**The 5 Ws of Spiritual Fitness**

**What is Spiritual Readiness:** “Spiritual Readiness develops the personal qualities a person needs in times of stress, hardship and tragedy. These qualities come from religious, philosophical, or human values and form the basis for character decision making, and integrity.” (FM 7-22, 10-1) Spiritual readiness is rooted in an individuals’ spirituality. Spirituality is often defines as, “a sense of connection that gives meaning and purpose to person’s life.” (10-2) The identifying marks of the spiritual dimension is an understanding of you own “purpose, core values, beliefs, identity, and life vision.” (10-2)

**Who needs Spiritual Readiness:** All people are born with a spiritual core, 30% of our spirituality is embedded in our DNA. (to learn more, go to Section 2 “The Science of Spirituality”) Spirituality is different from religion. However, our spiritual core is often developed through participation in faith communities, coaching by spiritual mentors, and undertaking a journey of spiritual fitness. (to learn more go to Section 3 “Build your Spiritual Fitness”) Building our spiritual core provides protective factors against numerous negative ideations and harmful behaviors. Spiritual Readiness is crucial to live your best life.

**Why do I need Spiritual Readiness:** Building our spiritual core provides protective factors against numerous negative ideations and harmful behaviors. Spiritual Readiness builds greater mental health and is 70% protective against risk taking behaviors, 60% protective against major depression, 80% against substance dependence and abuse. There is a 50% reduction in suicidal ideation/attempts when raised with religion passed through generations. *Miller, L. (2016) The Spiritual Child; The New Science of Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*

Spiritual Readiness is also vital to live your best life. “A Life Worth Living” comes from a deep exploration of your values, identity, and purpose! Since the beginning of humanity we have asked, Who am I? Why am I here? Why is their suffering in the world? Exploring these questions is a lifelong journey, that everyone can take. Finding your own spiritual path will help build a deeper understanding of who you are and your connection to the people and world around you.

**When do I need to develop Spiritual Fitness:** Now! There is no time like the present to start, restart, or continue your spiritual fitness. There are stages of development and life events that will often peak our spiritual curiosity. People ages 18-25 often experience a “spiritual surge” as the move toward full adulthood. Building a family, can prompt us to think about passing on our values and traditions, building a safe community, and teaching children how they “fit” into the world around them. Experiencing trauma, the death of a loved one, or struggling with depression and despair will often lead us to ask questions of ultimate meaning. In the face of developmental changes or life events, seeking out spiritual mentors, communities and personal spiritual practices will help individuals thrive and live their best life.

**Where can I build my Spiritual Fitness:** In many ways spiritual fitness can be built anywhere! There is often both an individual and community aspect to a person’s spiritual path. With physical readiness you sometimes workout on your own, sometimes you work out with a coach. Other times you work out in the gym, and other times with your squad. Spiritual Readiness is built through individual practice (to learn more see section 3 “How to Build Your Spiritual Fitness”), and sometimes working with a “coach” such as a chaplain, community leader, imam, rabbi etc. You may have other spiritually minded friends and battle buddies you serve in the community with. You may attend community settings, worship service, yoga classes, and service projects.

**How Can I Build my Spiritual Readiness?**

1. **ASSESS:** Determine the current state of your spirituality. Perhaps you have never done anything to build you spiritual core. Maybe you have gone to church your whole life but still feel something is missing. It is a good idea to see where you are. Use the Spiritual Assessment in Hip Pocket Training, to get a sense of areas you would like learn more or improve.

1. **DEVELOP:** Identify practices that build your spiritual readiness, and strengthen your spiritual core. Start small, and gradually build these practices into regular habits. It could be as small as taking a moment of thankfulness or gratitude before a meal, or as big as going on a spiritual retreat. See a list of spiritual practices in Hip Pocket Training.

1. **DEEP DIVE:** Building your spiritual readiness means facing some of the deep and difficult questions and experiences in our lives. A deep dive into our spirituality helps us establish what a good and meaningful life means to each one of us. This can be accomplished in many ways. Reflecting on your spiritual practice and life experience, educational pursuits, reading in the areas of philosophy, ethics or religion. Other ways people go deeper with their spirituality is through working with spiritual directors or leader, and retreats. As your awareness of the spiritual path grows, you may wish to develop a “Spiritual Road Map” to assist you in charting a continued course toward your spiritual fitness goals. See a sample of a “Spiritual Road Map” in Hip Packet Training.
2. **BUILD YOUR TEAM:** While everyone is on their own spiritual journey, you have many people to walk with you. Your unit chaplain can assist you with resources to help build your spirituality. Building your spirituality will help you fight difficult and harmful behaviors. Spirituality does not conflict with seeking help from other providers, it enhances your health and healing. Do not hesitate to seek assistance for issues such as substance abuse, suicidal ideation, or mental health.