

What Leaders Can Do

With good leadership, spirituality can promote unit cohesion. For many people, being spiritual is part of being religious. Others may be spiritual without any religious affiliation. It is important for leaders to promote tolerance alongside the practice of spirituality. Without it, conflict over spiritual differences has the potential to harm cohesion and readiness. As a leader, you can also:

- Take cultural competency training to help you understand diverse beliefs. This will help you understand how your unit members make individual ethical choices.
- Work with chaplains to help your unit members deal with moral dilemmas and traumatic events.
- Provide balanced support for warriors of all faiths.
- Try to help your Service members understand that traumatic events may not be something we can completely understand.
- Be supportive of Warriors who report having had stressful or traumatic experiences that can be difficult to understand. For example, some Warriors may have dealt with a near-death experience. While there is a lot yet to learn about these events, it is important to support Warriors who need to talk with someone about it.
- Give individual Service members and the whole unit opportunities to express their spirituality.

Spirituality can help you feel connected to something bigger than yourself and build resilience at the same time.

More resources:

- **Real Warriors.net**
<http://www.realwarriors.net>
- **After deployment.org - Personal Spirituality Assessment and Guide**
<http://www.afterdeployment.org/topics-spirituality>
- **Military OneSource**
<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>
- **Community Resource Guides**
<http://phc.amedd.army.mil/topics/healthyliving/hpr/Pages/CommunityResourceGuides.aspx>

Information in this brochure is taken directly from
<http://realwarriors.net/active/treatment/spirituality.php>



<http://phc.amedd.army.mil>
1.800.222.9698

TA-206-0516

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

BOOSTING RESILIENCE through Spirituality



Benefits of Spiritual Fitness

Spiritual Fitness Tips

Finding a Chaplain

What Leaders Can Do

Boosting Resilience through Spirituality

Spirituality can help you feel connected to something bigger than yourself and build resilience at the same time. Your spirituality can involve whatever beliefs and values give you a sense of purpose. For many, it may be a relationship with God and certain religious practices. For others, spirituality plays out in non-religious ways, such as through a focus on family or nature. However you express it, spirituality can promote healthy connections with others, healthy lifestyle choices and the strength to endure hard times. Whether expressed through prayer, meditation, or in other ways, being spiritually “fit” is important to building resilience.

Benefits of Spiritual Fitness

At the heart of it, spirituality can help people find meaning in life. During difficult times at all stages of military experience, spirituality can help you cope with difficult situations and traumatic events. Spirituality can:

- Help Warriors cope with multiple deployments, combat stress or injury
- Protect Warriors from experiencing “moral injuries,” which can occur from either participating in or witnessing certain acts during war that may conflict with deeply held moral beliefs and expectations
- Encourage a supportive environment and foster unit cohesion, as many spiritual practices promote tolerance of other worldviews and diverse populations

As Service members and members of civilian communities, spirituality can play a key role in a Warrior’s well-being. Research has shown that strong spirituality can promote good health by encouraging people to smoke and drink less. Research also links spirituality to increased optimism, less anxiety and depression, fewer suicides and greater marital stability.

Spiritual Fitness Tips

The eight steps below can help you embrace your spirituality or find support in your efforts to build and maintain spiritual fitness:

- 1. Look to your Leader or Chaplain.** Losing a fellow Service member on the battlefield, dealing with a serious injury or even just the day-to-day challenges associated with deployment can test your faith. If you are experiencing stress, look to your leaders and chaplains for guidance. Chaplains are available to offer guidance for people of all faiths. Consulting with a chaplain guarantees confidentiality with the topic being discussed. This Real Warriors article [<http://www.realwarriors.net/active/treatment/spirituality.php>] provides more about the important role chaplains play in the military.
- 2. Connect with others.** Try not to isolate yourself. Needing time alone is a common reaction to traumatic events, but social ties can strengthen your spirituality. You can connect with others in traditional spiritual ways, such as at worship services or by meditating with others. Or, connect with others in ways such as through sports, volunteering or just reaching out to a friend to offer support.
- 3. Practice the spiritual disciplines of your faith** such as, praying, attending worship, reading scripture, or journaling. These can refresh you and help you keep your perspective. In times of stress, they can provide comfort and help you find strength and hope.
- 4. Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness is a type of training practice that focuses on having an objective awareness of your own thoughts and feelings. It can help Warriors strengthen attention and situational awareness skills because it is about focusing on the present moment, which helps promote objective decision making based on the situation -- not based on habit, fear or emotions. Mindfulness can also boost brain function and resilience, as well as reduce stress through enhanced mental focus and emotional regulation. Mindfulness is useful across religious and non-religious spiritual beliefs. In fact, the military has used mindfulness training for more than 25 years.

- 5. Do mind-body exercises.** Try mind-body exercises or mental imagery, which is using positive images to bring about a desired physical response, such as decreasing pain or stress. Exercises like these [<http://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/education/factsheets/mind-body-connection.pdf>] can help improve performance, increase focus, and manage stress.
- 6. Take spirituality with you.** Keep in mind that certain practices can go anywhere with you. Even during combat, you can pray silently or practice mindfulness.
- 7. Be good to others.** This simple idea moves across religious and non-religious philosophies. Caring about the safety and needs of others is a common value shared among those engaged in military service.
- 8. Embrace your belief in a higher power.** If you believe in a higher power – whether that is God, nature or your relationships with others – hold onto it.

Finding a Chaplain

To find a chaplain near you, you can:

- Walk to the nearest chapel and make an appointment
- Contact the closest military installation and ask for help
- Contact Military OneSource at 1-800-342-9647 or at <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/> for help finding your unit chaplain
- Use the Local Community Resource Finder on the Joint Services Support Resource Center website: <https://www.jointservicesupport.org/ResourceFinder/Default.aspx>