Optimal Healing Environments
A Key Component of Your Personal Resiliency Plan
Personal Healing Capacity

• Everyone has an inherent healing capacity

• You can increase your body’s ability to heal by making small changes in your daily life

• Once you are aware of the changes you can make to improve your healing influence you can embark on a path to strengthen your resiliency
Personal Healing Capacity

What is Healing?
• Healing is a dynamic process of recovery, repair and renewal.
• It increases endurance, well-being and synergy of mind, body and spirit.
• As we deal with daily stress and/or injury, our mind, body and spirit continually tap into the innate capacity of healing to move toward wellness and wholeness.
• It is a personal process – one that may occur even if a disease cure is not possible.
Personal Healing Capacity

What Is The Difference Between Healing and Curing?

Healing
• Gives us:
  • sense of meaning in hardship
  • hope in suffering
  • peace at end of life

Cure
• Signs and symptoms of disease of injury are gone
• Usually requires an outside influence such as medication or some type of procedure

Healing and cure may happen together or separately. Some may continue to feel distress or sadness even after a condition has been cured, which means they have not been fully healed.
Personal Healing Capacity

What Is The Difference Between Healing and Curing?

For example:

A person may have a complete recovery from injuries sustained in a car accident but continue to feel anxious and depressed when thinking about the incident. It can also interfere with daily life.

On the other hand, some may find meaning in suffering and experience healing, even though there is no possibility of cure for their disease. That is, some with cancer in remission are not truly cured, but they find hope and meaning in being able to help others who share the same treatment and experiences.....they feel a sense of peace and wholeness in helping others.
Personal Healing Capacity

What Can You Do to Experience Healing, Health, Well-Being and Strengthen Your Resiliency?

You can begin to make changes today….you can create an environment in your life, at home, at work and in your community that supports your natural healing potential. You can create your own OPTIMAL HEALING ENVIRONMENTS.

This Learning module will help you understand how to make changes you need to stimulate and support your natural healing ability and live a healthy, vibrant, joyful life with purpose and meaning.
OPTIMAL HEALING ENVIRONMENTS

The following components can combine to create an Optimal Healing Environment:

– Healing Intention
– Personal Wholeness
– Healing Relationships
– Healthy Lifestyles
– Integrative Health Care
– Healing Spaces
– Ecological Sustainability
Personal Healing Capacity

• The Optimal Healing Environments framework is made up of four environments that work together to support health, wellbeing and healing.
• Each works on a personal level, is important to the relationships in our lives and to the groups where we live, work, play and receive care.
• If even one of these areas are out of balance, it can prevent you from achieving health.
• These areas of your life are called your internal, interpersonal, behavioral and external environments.
Personal Healing Capacity

- Which parts of your life should you focus to boost your self-healing ability?
- Although each area or environment relates to and affects the others, change is best implemented in small, thoughtful ways.
- Start small...with one environment; you will find that the positive effects trickle out to others.
Personal Healing Capacity

The following statements will help you decide which area or environment to start with. When you agree with one, move ahead to that section and read something that inspires you. You may decide to set a goal and make a change.

**Self-Evaluation**

**Internal Environment**
- I feel emotionally balanced. □ Agree □ Disagree
- When I think of my life, I feel hopeful or positive. □ Agree □ Disagree

*If you disagree with these statements, then you may want to focus on your internal environment.*

**Interpersonal Environment**
- Assess your various relationships. My relationships with others leave me energized rather than worn out.
  □ Agree □ Disagree
- I feel supported and connected to my family and community.
  □ Agree □ Disagree

*If you disagree with these statements, then you may want to focus on your interpersonal environment.*
Personal Healing Capacity

**Behavioral Environment**
- I avoid behaviors that I know are unhealthy. □ Agree □ Disagree
- I am an active participate in my medical care and wellness. □ Agree □ Disagree

*If you disagree with these statements, then you may want to focus on your behavioral environment.*

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**External Environment**
- I feel calm, relaxed and/or energized in my surroundings. □ Agree □ Disagree
- I have space at work or home for reflection. □ Agree □ Disagree

*If you disagree with these statements, then you may want to focus on your external environment.*

It does not matter which environment you start with. You can start with the one that you need the most, or, you may want to ease in and pick the one that will be easiest for you....whichever....will be the right choice! What is important is that you begin your journey to healing and your resiliency capacity.
Internal Environment

• The internal environment is your deepest inner level; made up of your mind, emotions, wishes and intentions. Healing and personal wholeness only occur when the mind, body, and spirit are in balance. Balancing them is necessary for a happy and fulfilled life.

• A weakness or imbalance in one can negatively affect others.
  – Example: Severe emotional stress of the mind can cause high blood pressure and other illnesses in an otherwise healthy body. Similarly, a physical illness or injury can cause depression in a usually healthy mind.

The Optimal Internal Environment Supports:
• Developing the intention and the expectation for healing
• Experiencing the personal wholeness that comes from harmony of the mind, body and spirit
Internal Environment

• **Healing intention** is a conscious mental choice to improve your health. It includes:
  – the understanding of the personal meaning in your life and work.
  – the expectation of improved well-being and the hope that a desired health goal can be reached.
  – the belief that healing and well-being WILL occur.

*If you do not truly believe you can be healed, or if some part of you is holding onto the disease or condition, you may disrupt or limit your own inherent capacity to heal on a subconscious level.*
What Can I Do to Develop Healing Intention?

**Build Awareness**

- What goes on in our inner environment affects our bodies; become aware of your bodies’ subtle signals e.g. changes in energy.
- Awareness of your body and mind and spirit or soul must be brought to the level of your conscious mind.
- This will allow you to change behaviors that don’t contribute positively to the healing process.
- Some interventions include: religious practices, or regular participation in religious services or practicing mind-body practices such as meditation, yoga, journaling or mindfulness exercises.
What Can I Do to Develop Healing Intention?

**Directing Intention**

- Open up communication channels to your deep, inner self.
- This can be achieved through sitting quietly and getting in touch with a calm space within yourself, through meditation, tai chi, yoga, or, some individuals find achievement through prayer.
Internal Environment

What Can I Do to Develop Healing Intention?

Reflection

- Reflection may help you to understand or identify some of the central themes or values in your life and find meaning in them – reflect on your experiences and nurture your awareness.
- Keep a journal to answer some of the following questions; record your thoughts, dreams and desires:

  Who am I? What is my purpose? How do I fit into my family, my community, my life? What are my spiritual beliefs or what inspires me?
Internal Environment

Experiencing Personal Wholeness

• Personal wholeness is the feeling of well-being that occurs when your body, mind and spirit are in harmony and balance.

• You can develop mind-body practices that support resiliency, overall well-being and recovery from illness.
Internal Environment

Experiencing Personal Wholeness

*Integrating Your Mind-Body-Spirit*

- When your internal environment is an Optimal Healing Environment, your physical and the non-physical mind and spirit can be “in tune”.

- Activities that connect your physical body with your non-physical mind and spirit help to integrate your biological responses with psychological responses.

- Reflect on a time when you felt most authentic and fulfilled – a truly meaningful experience, reaching a major milestone or successfully completing a difficult task......
Internal Environment

Experiencing Personal Wholeness

*Integrating Your Mind-Body-Spirit*

......Activities that integrate your physical body and non-physical mind and spirit will help you experience a sense of wholeness that enhances recovery, resiliency and the restoration of health.
Consider and answer these questions truthfully!

– Are you critical of yourself?
– Are you critical of others?
– Do you see life in a “glass-half-empty” way?

• If you answered yes to even one, work to eliminate negative self-talk.
• Create a habit of positive thinking....self-talk is the stream of thoughts running through your head form the moment you wake until you fall asleep.
• Negative thoughts = difficulty coping with stressful situations
• Positive and productive thoughts = increased health benefits including a longer life span, increased resistance to illness and enhanced mental and physical wellbeing
Once learned, mind – body practices or techniques can be done anywhere - at home or at work:

Breathing exercises
Relaxation
Yoga
Tai Chi
Imagery
Meditation
Journaling
Art
Interpersonal Environment

• Your personal support systems consists of a number of relationships – family, friends, physician, pastor, neighbors, co-workers, supervisor....many others.
• They can either support you or they can add stress and burdens.
• An optimal interpersonal environment is made up of more positive relationships than burdensome ones ....those that are healing in nature are loving, kind, trusting and benefit everyone around you.

The Optimal Interpersonal Environment Supports:
• Cultivating healing relationships
  • Creating healing groups
Interpersonal Environment

*Develop Healing Relationships*

**The Social Connection: We are social beings.** We need relationships with others, both individually and part of a community. They provide us with a sense of belonging, caring and support for our health.

It has been shown that physical illness can result from social isolation and depression. Research has demonstrated that while some relationships can literally "make us sick", love and support among family, friends, peers, etc., actually boost immune systems and can delay disease and death.
Interpersonal Environment

Develop Healing Relationships

Positive relationships = healing relationships

Three elements of a healing relationship:
Trust                 Honesty                  Compassion

Being loved, respected, understood and connected to others can have a profound effect on your health.

Studies have tracked links between depression, anxiety and social isolation to chronic heart failure.
American Heart Journal, 2006
Interpersonal Environment

Develop Healing Relationships

Refer to the following checklist and ask which statements are true – decide which aspects of your relationships are healing and which can be improved.

Trust:
- I feel emotionally and physically safe.
- I don’t have to be on guard against being hurt by the other person.

Honesty:
- Both the other person and I can reveal true feelings without harm to either of us.

Compassion:
- Both the other person and I have the ability and willingness to understand one another and express kindness.

- If relationships do not contain all three of these aspects, do not feel you need to shut that person out of your life.
- You can learn skills that infuse relationships with healing qualities: trust, honesty and compassion.
Interpersonal Environment

Develop Healing Relationships

Here are a few examples of how to create more healing relationships in your life.

Communication Is Key

• Honest and open communication is essential to healing relationships
• Use simple communication techniques, such as repeating back to the person what you heard ......
• .....By saying, “Let me see if I understand what you are saying”, can help to prevent misunderstandings.
• Another technique is to use “I” statements that tell the other person, “This is how I feel” – This creates open communication versus, “You are wrong and this is why”.

Good communication skills build strong relationships.
Interpersonal Environment

Develop Healing Relationships

Be a Friend

• Having quality friendships is vital to well-being.
• Be a good friend by listening more than talking.
• Only offer advise when asked.
• Refrain from both judgment and persistent complaining; you will teach your friends to adopt the same positive behaviors.
• Value your friends for who they are and provide mutual support.
Interpersonal Environment

Create Healing Groups

• Whether it’s a school, workplace, church or community organization, you are part of many groups that impact life.

• Involvement in groups that are healthy and have healing qualities support your well-being and help build your resiliency.

• These types of healing groups allow you:
  – To participate in making decisions that affect you.
  – Promote open and honest communication.
  – Create a climate of trust and personal responsibility.
  – Inspire a sense of belonging.
# Interpersonal Environment

## Create Healing Groups

### Culture of Healing

*Groups that foster a culture of healing have these characteristics in common:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respect for individuals including their own inner lives.</th>
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<tr>
<td>A system of value that is present at all levels.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honest and open communication at all times.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A climate of trust.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A focus on learning and understanding rather than blame.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities for self-care, like exercise, yoga, relaxation and meditation.</td>
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Ask yourself....Do the groups you belong to help you to heal or do they impede it?
Interpersonal Environment

Create Healing Groups

What can I do to Influence My Workplace or Other Types of Organizations that are a Part of My Life?

Leadership

Ask yourself: Am I a good leader? Am I a good follower?

- Good leaders and good followers “walk the talk”.
- Good leaders work on improving their communication skills, treat others as they would like to be treated and are good team players.
- Assess your role in the workplace and other groups – explore your ability to shift it toward a healing culture. The best way to do this - LEAD BY EXAMPLE!
Interpersonal Environment

Create Healing Groups

What Can I Do To Influence My Workplace or Other Types of Organizations That Are a Part of My Life?

Get Involved

• Are you actively involved in an organization?
• Opportunities such as committees and volunteerism are ways to inspire change.
• As part of these groups, you can set an example for others in ways previously stated.
• Building healing relationships with your co-workers can provide you with opportunities to practice your own self-care and to share ways to foster open communication and caring relationships that support greater personal well-being.....both in work environments and in other social situations.
The behavioral environment is made up of those actions we take to prevent illness, improve health and engage in self-care in a way that allow your natural healing process to emerge.

*The Optimal Behavioral Environment Supports:*
- Practicing healthy lifestyles
- Applying collaborative and integrative medicine
Behavioral Environment

Practicing Healthy Lifestyles

Health behaviors can enhance your well-being. They prevent, treat or even cure disease. Making good food choices, staying physically active and avoiding unhealthy behaviors are important for building your resiliency and lifelong health and wellness.

DID YOU KNOW?

7 of 10 deaths are from preventable chronic diseases.

*Health Affairs, Nolte and McKee, 2008*
Practicing Healthy Lifestyles
How Can I Change to Healthy Habits?

Finding the Motivation to Change

• Nutrition, staying physically active and building your resiliency all play major roles in healing our bodies, mind and spirit.

• The problem lies not in knowing what you should be doing, but rather in getting motivated to actually lose that weight, stop smoking, get on the treadmill or even just taking time out to relax.

• For most of us, finding the motivating to change is difficult.

• Wanting to change our lifestyles is not enough – we need to change our environments so that we find satisfaction and rewards for our healthy habits.

You can support and be successful at change by starting with small changes!

Drink water instead of sugary soda, find a buddy to walk with 3x/week, add fruits and vegetables to your main meals or reduce your portion sizes.
Behavioral Environment

Practicing Healthy Lifestyles
How Can I Change to Healthy Habits?

**Nutrition**

• Instead of thinking about what you shouldn’t eat, think about what you should add to your diet.
• A low-fat diet with moderate protein, high fiber, whole grains, and at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day is best for your health.
• Remember...foods with sugar, corn syrup and unhealthy fats have been linked to heart disease, cancer and diabetes – high fiber diets can counteract some of these effects.
• Write down what you eat throughout the day; we are very often unaware of what and how much we eat.
• There are free cell phone apps that can help you track and provide motivation to eat a healthier diet.

**Physical Activity**

• Strive to be active 30 minutes per day on most days of the week.
• Find activities you enjoy.
• Find a partner or buddy to participate with.
• Even small bouts of activity e.g. 10 min brisk walks 3x a day will bring health benefits...this can be done from home or at work; and, does not require special clothing.
• “Schedule” your physical activity just as you would any important meeting...make it a priority.
• Investigate your work location; you will discover there are resources out there to encourage you to be active on a regular basis.
Practicing Healthy Lifestyles
How Can I Change to Healthy Habits?

Dealing with Unhealthy Behaviors
• We all do things that we know are not healthy...what is important is we do not let these behaviors become habits! Habits are hard to break.
• Use healthy relationships to find support to manage unhealthy decisions before they become a habit or break those bad habits before they become addictive.
• What is important is you develop awareness of your behaviors and seek help.

Experience Integrative Care When Seeking Health Care
• Understand all your options when seeking care; modern medicine such as acupuncture, healing touch, massage therapy, Reiki, nutrition counseling have a lot to offer for treatment of disease and injury. Care that includes many of these options is called integrative medicine.
• You should investigate and have choices (supported by scientific evidence) beyond medication and surgical procedures.
• The best option for you may be a blend of complementary therapies with conventional medicine to treat you as a “whole” person.
• The “whole” person approach uses different curing-healing modalities to support your cultural healing preferences and natural healing abilities.
**External Environment**

- The external environment is the physical environment where you live, work and play.
- Most people do not realize the extent to which their surroundings and role within the environment affect their ability to find peace, rest and energy.
- Instead of becoming de-sensitized to your surroundings, turn your awareness outside of yourself.
- Notice how your external environment makes you feel; does it support your healing? If not, what can you do to improve the things you have the ability to change?

**The Optimal External Environment Supports:**

- *Creating physical spaces that facilitate healing and enhance quality of life*
- *Fostering ecological sustainability by creating a healthy environment for future generations*
Creating Healing Spaces

- Healing spaces build resiliency, minimize stress....they make you feel good...they allow you to perform at your best.
- Physical space is one area of our life that we have some degree of control.
- Whether or not you consciously notice elements of space around you, the nature of that space has a powerful effect on your body, mind and spirit and therefore your healing journey....space also has a powerful impact on the way you interact with your co-workers, family and friends.
- Use intention and purposeful creativity to design space at home and work that contribute to your Optimal Healing Environment ...there are ways to create and enhance the healing powers of your personal spaces....even in the midst of the demands of hectic daily life.

Did You Know?

Contact with nature, natural light and soothing colors reduces stress and improves well-being.

External Environment

Creating Healing Spaces

How Do I Make My Home or Work into a Healing Space?

• Where do you spend most of your time? Picture each place ...how does it make you feel – how can you control the spaces? E.g. even small changes like keeping your car clean and trash-free can make you feel less stressed. E.g. having a dark and clutter-free bedroom at night is a great way to improve sleep...surround yourself with comfortable bedding in soothing colors.

• What Colors? Choose colors to suit your mood or instill desired behaviors.
  – Red, orange and yellow tones energize and stimulate
  – Greens, selective blues and violet evoke feelings of peace and restfulness (go back and recognize the colors in this presentation).
External Environment

Creating Healing Spaces

Practical Interventions For An Optimal External Healing Environment

1. **Surround Yourself With Nature**
   - Natural Light
   - Nature Views...that nurture you e.g., find a green space outside to eat lunch
   - Enjoy a garden, flowers, sounds of a fountain, watch and listen to birds...enjoy outdoor areas that connect you to the earth
   - Artwork

2. **Decorate with Meaning:**
   - Photographs of family, friends and happy, memorial times
   - Memorial objects
   - Religious or inspirational symbols
   - Peaceful amenities e.g., candles, art
   - Arrange furniture to encourage interaction
   - Arrange furniture to have views of outdoors/nature and natural light

3. **Simplify Your Life**
   - De-clutter; organize
   - Clean
   - Create quiet spaces for reflection and relaxation
Creating Healing Spaces

Practical Interventions For An Optimal External Healing Environment

• Another way to connect with nature is to track how changes in nature affect you, your mood and your energy level ...you can even change your perception of the situation e.g. If you find yourself becoming depressed or sad during rainy days or weekends, try to see the beauty in the rain or create something you love to do - a rainy day only activity.

• Although bad weather can make you feel down, nature frequently provides positive images for relaxation.

The restorative quality of nature and your own body is an important image to hold onto throughout your journey.
External Environment

Fostering Ecological Sustainability

• Healing also occurs within the larger landscape of the environment and the health of the planet we share.
• You can foster ecological sustainability by reducing your carbon footprint and supporting a healthy planet.
• Just by being a living being, you are an integral member of the ecosystem that sustains you.
• Your choices impact the entire ecosystem – like cooking, cleaning and recycling – you are part of a larger design...your choices will eventually affect your health.
• Take peace in knowing that you are an important part of the dynamic cycles of the planet.
External Environment

Fostering Ecological Sustainability

Ways to Foster Ecological Sustainability

• Give yourself credit for even the small ways you “give back” to save the planet...little things make a difference  e.g. like being mindful of how much time you spend in the shower or turning the faucet off when brushing your teeth.

• Do all you can at home and work:  reduce, reuse and recycle;  AND also think of yourself within the community:  get involved in local conservation efforts ....look for  volunteer opportunities to clean or restore parks and green spaces;  if you don’t already, bring your own reusable grocery bags while shopping.

The choices you make today can help support the health of your community for generations to come!
Good Luck on Your Healing Journey

• Once you are aware of the changes that you can make to improve your inner healing power and build your resiliency, you can choose to embark on a path to health.

• Reflect on each healing environment and absorb the information; take time to note your thoughts, intentions, hopes and expectations for you and your family while on this healing journey....use this module to inspire you and spark your inner imagination.

Use it to its fullest to guide you on your healing journey!
Optimal Healing Environments

Additional Reading and Resources:
Visit Samueli Institute online [www.SamueliInstitute.org/Inspire](http://www.SamueliInstitute.org/Inspire)
To assist you in finding small changes in daily habits to help you increase and optimize your healing potential!

Source: Samueli Institute, 2013

*Samueli Institute was founded as a non-profit research institute with the bold mission of transforming health care through the scientific exploration of wellness and healing. The Institute developed the Optimal Healing Environments framework to demonstrate how the social, psychological, spiritual, physical and behavioral components of an organization can affect the inherent healing capacities of those within it.*