



VCU

Gerontology

School of Allied Health Professions



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

Navigating Loss, Loneliness, and Aging: **RECONNECTING TO SOURCES OF STRENGTH**

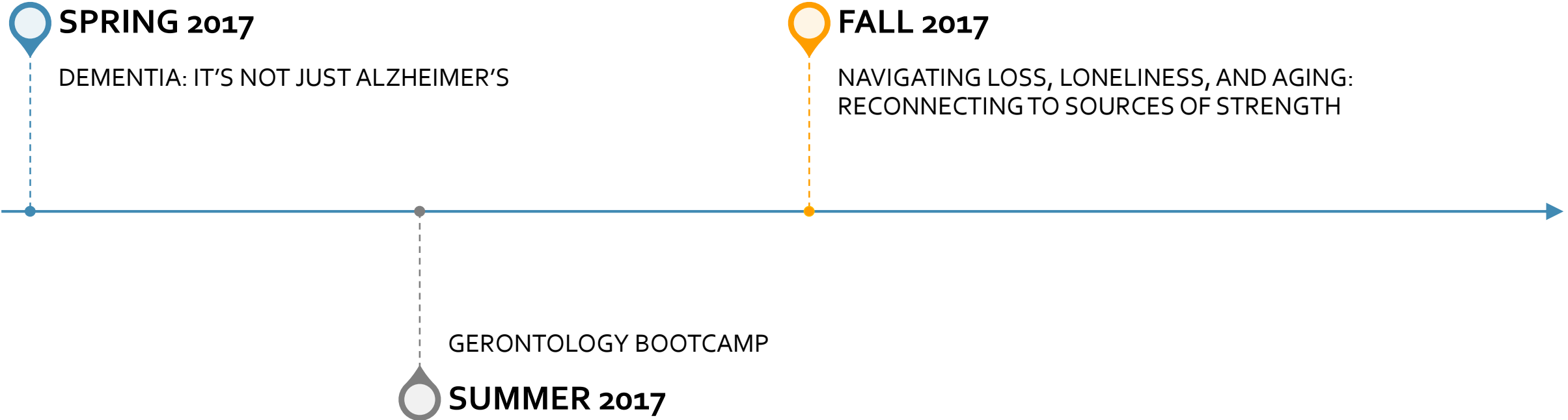
PART 4 – SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

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THREE SERIES





VCU Department of Gerontology

<http://www.sahp.vcu.edu/departments/gerontology/>



Virginia Department for Social Services

www.dss.virginia.gov/

A PROGRAM FOR PROFESSIONAL CAREGIVERS WORKING IN ADULT DAY CARE SETTINGS

A FOUR-PART WEBINAR SERIES

1

Part I: Loss

2

Part II: Grief & a
“New Normal”

3

Part III:
The Professional
Caregiver & Loss

4

Part IV:
Social
Connectedness

At the end of this series, YOU will have an increased understanding of:

the difference
between **grief** and
loss

the areas of life
that loss can
impact

how to work
towards a "**new
normal**"

activities and
resources for
navigating loss

person-centered
care as it relates to
loss

the relationship
between **loss,**
loneliness, and
social isolation

risk factors for
loneliness and
social isolation

the **health
consequences** of
loneliness and
social isolation

how loneliness and
social isolation
impact the body's
immune system

the importance of
self-care for the
professional

the health benefits
of **social
connectedness**

activities for
enhancing social
connectedness

At the end of this webinar, you will have an increased understanding of:

- The relationship between **loss, loneliness, and social isolation**
- How loneliness and loss impact **health and mental health**
- The health **benefits** of **social connection**
- Activities for enhancing **social connectedness**
- The connection between **transitions and isolation**
- What influences transitions

SESSION 4

Learning Objectives

A wooden Adirondack chair sits on a wooden dock, facing a calm lake. In the background, there are green, forested mountains under a cloudy sky. The text 'INHALE' is overlaid in large, white, bold letters with a blue outline, and 'EXHALE' is overlaid below it in similar style but with a lighter blue outline. Both words have a reflection effect below them.

INHALE

EXHALE

LONELINESS

The percentage of American adults stating they are lonely has soared from 20% to 40% in a generation. (U.S. Surgeon General, 2017)

HEALTH

From immunity to inflammation, cognitive impairment to stroke, our social connections play a role in disease: risk and preventive.

LONGEVITY

People with strong social connections live longer. And without strong relationships, life expectancy shrinks.

Why is
Connectedness
Important?

The Connectedness Continuum

(Amateau, G., Hickey, P., Gendron, T., Link, S., MacDonald, C., Watson, T., Welleford, E.A.)



Definition of social isolation:

- A state in which the individual experiences less social engagement with others than they would like, and they report that this interferes with their quality of life. *(based on Nicholson)*

Definition of social connectedness:

- A state in which the individual experiences a satisfying number of social gatherings, close relationships and/or satisfaction with social contacts and reports that these experiences maintain their quality of life. *(based on Toepoel)*

**Who is at
risk for
social
isolation?**

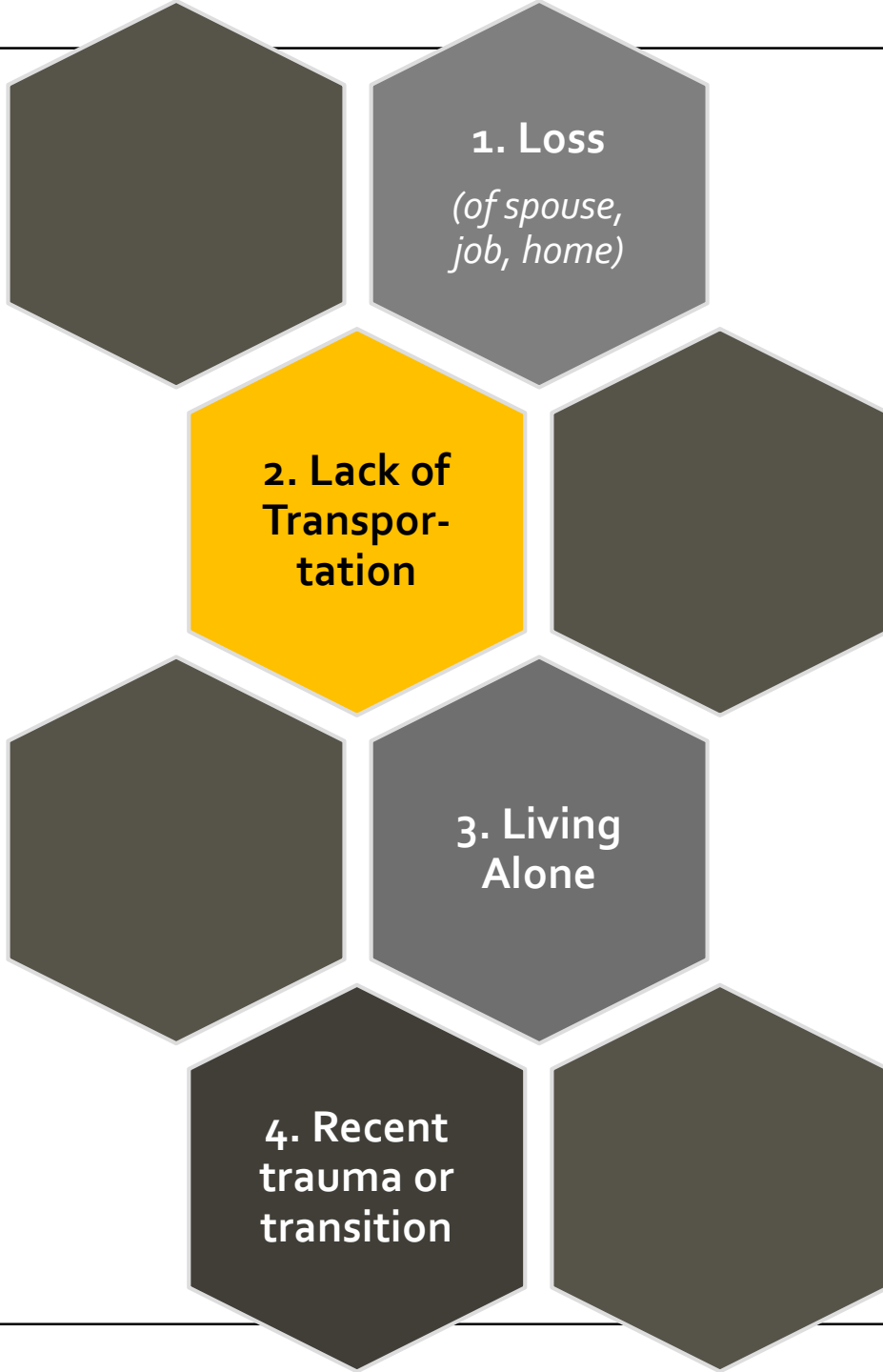
1. Caregivers

2. LGBT Older Adults

3. Minority Older Adults

4. Trauma Survivors

5. Everyone



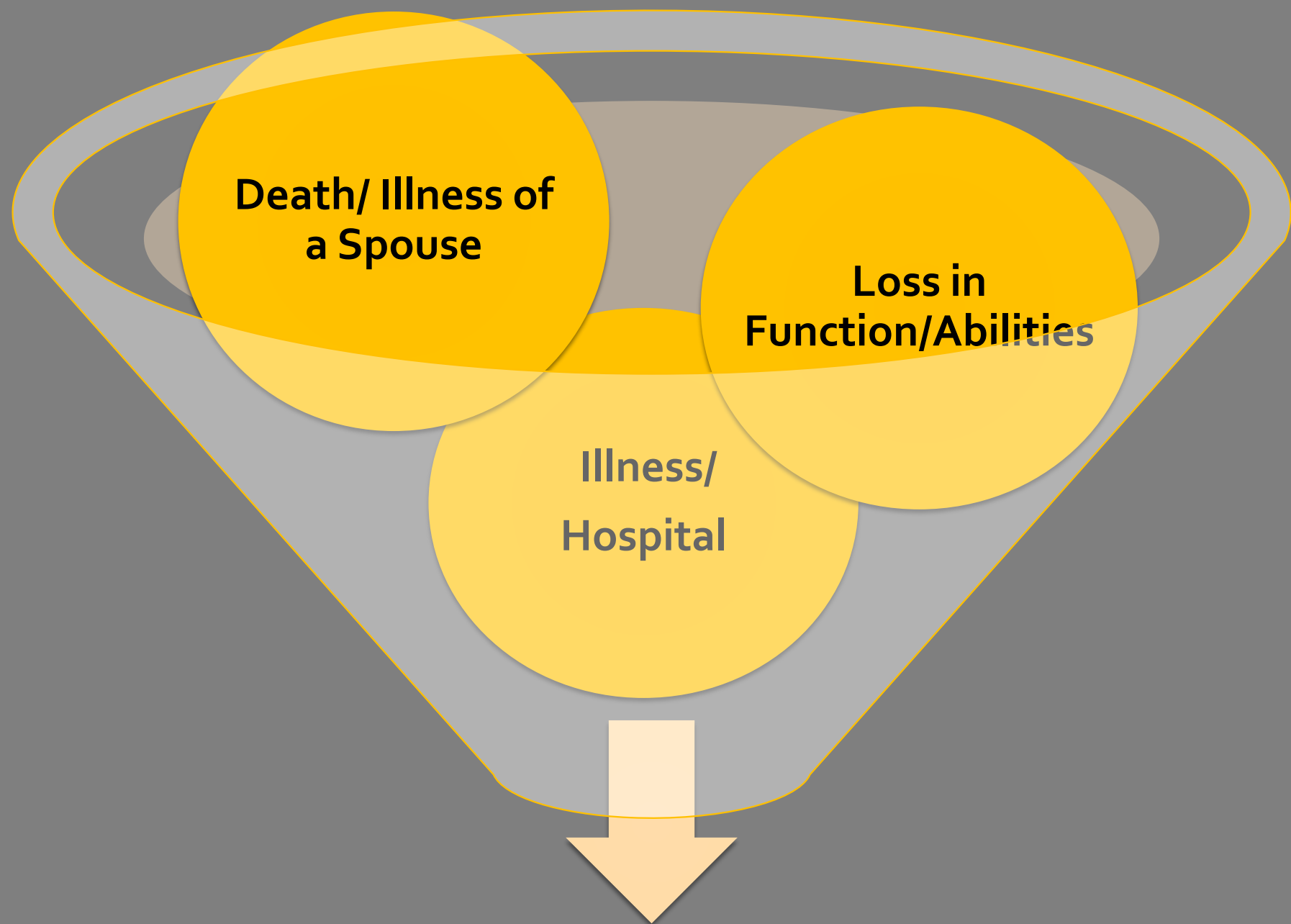
Risks for Social Isolation



TRANSITIONS

Transitions Overview

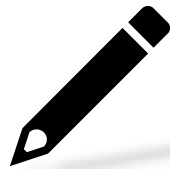
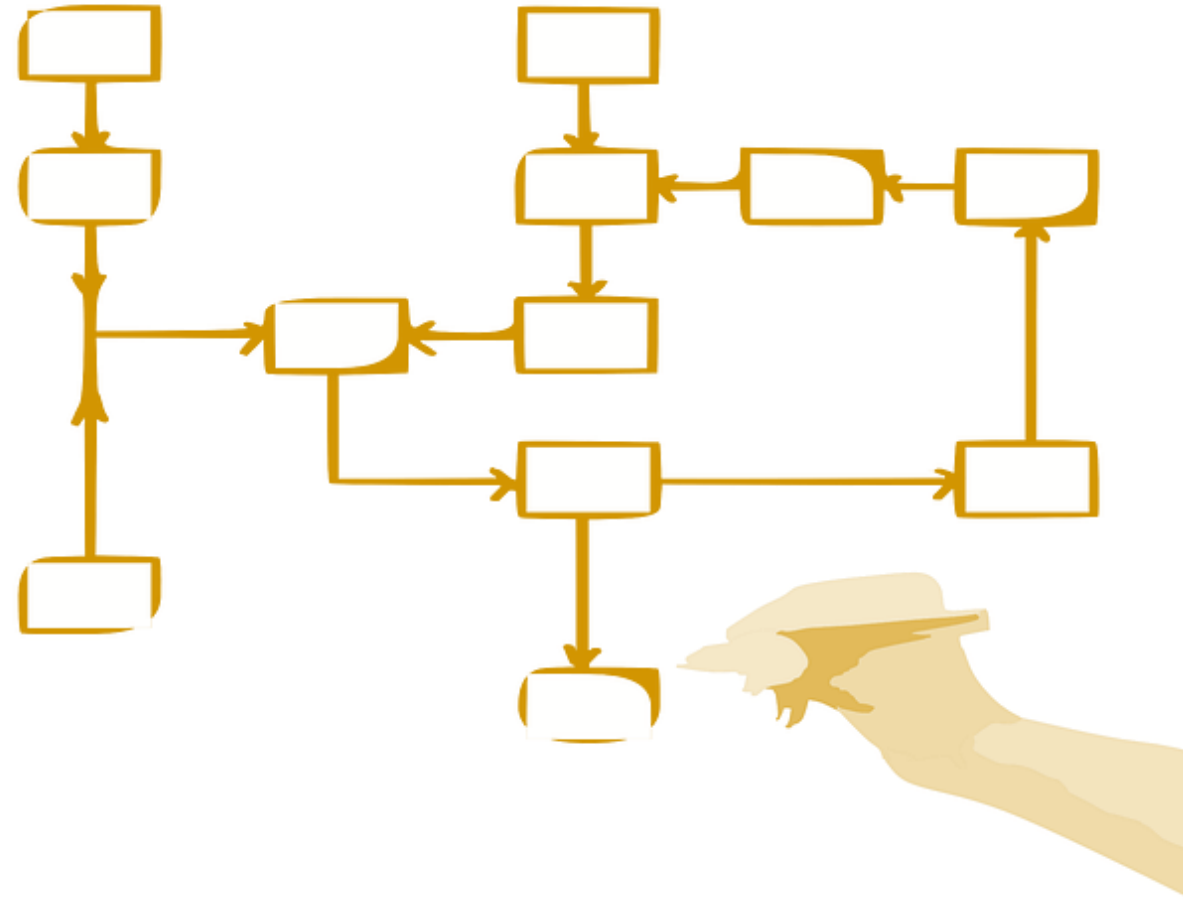
- A successful transition is a WIN – WIN!
- Grief and loss are among the most stressful life events we encounter
- Successful transitions are important and can determine older adults' long term success in the center
- Transition success may affect social engagement



Transition into Adult Day Programs

Transition Role Mapping

- Define the roles you hold in your community.
- How is each role responsible for in supporting transitions?



The DON'Ts and DON'Ts of Transition Planning

Social Segregation:

The state or action of setting someone apart from other individuals or groups

Stigma:

A distinguishing mark of social disgrace



Reflection Exercise

Think back to your first day at your current job...

What was the biggest challenge of that day?


What did you do to overcome the difficulties/obstacles?

Did you experience a shift in empowerment and control?

Did you feel as though you were segregated socially and practically?

Were you recovering from the stress of needing to change jobs or some other loss?

Helping to create successful transitions



Person-
Centered
Care

Social
Integration

Successful
Transition

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INHALE

EXHALE



FOUR PILLARS OF OPTIMAL BEING

(HOLLY NIEMELA)

Physically Fit

Emotionally
Sound

Mentally Strong

Living With
Meaning



I Physical Fitness and Connectedness

1. Immune system

Loneliness activates a double whammy: increases inflammation, suppresses fighting off viral infections (Cole, 2015).

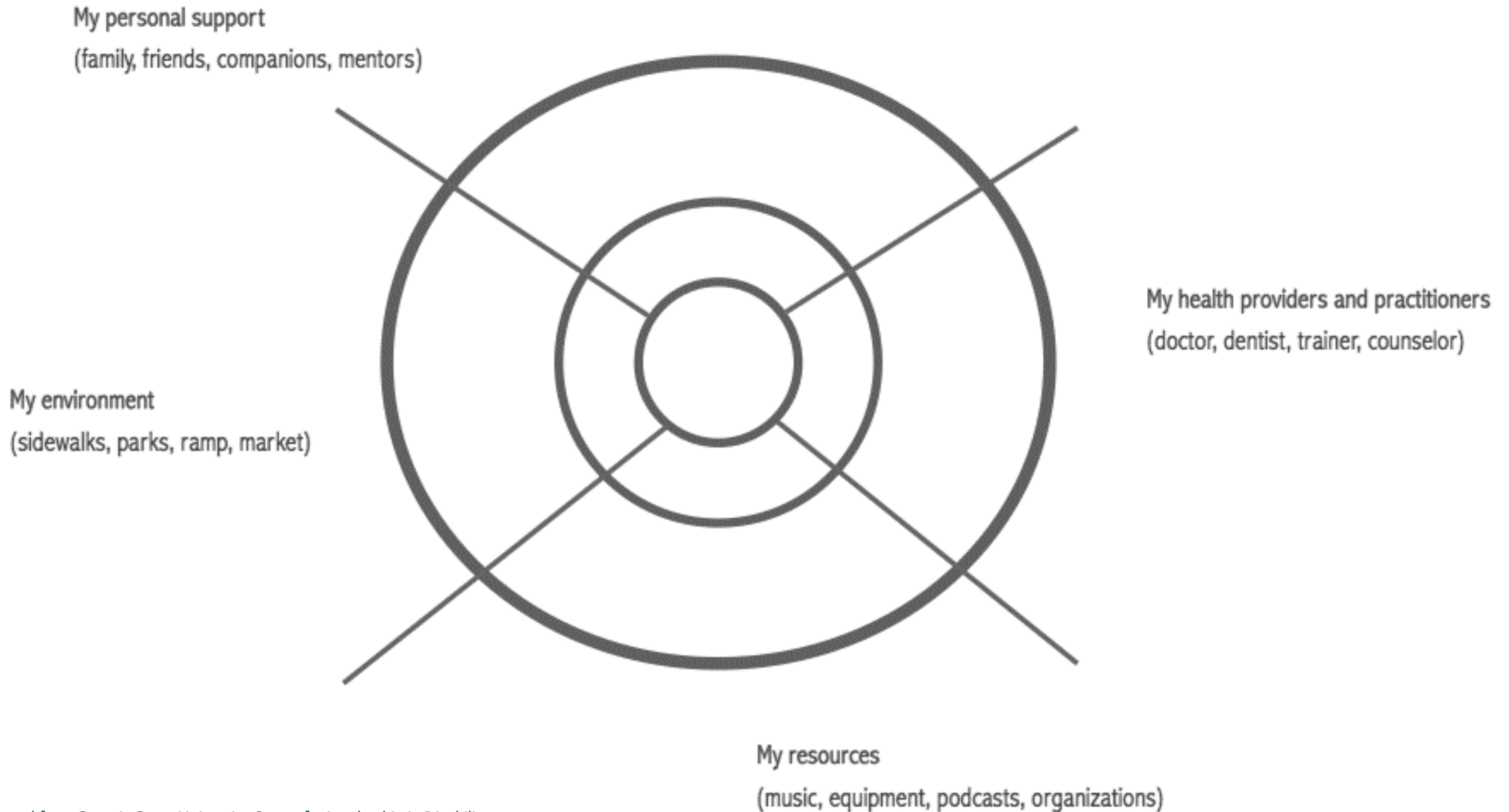
2. Chronic disease

Strong social bonds are as good for you as quitting smoking. Weak social circle carries a health risk equal to smoking 15 cigarettes daily (Holt-Lunstand).

3. Built environment

People want to “age in place,” yet only 1% of U.S. housing stock is equipped with universal design features that make engagement easier.

Physically Fit and Socially Connected



“We forget that some of the oldest medicines that we have are, in fact, love and compassion. When these medicines are deployed, they can be deployed by anyone. When they are deployed they can provide an extraordinary source of healing.”

Vivek Murthy, former U.S. Surgeon General



II Emotional Soundness and Connectedness

1

1. Happiness

70% of our happiness comes from relationships (Murray & Peacock, 1996).

2

2. Self-esteem

Positive relationships help us thrive emotionally, increase our self-esteem and self-acceptance (Pinker, 2016).

3

3. Affinity

Singing in groups has been shown to improve happiness and well-being and to spark rapid social bonding (Pearce, Luanay, & Dunbar).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-7zAkwAOYg>



SOUL FRIENDS

2005 FRIENDS

Soul Friends: 6 Mechanisms of Transformation

(Stephen Cope)

1. CONTAINMENT

- A safe holding environment within which you relax and expand.

2. TWINSHIP

- Inspires deep feelings of belonging and a sense of likeness.

3. NOBLE ADVERSITY

- Challenging or confrontational to your benefit.

4. MIRRORING

- Sees something special in you, reflects you back to you.

5. MYSTIC RESONANCE

- A mysterious, mystic kinship.

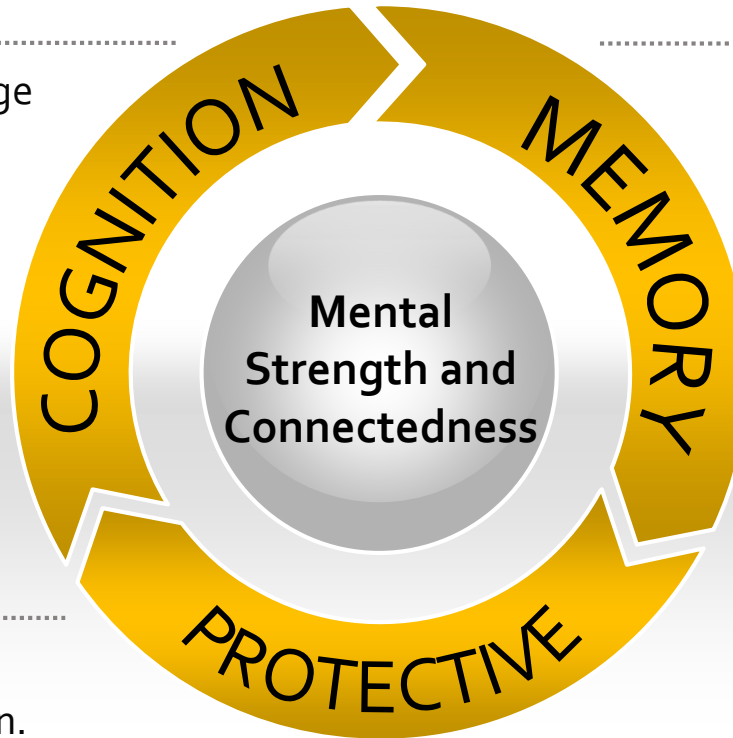
6. CONSCIOUS PARTNERSHIP

- Irreplaceable companion in your struggle to make meaning and express yourself.

MENTAL STRENGTH AND CONNECTEDNESS

Isolation and loneliness change the brain (Wilson, Cacioppo).

Across the lifespan, good relationships protect the brain.



More frequent social activity is associated with reduced risk of cognitive impairment. Higher social integration is associated with less cognitive decline and slower memory loss (Ertel).



Meaning, Purpose, and Connectedness

1. Ask for Help. When we ask for help it makes person we ask happy and helps them to feel connected and needed (Seppala).

2. Volunteering and Lifelong Learning. Community ties = richer lives (Ertel).

3. Belonging. A sense of belonging is an important driver of meaning. Being excluded causes pain and conflict (Smith).

EASE

(Cacioppo, J.)



E^{Extend} yourself

Send out small social signals. Take tiny steps in small doses of positive sensations that originate with social interactions.



A^{Action} plan

Acknowledge it's difficult and why. Be intentional and plan to seek out connections.



S^{Seek} collectives

Connection is not about being interesting, but rather: **be interested.**



E^{Expect} the best

Expect warmth and connection.



“When other people think you matter and treat you like you matter, you believe you matter, too.”

Emily Esfahani Smith

Now that you've completed the entire series, you may request your certificate!



1. Complete the Request Form here:

<https://redcap.vcu.edu/surveys/?s=F4J7LPEgCP>

2. Following the certificate request, you must complete the required questions in order to receive your certificate.

3. All persons requesting a certificate will be cross-checked with the roster to ensure payment has been received. If payment has not been received, someone will be in touch.

What's Next?



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SOCIAL SERVICES

Watch for
future training
opportunities
from the
VCU/DSS
partnership!

Call us with questions
at:

- 804.828.1565

Find us on

- Website:
<http://www.sahp.vcu/gerontology/>
- Email: agingstudies@vcu.edu
- Be sure to "like" us on Facebook
 - facebook.com/vcugerontology

We would appreciate any and all feedback about this program.

You have the opportunity to leave feedback via the evaluation form included after the certificate request form.

Please contact Jennifer Pryor with any questions:

pryorjm@vcu.edu

THANK YOU