit or spirituality is hard to define, but broadly it is the non-physical part of a person, the source of our emotions, our character and even our soul. It deals with aspects of human life that are both intensely personal and difficult to describe. It is not related to a specific religion or necessarily religious in nature.

Māori have always recognised the significance of wairua for wellbeing and good health in general, and that this applies to all people. Wairua describes the capacity to have faith and to recognise the links between you and others and the world around you. It doesn't necessarily mean having a religious belief, although this might be an important part of one's spirituality.

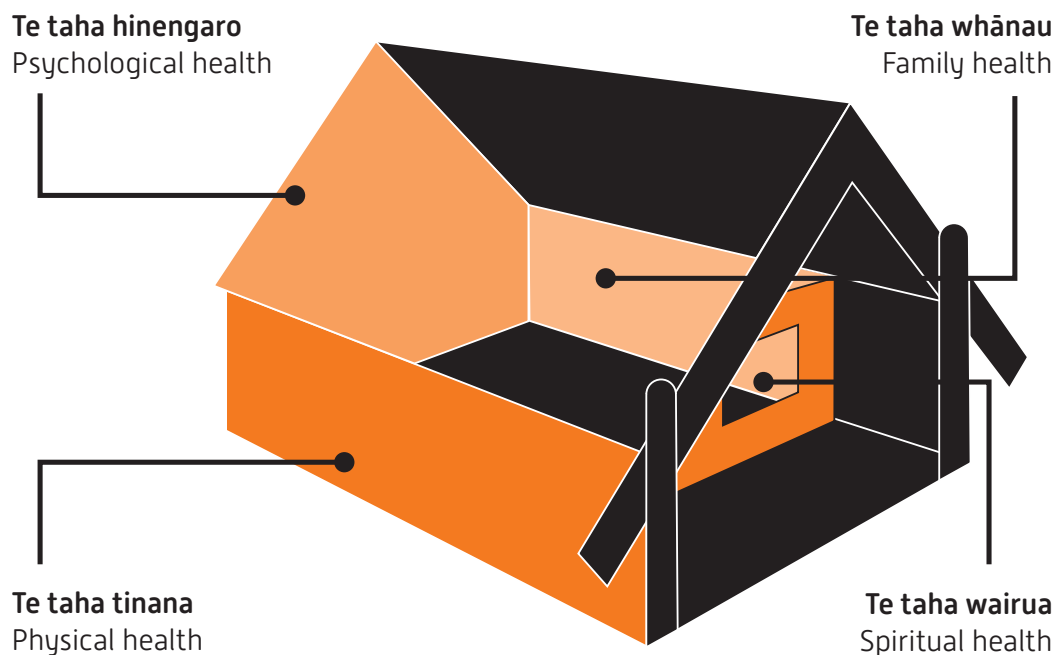
Spirituality is a broad term, but there are a number of common themes, as outlined in the table below. Cultivating some sense of spirituality however, can help people build their sense of identity and meaning and purpose in life, as well as a senses of contentment². It can also help people find more significance in relationships, better handle adversity, and experience life more fully, all of which help one's emotional well-being and mental health^{3, 4}.

¹ Durie, M. (1999). Te Pae Māhutonga: A model for Māori health promotion. In *Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand Newsletter*: 49(2): 5.

² Yeung, D., & Martin, M. T. (2014). Spiritual Fitness and Resilience: A Review of Relevant Constructs, Measures, and Links to Well-Being. *Rand health quarterly*, 3(4).

³ Koenig, H., Koenig, H. G., King, D., & Carson, V. B. (2012). *Handbook of religion and health*. Oup Usa.

⁴ Fredrickson, B. L.; Losada, M. F. 2005]. 'Positive affect and complex dynamics of human flourishing'. *American Psychologist*. 60: 678–686.



Te Whare Tapa Whā model of health

TABLE 1: COMMON THEMES OF SPIRITUALITY

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > A sense of purpose > A sense of 'connectedness' – to self, others, nature, or a place > A quest for wholeness > A search for hope or harmony | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > A belief in a higher being or beings. > The sense that there is more to life than the material or practical aspects of life. > Those activities that give meaning and value to people's lives. |
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According to the UK Mental Health Foundation⁵ spirituality can also help people build psychological resilience. Like spirituality, resilience is a broad term. In essence it is about how we respond to a crisis or a disaster in the short-, medium- and long-term. It is also about maintaining the status quo after a crisis. Having access to support networks and relating to others are important factors in this type of resilience. It can also be about *transformational resilience*, which is about taking advantage of change in order to be successful in the new environment. Support from close family and friends and wider community are important.

Being resilient can help us cope with everyday stress as well as cope with complex and layered problems and crises. When we don't recover quickly and well, we are all affected. Therefore, ensuring that we and our whānau are more resilient to crises or disasters is important.

⁵ Mental Health Foundation, (UK) [2006]. The impact of spirituality on mental health. www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/impact-spirituality.pdf



VIDEO CLIPS

Below are useful video clips on how to discuss mental health issues in a positive way:

Hauora Tane: Wairua – Huataki Whareaitu:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvURh-rLDew&feature=youtu.be

Mental Health at Work: Helping Yourself:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uR6Xu3cLi24

The Secret of Becoming Mentally Strong:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFbv757kup4

Depression and spiritual awakening:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=7c5t6FkvUG0

EXERCISE 1: MENTAL HEALTH AND SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is concerned with people finding meaning and purpose in their lives, as well as the sense of belonging to a community. The World Health Organisation has also recognised the value of factors such as faith, hope and compassion in the healing process. Because spirituality comes into focus in times of stress, suffering, physical and mental illness, loss, dying and bereavement, it is important in both physical and mental wellbeing.

AIM: The aim of this exercise is to provide an opportunity to talk about the link between mental health, spirituality and happiness. The task set out below is designed to start to engage people on a sensitive topic that is rarely discussed.

TASK: In small groups, invite the participants to discuss the following points.

TIME: 15-20 minutes.

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| List the things that generally make people unhappy and discontented | List the things that generally make people happy and contented |
| List the things that are uninspiring | List the things that are inspiring |
| List the things that are typically stressful and psychologically harmful for people | List the things that people can do that help to calm down and relax after a stressful situation |
| Think of ways people can reduce the negative aspects in their lives | Think of ways people can do to increase the positive aspects in their lives |

EXERCISE 2: MENTAL HEALTH, SPIRITUALITY AND RESILIENCE

When a person is bombarded by either short or prolonged levels of stress, it puts pressure on our physical and mental health. How we respond to and cope with a stressful or an adverse situation is generally viewed as how resilient we are. Psychological resilience exists when we develop psychological and behavioural capabilities that allow us to remain calm during a crises or chaotic situation, and to move on from the incident without long-term negative consequences. The ability to cope well under pressure is based on a positive outlook, combined with strategies to manage pressure.

AIM: The aim of this exercise is to discuss the key characteristics of resilience and when and how we can apply them to our day-to-day life.

TASK: In groups, go through each of the characteristics of resilience and if possible give different examples of when and how these characteristics have been applied.

TIME: 20-30 minutes.

| Characteristics of resilience | Give examples of how these characteristics have been applied successfully |
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| Adaptability. The result of a number of skills and abilities working in tandem to help us deal well with a challenge, change, and setbacks. | |
| Problem solving ability: People who like challenges and solve problems and are able to accept solutions that are not perfect, fare better than those who do not. | |
| Sense of meaning and purpose. A sense that what you are doing is meaningful and purposeful. People with strong values and a clear belief system rooted outside themselves fare better. However, the ability to be flexible in adapting these beliefs over time is also very important. | |
| Good relationships/social support. Having supportive and caring relationships during good and tough times is key factor in being resilient. | |
| Optimism and the regular experience of positive emotions. Having a generally positive outlook (realistic optimism) and a sense of humour and fun are common attributes of resilient people. | |
| Emotional regulation. The ability to regulate and manage intense and negative emotions when appropriate is an important part of resilience. | |
| Self-awareness. Resilient people know themselves well – their strengths and relative weaknesses, their limits, and their needs. This self-awareness underlies their awareness of their limits. | |
| Balance and the ability to pace oneself and disconnect. Many resilient people appear to live by the mantra, “this is a marathon, not a sprint.” They find ways to pace themselves and disconnect from their work both in the short-term and the long term | |
| Physical and mental health. The basic building blocks of physical and mental health – eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising – are often neglected by people, but without some basic level of health to draw upon, resilient actions and reactions become less likely. | |



EXERCISE 3: NATURE, SPIRITUALITY AND WELLBEING

Connecting with nature has been shown to improve concentration, attention and emotional functioning as well as buffering against stress, lowering cortisol levels (flight or fight response) and improving the immune system⁶. It significantly improves mood, enhances wellbeing and provides greater life satisfaction. As part of the 'Healthy Nature Healthy People' movement, the Department of Conservation and the Mental Health Foundation have partnered to promote the positive effects of nature on our wellbeing.

AIM: The aim of this exercise is to build positive emotions, broadened our perspectives, and personal values in order to at feel better emotionally and physically by reducing our blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and stress.

TASK: In small groups or pairs, head out to a green space, such as a local park, and see if the group can find all the items in the circles below. When a match is found, write it down or draw a picture of it in the empty box next to it. See if the group can find a new item for each box.

TIME: Although this exercise can be completed within 20 minutes, it is preferable if more time is allocated, say 60-45 minutes.

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Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

⁶ Howell, A. J., Passmore, H. A., & Buro, K. (2013). Meaning in nature: Meaning in life as a mediator of the relationship between nature connectedness and well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(6), 1681-1696.