

# Integrating Spirituality into the Eating Disorder Recovery Process

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Central East (HHS Region 3)

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

# MHTTC Network

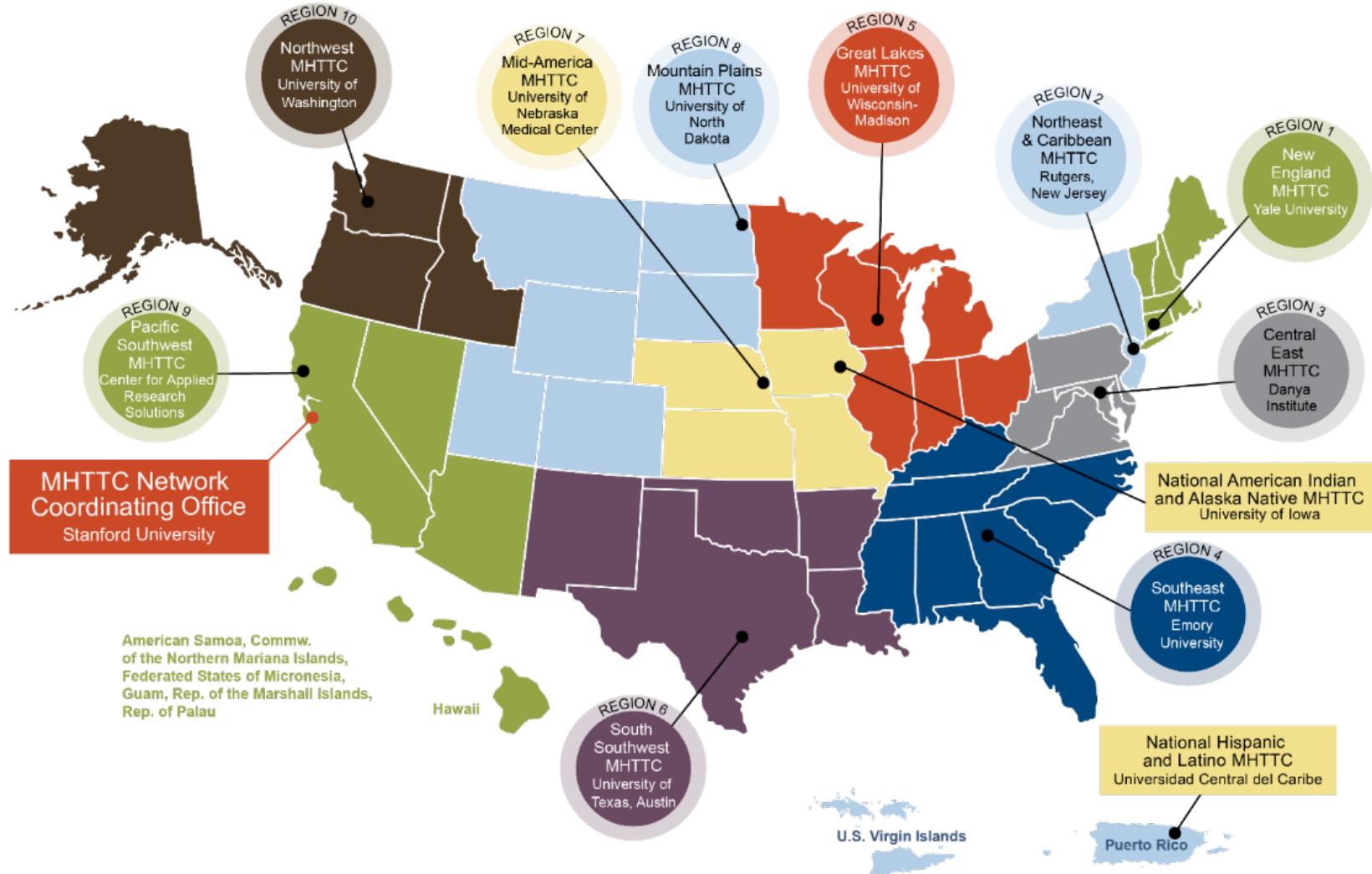


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# MHTTC Purpose

The MHTTC Network vision is to unify science, education and service to transform lives through evidence-based and promising treatment and recovery practices in a recovery-oriented system of care.

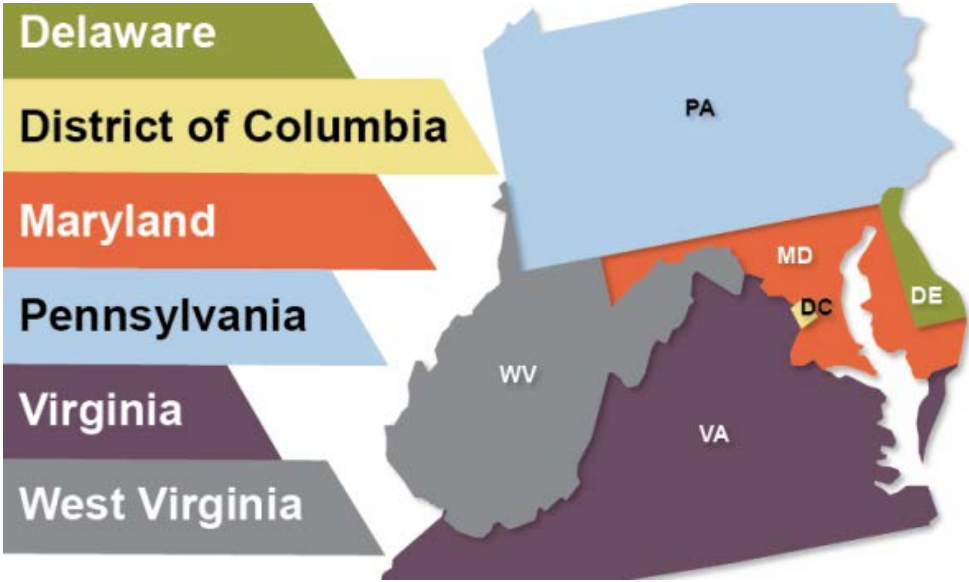


# Central East MHTTC Goals

## Funded by SAMHSA to:

- **Accelerate** the adoption and implementation of mental health related evidence-based practices
- **Heighten** the awareness, knowledge, and skills of the behavioral health workforce
- **Foster** alliances among culturally diverse practitioners, researchers, policy makers, family members, and consumers
- **Ensure** the availability and delivery of publicly available, free of charge, training and technical assistance

# Central East Region 3



Central East (HHS Region 3)

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# Evaluation Information

As part of receiving funding through SAMHSA to provide this training, the Central East MHTTC is required to submit data related to the quality of this event. At the end of today's presentation, please take a moment to complete a brief survey about today's training.

# About Rock Recovery

- Nonprofit organization founded in 2009 and based in the Washington, DC metro area
- Bridge gaps in eating disorder treatment and provide education to help individuals and communities fully recover
- Program offerings include in-person and virtual outpatient clinical programs for residents of DC, MD, VA and CA and nationwide support services



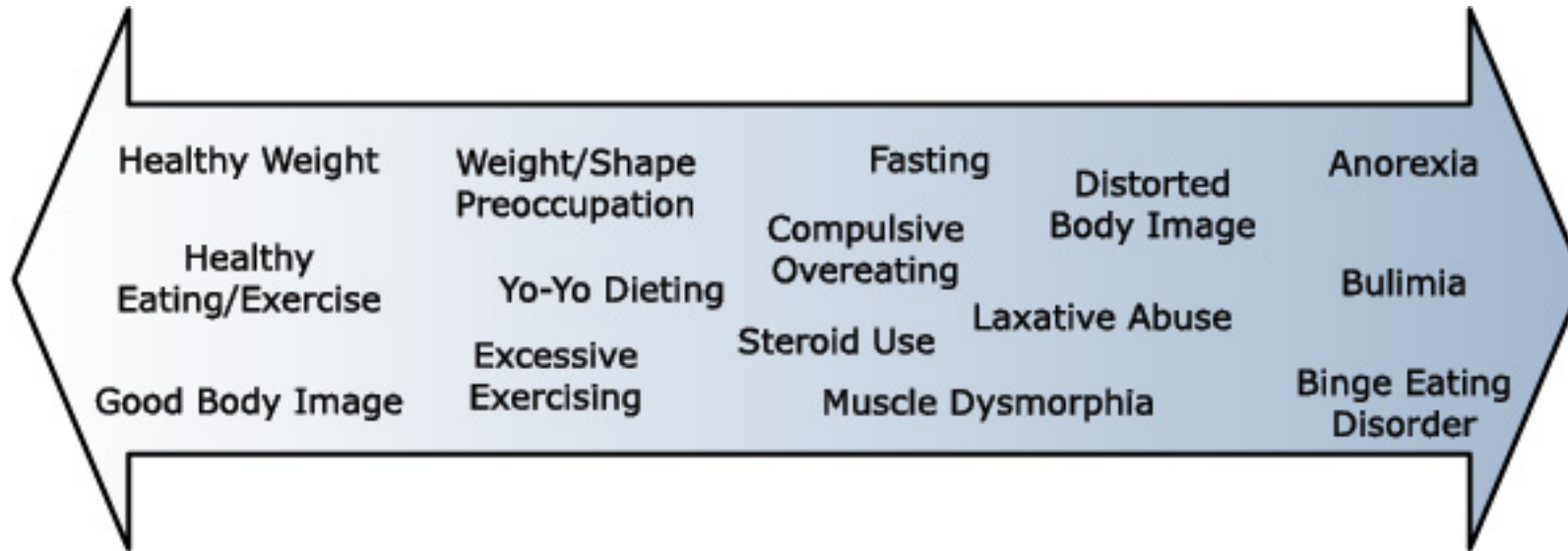


# What are eating disorders?

- Detrimental eating related behaviors: restriction, bingeing, purging, etc.
- Bio-psycho-social illnesses
- Underlying functions of eating disorders:
  - increase self-esteem
  - cope with difficult thoughts, feelings, or situations
  - fill up a feeling of emptiness
  - give an outlet for a drive for perfection or high achievement
  - provide a feeling of specialness or uniqueness
  - provide a sense of power over self, others, family, or life
  - provide an illusion of control
  - communicate needs, feelings, etc. to others
  - provide an outlet or a “safe space to go”



# Normal vs. Disordered Eating



Source: [LKT Counseling](#). Accessed 1 February 2021.

# Brené Brown on Shame

“We live in a world where most people still subscribe to the belief that shame is a good tool for keeping people in line. Not only is this wrong, but it’s dangerous. Shame is highly correlated with addiction, violence, aggression, depression, eating disorders, and bullying.”

“Perfectionism is a self destructive and addictive belief system that fuels this primary thought: If I look perfect, and do everything perfectly, I can avoid or minimize the painful feelings of shame, judgment, and blame.”

(Brown, 2013)

# Shame & Eating Disorders

- Difference between shame and guilt
- People with eating disorders feel like they are failing and unworthy
- Shame around how they are treating their bodies and feeling out of control
- Addictive patterns, dieting and maladaptive coping
- Diet culture vs. food as the “good girl drug”

# What is Spirituality?

Here are a few definitions:

- The quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things
- Related to sacred things
- Connection to something bigger or greater than ourselves

How do people experience spirituality?

- Religious connections (worship service, rituals, etc)
- Mindful practices (yoga, meditation etc)
- Nature (connection to beauty/creation)

# Why Spirituality in the Treatment of EDs?

- **Connection:** People with eating disorders are often very disconnected from their bodies, and spirituality can help bring connection and aliveness
- **Depth:** Spirituality brings depth beyond the physical or temporal
- **Surrender:** Often times people with eating disorders are seeking to control their environment and spirituality can help make us open to surrender and not calling the shots

# Research on Spirituality in ED Treatment

- **Study by Richards, Berrett, Hardman, & Eggett (2006):**
  - Compared effectiveness of a spirituality group with cognitive and emotional support groups among 122 female patients receiving inpatient treatment for eating disorders
  - Results: at discharge, the individuals in the spirituality group scored significantly lower on eating disorder symptoms and co-occurring psychological symptoms than the control group
- **Study by Strenger, Schnitker, & Felke (2016):**
  - Compared questionnaire responses on attachment to God, sociocultural pressures, and eating disorder symptoms from 102 women of diverse religious affiliations and beliefs, ages 19-57
  - Secure attachment to God was correlated with greater resilience against sociocultural pressures and less emotional eating and eating disorder symptoms

# How Spirituality Helps

- Spirituality can reconnect people with their authentic selves
- Spirituality offers ways to cope with distress
- Spiritual growth can lead to symptom improvement
- Spirituality can put the eating disorder out of a job

Hill, Natalie. "Four Ways Spirituality Can Help and Hinder Eating Disorder Recovery." *Walden Eating Disorders*, <https://www.waldeneatingdisorders.com/4-ways-spirituality-can-help-and-hinder-eating-disorder-recovery/>. Accessed 1 February 2021.



# The Power of Surrender & Spirituality in Recovery

- Physical (body): cells, organs, brain, nerves
- Emotional (soul): thoughts, feelings, motivation, personality
- Spiritual (spirit): purpose, meaning, love, worth

Physical Recovery: enjoy our bodies, nutrition - learning to eat appropriately again, 3 meals a day, no good and bad food lists, no longer have a life ruled by food, freedom around food

Emotional Recovery: going back and looking at 'why. Facing past hurts & finding healing from them, moving on, learning how to deal with difficulty & present problems & pain appropriately, learning life skills, growing up, not reacting to life from a place of pain, etc

Spiritual Recovery: why this is so important – about IDENTITY.

About who we are, where we get our self-worth from

Foundation to build our lives on

Eating disorders: clear indication foundation not laid. Our core being is hurt, damaged, looking in the wrong place to find our worth. We (wrongly) think that our worth will come if our bodies are perfect. Something missing.

Spiritual delves into deep roots, core of us – we need to be met there.

# The Link Between Surrender & Spirituality

First three steps of the 12 steps of AA (adapted):

- We admitted we were powerless over food — that our lives had become unmanageable.
- Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

Source: [Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions](#). Accessed 31 January 2022.

# Replacing Eating Disorder with Higher Power

“Making another person our Higher Power is, I believe, the heart of love addiction, an addictive process of its own. In order to enter recovery from either codependence or love addiction and stay there, we need to develop a relationship with an appropriate Higher Power, a power greater than ourselves that is not another human being, a Higher Power that can provide guidance, solace, and serenity.”

(Mellody & Miller, 2010)

# How Spirituality Hurts

- Eating disorders feel like a path to spiritual fulfillment
- Eating disorders block authentic spiritual experiences
- Eating disorders use spiritual values to justify disordered behaviors
- Eating disorders can cause people to give up on spirituality out of despair
- Some spiritual frameworks de-emphasize or demonize the physical world and bodies
- Some religious frameworks produce shame rather than mitigate shame
- Some religious systems lend themselves to rigidity and rules

# Countering Guilt & Shame (Case Study)



[Source](#)

# Clinical Applications

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- Mindfulness
- Forgiveness
- Community



# Mindfulness Defined

## Definition

Mindfulness is awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a sustained and particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

(Kabat-Zinn, 2016)

## Principles

- Non-judging
- Patience
- Beginner’s mind
- Trust
- Non-striving
- Acceptance
- Letting go

(Kabat-Zinn, 2013)

# Mindfulness Applied

## Practices

- Yoga
- Meditation
- Prayer
- Worship

## Therapeutic Modalities

- DBT
- ACT
- MBSR
- MBCT



# Forgiveness Defined

## Forgiveness is:

- “An unjustly hurt person’s act of deliberately giving up resentment toward an offender while fostering the undeserved qualities of beneficence and compassion toward that offender”
- Paradoxical/dialectical
- A process
- Intentional and unconditional
- Manifests in emotion, cognition, and behavior

## Forgiveness isn’t:

- Pardon (dismissal of justice)
- Reconciliation/  
restoration of the relationship
- Condoning (“no harm was actually done”)
- Excusing (“it wasn’t that bad”)
- A one-time act/decision



- Freedom from resentment
- Studies show that forgiveness leads to a decrease in anxiety and depression, and an increase in self-esteem and hope
- Maintenance of close interpersonal relationships requires the ability to forgive

(Baskin & Enright, 2004)

# How To Forgive

## Uncovering Phase

- Exploring psychological defenses, confronting/releasing anger, awareness of comparisons with the offender, awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the offense

## Decision Phase

- Acknowledging old strategies aren't working, willingness to consider forgiveness, commitment to forgive

## Work Phase

- Reframing who the offender is, empathy and compassion toward the offender, acceptance and absorption of the pain

## Outcome Phase

- Finding meaning for self and others, acknowledging the need for forgiveness from others, awareness of decreased negative affect toward offender

# Faith Communities & Recovery Communities

Faith communities can often hinder or help recovery:

Hurts:

- Poor theology around bodies
- Abuse of religious practices
- Promoting diet culture
- Shame and stigma
- Spiritual abuse or control

Helps:

- Offering resources (mental health scholarships, etc)
- Reducing shame and starting conversations
- Offer hope

# Faith Communities & Recovery Communities

As clinicians, we can support our clients in discovering and accessing the communities most likely to be helpful for them:

- 12 step groups: AA, NA, OA, CoDA, SLAA, EDA, Celebrate Recovery, etc.
- Religious communities: churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.
  - Many religious communities offer smaller groups for connection/fellowship
- Spiritually-based therapeutic/support groups



[Source](#)

# Case Study

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# References

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# Questions





# Appreciation





# Contact Us

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# Contact Us



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