

# Total Health: The SSLD Approach

(Strategies and Skills Learning and Development)

© 2008

Professor A. Ka Tat Tsang  
Faculty of Social Work



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

天行健，君子自強不息

<易经>

**Nature goes well. The noble character self-  
strengthens incessantly.**

*I-Ching*



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

# Developing Proactive Health Strategies

*健行新方略*

## Core Program

© 2008

Professor A. Ka Tat Tsang

Faculty of Social Work



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

# World Health Organization (WHO) Definition of Health

Health is a state of complete **physical, mental and social well-being** and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

It is the extent to which an individual or group is able to **realize aspirations** and **satisfy needs**, on the other hand to **change or cope with the environment**.



# Total Health and Well-Being: Your Own View

- The World Health Organization (WHO) definition
  - Not only absence of physical illness
  - Both state and action: aspiration, needs, and changing the environment
- What is your own understanding of health?
- What is your own understanding of well-being, being-well, or living well?
- How are these related to what you consider to be desirable, happy, valuable in life? (Your own aspirations, needs, and what you want your world to be)



# Why Do I Want to Be Healthy?

- Judging from the way people live their lives, we have to recognize that not everyone really wants to be healthy
- Health is often not perceived as a priority in people's lives
- Health and well-being, therefore, have to be understood with regard to the kind of life people desire to live
- The first question we need to ask is what is the kind of life you want to live, and what is the kind of person you want to be
- An objectively defined health has to be integrated with your subjective imagination of what is a good life, and the person you want to be



# Life Review

- Cartography of your life-world: Mapping it out
  - Self (body, mind, identity, self-image, soul, spirit)
  - Work, occupation, career, calling, life-task
  - Relationships
  - Social location: includes social space, mobility, transitioning
  - Resources: Wealth, social capital, personal strengths/capacities
- What are the areas of life that you wish to improve on?
- What will make you feel better?
- What can you do differently to achieve the desired changes?
- What are you prepared to do (can include learning what to do)?



# Total Health Manifesto

## Your Health in Your Own Hands

- You are ultimately in charge of your own health: You make the decisions and are responsible for them
- Each one of us has a set of health strategies and practices, which are of varying effectiveness
- Medical technology is a key component of your health, but it is not everything
- Your health is too important to be totally left to a healthcare professional
- There are always things you can do to achieve better health and well-being
- The best thing you can ever do to yourself is to learn the strategies and skills that will enable you to realize a better life





# Why Do We Keep Doing Things That Are Damaging Our Own Health?

- Some of us do not know what is healthy, or we are misinformed
- Knowing what is healthy, however, does not solve all the problems. Most people knowingly do things that damage their health (e.g., unhealthy eating, not exercising, smoking, excessive drinking, not dealing with stress)
- Unhealthy practices are motivated: They are maintained because they meet certain psychological or emotional needs (e.g., security, control and mastery, anger, resentment) or because they are simply pleasurable



# Why Do We Keep Doing Things That Are Damaging Our Own Health?

- Unhealthy practices are often socially facilitated or reinforced (friends, family, culture)
- Unhealthy practice is supported by market forces (e.g., junk food, ineffective/harmful health products)
- Healthy practices and competing needs and goals
  - externally prescribed procedures compromise our pleasure seeking, sense of autonomy, independence, and freedom
  - Healthy practices may be costly, inconvenient, or simply not cool
- Some of us are actually motivated to be self-destructive (e.g. reckless driving, unprotected sex, indulgent diet)



# Aspects of Living and Being Well

- Body
  - Medically defined
  - Fitness
  - Feel good
- Financial
  - What you need?
  - Income and security
- Spiritual
  - Purpose, meaning
  - Transcendence
- Psychological/emotional
  - Pleasure
  - Subjective well-being
  - Freedom from pain, suffering
- Work/Occupational
- Social
- Sexual



# Engaging with the Dark Side

We have all done things that are detrimental to our own health and well-being (e.g., drunk driving, smoking, abusing our partner, overeating, overworking, gambling, etc.).

Passing judgment, denying, and/or avoiding them do not help. We just need to deal with them directly.

Actually, we often do them for a reason, and the reason may actually be based on a very valid or natural need (e.g., I need to be accepted by my peers, and do not want to be socially isolated).

We can start by looking at what we do, and the needs that drive them (even when the needs are not obvious to you).



# Engaging with the Dark Side

List the things you do that are likely to be detrimental to your health and well-being:

## Examples

- I have a habit of over-spending and I am now in heavy debt
- I have high blood-pressure and cholesterol but I consume large quantity of high-fat food
- I need my spouse badly, but I always say and do mean things to her/him
- I want to be emotionally and sexually close to someone, but I often avoid opportunities to develop intimate relationships



# Pleasure Scan

1. What are the things that you find pleasurable in your life?
2. What are some of the pleasurable things that you want to add to your life?
  - List the things that come to mind, do not censor
  - You can keep some of the items to yourself, you do not have to share all of them
  - If you cannot name, label, or describe, you can use a symbol or a code
  - Rank them according to the level of pleasure/satisfaction



# Living with Illness and Suffering

- Everyone of us faces an increasing chance of having to deal with a chronic health condition, either as the patient, a caregiver, or just a concerned family and friend.
- Living with illness, pain, dysfunction, disability, deterioration, or the reality of death can be difficult and scary. Avoidance, fear, and/or resentment are normal.
- Society and the healthcare system are still trying to figure out ways to deal with aspects of the issue (e.g., healthcare economics, treatment technology) and the full impact on our lives is often not recognized and understood.
- We need to take charge of our bodies, our health and well-being, our own lives by learning and developing proactive strategies and skills.



# The Multiple Roles We Play

Society and the healthcare system often slot us into a single position: patient, caregiver, transmitter or recipient of health information, etc.

In reality, we play multiple roles, and we have probably played all of these roles at different times of our life.

We sometimes enjoy playing certain roles (e.g., information provider, passive patient), and we sometimes resent them. We move in and out of these roles a lot.

These socially constructed roles often do not match our needs and desires. There are times when we are uninformed, confused, scared, resentful, or sad.

We can learn strategies and skills to manage these roles.

