

## SPIRITT: What does 'spirituality' mean?

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### Disclosure

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**B**oth patients and clinicians alike have shown increasing interest in spirituality as a component of physical and mental well-being.<sup>1</sup> However, there's no clear consensus on what spirituality actually means. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it "affecting the spirit, relating to sacred matters, concerned with religious issues."<sup>2</sup> Spirituality is sometimes defined in broadly secular terms, such as the feeling of "being part of something greater than ourselves," or in connection to ideas rooted in a specific belief system, such as "aligning oneself with the Will of God."

I prefer to think of the word "spiritual" as encompassing multiple practices and beliefs that have the common goal of helping us deepen our capacity for self-awareness, joy, compassion, love, freedom, justice, and mutual cooperation, not only for our own benefit, but also to create a better world. To help clinicians better understand what the term spirituality implies, whether for themselves or for their patients, I offer the acronym **SPIRITT** to describe core components of varied spiritual perspectives, beliefs, and practices.

**Sacred.** Considering certain aspects of life, time, or place as non-ordinary and worthy of reverence and awe.

**P**resence. Cultivating an inner presence that is open, accepting, compassionate, and loving toward others. During a spiritual experience, some may feel embraced in this way by a presence outside of themselves, such as an encounter with a spiritual teacher or an experience of feeling held lovingly by a transcendent power.

**I**nterconnection. Understanding that we are not separate entities but are interconnected beings existing in interdependent unity, starting with our families and extending out universally. According to this perspective, harming anything or anyone is doing harm to ourself.

**R**est. Taking a Sabbath or unplugging. Dedicating time each week for resting your mind and body. Spending quality time with family. Decreasing excessive stimulation and loosening the grip of consumerism.

**I**ntrospection. Looking inwardly. Eastern traditions emphasize deepening self-awareness through mindful meditation practices, while Western traditions include taking a personal inventory through self-examination or confessional practices.

**T**raditions. Studying sacred texts, participating in communal prayer, meditating, or engaging in rituals. This requires sorting through outmoded beliefs and ways of thinking while updating beliefs that are compatible with our lived experiences.



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**T**ranscendence. Experiencing moments, whether through nature, music, dance, ritual, prayer, art, etc., in which the narrow sense of being a separate self fades away and there is a deeper sense of a larger connection and belonging that is transpersonal, timeless, and expansive.

The components of **SPIRITT** have helped me to think about and pursue the physi-

cal, emotional, and social benefits of adopting a spiritual practice for my well-being as well as for the benefit of my patients.

#### References

1. Koenig HG. Religion, spirituality, and health: a review and update. *Adv Mind Body Med.* 2015;29(3):19-26.
2. Spiritual. *Miriam-Webster Dictionary.* <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spiritual>. Accessed May 9, 2019.

**Spirituality encompasses multiple practices and beliefs that can help us deepen our self-awareness**