

# THRIVING IS HOLISTIC—IT INVOLVES, BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT.



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**Our mind, body and spirit are intrinsically connected and form the dynamic whole of our being.**

We are not disembodied minds, neither are we solely material beings made up of chemicals and atoms, nor are we merely spiritual beings with no connection to our physical and mental existence. Rather, our individual parts inform and interact with one another in a dynamic and fluid system that comprise who we are. Thriving is more than the discrete well-being and health of our individual parts; the health of one influences and impacts the health of the others and therefore impacts our overall well-being.

# HOW CAN IT BE FOSTERED OR CREATED?



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**Individual thriving in its truest sense is when the three broad aspects of ‘self’ are healthy, in balance and functioning well.**

The word ‘health’ is of Germanic origin and means ‘related to whole’. Imagine a Celtic knot, a Triquetra, of three intertwined and intersecting circles. Each circle represents an aspect of the self and where all three intersect is the centre of who we are as individuals. Each circle forms a discrete health dynamic within itself, and in turn, that dynamic affects the health of the other parts as well as the well-being of the whole.

The physical body can positively affect the mind and spirit. Exercise for the body has been found to help with depression, stress, anxiety and generally help someone feel good through the release of endorphins. It can help relaxation, mood, sleep and general wellbeing.

The ‘mind’ can positively affect the body and spirit. Relaxation and meditation can reduce the body’s physiological symptoms of anxiety and tension, reduces the stress hormone cortisol and also promotes spiritual wellbeing.

The 'spirit' in turn can positively affect the body and mind. Researchers have found that spirituality or religious belief was the single most powerful force for people who overcame tragedy and in explaining survival. A study into those with traumatic brain injuries showed that spiritual beliefs (a sense of connection to a higher power) was a positive predictor for life satisfaction, reduced distress and improved functional ability.

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# WHAT DOES HEALTH AND THRIVING LOOK LIKE FOR EACH CIRCLE IN THE KNOT?



## 1. POSITIVE PHYSICAL HEALTH

Looking after your body involves various aspects of self-discipline, mixed with genetics, environment, individual characteristics and life circumstances. The discipline involves things like exercising regularly, eating a varied and balanced diet, not eating or drinking to excess, staying well hydrated, sleeping well and avoiding illness and injury.

For a healthy body it is important to have the right fuel--a balanced diet, hydration and no excesses of sugars, fats, alcohol or other potential toxins. A healthy body is able to convert this fuel into energy and filters out the waste products and toxins.

Good physical health also involves maintaining a healthy weight, having a normal balance of hormones, looking after our

our eyes and teeth, managing our cholesterol and sugars through diet and exercise, attending reviews to pick up early signs of illness and disease, being aware of our bodies and what is 'normal' for us, exercising to help joints and muscles as well as the heart, lungs and mind and having the right balance of vitamins, minerals and chemicals.

It is a balance of all different factors, some we have control over, others we don't. It is a responsibility to work at, maintain and look after our own health. Especially as we age and our physical health naturally declines, we need awareness of disease, the abnormal and the unusual, and to address these where possible and bring us back to good health.

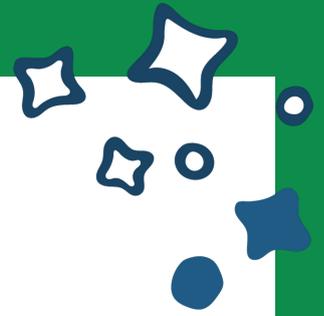
## 2. POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

There are broadly seven key components of ideal mental health (Parks and Schueller, 2014):

1. An ability to reflect on experiences and amplify good experiences
2. An ability to find and express gratitude
3. Kindness to others that promotes happiness
4. Empathy
5. Optimism based in reality
6. Building or developing psychological strengths
7. Identifying meaning, setting realistic goals and being effective

Notably, each component has a strong neuropsychological link with our body by way of our brain chemistry. It is possible to practice each of these components, which, when engaged, acts in a virtuous cycle to promote physical and mental health. Deliberately acting with kindness, gratitude, empathy and optimism nurtures the neural pathways of the hippocampus and counteracts the negative physical impacts of a person who is constantly reacting out of the fear and anxiety of the amygdala.





Additionally, each component also has strong connections to the way in which spirituality is formed and expressed.

Considerable research has been conducted on the impact of reducing the effect of our threat brains, or the amygdala, on our ability to think, reason and to be calm (Gilbert 2012). Here ideal mental health is expressed as stillness, calm or contentment which allows us to reflect and act.

Paradoxically there is also a growing body of evidence on the positive aftermath of toxic events for individuals (Tedeschi et al, 2018). Post traumatic growth indicates that many who experience deeply troubling or disturbing events grow to experience enhanced relationships and a more positive view of themselves that alters their philosophy of life. Whilst not claimed to be ideal, these outcomes map onto the seven components of mental health and reflect the inherent resilience and ability of people to progress in their lives.

### 3. POSITIVE SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Spiritual health is potentially the most ignored of the three aspects, but it is just as important as the other two dimensions of the whole person. Spiritual dis-ease, which often manifests as existential despair (the belief that life is meaningless and hopeless), causes mental and physical burn-out. A spiritually healthy person is one who constantly seeks and experiences a sense of meaning and purpose in life beyond their day-to-day material existence. It involves actively taking the responsibility to engage their creativity, imagination, resourcefulness and playfulness as they become more fully and authentically themselves. Spiritually healthy individuals can cultivate both their capacity for and experience of awe, wonder and flow (Scott in Transcend) as they work toward becoming fully self-actualized as physical, mental and spiritual beings. Individuals can also cultivate spiritual health through making time for reflection, meditation, contemplation and prayer.

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### **A POSITIVE HEALTHY DYNAMIC SYSTEM**

All three aspects of the self form discrete parts of our whole being, but are also interconnected, dependent and interdependent on one another. Thriving individuals are those who are proactive and take responsibility for promoting, sustaining and protecting their own health and wellbeing in each of these areas. They are mindful of how the ill-health of one aspect creates dis-ease in one or both other aspects. They seek to avoid physical, mental and spiritual burn-out by their commitment to self-care and by being aware of the dynamics of their whole selves.





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