

# Spirituality, Science and Addiction

Research findings by William White, CC Nuckols, et al  
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Spirituality in the addiction field can be either *theistic* (belief in God) or *non-theistic* (inner strength, moral values). One of the innovations of AA was to emancipate spirituality from its explicitly religious roots.

The term *spirituality* conveys experiences that bring a heightened sense of meaning and purpose in one's life. Spirituality can be defined by:

- HOW it is experienced -- a heightened state of perception, awareness, performance or being.
- WHAT it does to and for the individual -- informs, heals, empowers, connects, centers or liberates.

## **White's team conducted a meta-analysis of studies that confirm:**

1. A spiritual orientation to recovery is associated with a higher quality of life, contentment, optimism, social support, and lower levels of stress and conflict.
2. Spirituality can be a catalyst that initiates recovery, a protective shield in early recovery, and an increasingly significant dimension of long-term recovery.
3. Spirituality reduces the risk of relapse and predicts sustained recovery.
4. Self-reports of having had a 'spiritual awakening' through involvement with AA are highly predictive of recovery three years following treatment. The depth of this spirituality rises with length of recovery.

## **Recovering clients speak of spirituality in terms of:**

5. A turning point in their lives
6. Protection and support from a higher power (Steps 2, 3, etc.)
7. Guidance of an inner voice
8. Life meaning and gratitude
9. Service work with others seeking recovery (Step 12).

## **For Counselors**

White recommends that Counselors:

- Support each client's unique interpretation of spirituality (with or without belief in a higher power).
- Approach spirituality within the larger framework of life meaning and purpose.

(Nuckols/Miller)

Counselors should first have a sound understanding of their own beliefs. Spirituality and healing are closely connected. Counselors need to demonstrate:

- An openness and willingness to take the time to understand the client's spirituality and how this relates to their beliefs about recovery.
- A personal comfort level in asking about their clients' spiritual issues and to learn about their spiritual traditions.