

Work with faith and spiritual communities

When someone comes into an acute setting, their faith, beliefs or practices – religious or spiritual; and their relationship with their family and community, will be vitally important to them.

As it is impossible to know all the intricacies of specific religious and spiritual belief systems, it is critical that they are respected, and that you facilitate understanding of the issues and challenges that each individual faces.

Chaplaincy services can help in this by providing specialist advice, support or services and liaison with faith communities in the wider society.

Action Points

- Learn about yourself and your views on spirituality so as to ensure your values do not adversely affect clients' perspectives. Reflection and supervision may be helpful.
- Acknowledge your own vulnerability. Develop your skills in empathy, particularly for those who challenge you. Know your limits – no one has all the answers!

- Network to learn about the support that is available. This may be formal or informal e.g. counsellors, chaplains, faith groups and other groups, interested colleagues or clients. You can signpost service users to these as appropriate.
- Emphasise a respecting and empathetic culture that proactively fosters consideration of spiritual needs. Encouraging discussion with colleagues and clients which may include exploration of preferences and needs will assist in this.
- Be creative and supportive of activities that can support client's spirituality and its development. Work collaboratively with service users.

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Additional copies can be downloaded from www.virtualward.org.uk.

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Care Services Improvement Partnership **CSIP**

National Institute for
Mental Health in England



Facilitating spirituality

All of us, at some stage in our lives, will experience acute mental distress. This leaflet aims to help you to start working with service users who want to explore their spirituality at this challenging time.



Facilitating Spirituality

To be able to do this effectively you need to:

- have an awareness of your own spirituality, and
- recognise that spirituality is not just about religion or faith; it encompasses much more

As professionals we need to understand where someone is coming from, and to take account of the whole person. This includes working with them to address their social, emotional, physical, cultural, psychological and spiritual needs. Doing this can help an individual's recovery and reintegration into their community.

So, what is spirituality?

We all have something inside us which makes us tick and grounds us. This is our spirituality. It can be seen as many things including:

- our life force, our soul
- what makes us – our uniqueness as a person
- a sense of hope, harmony and wholeness
- what keeps us going when times are tough
- a belief in something other than ourselves and the material world, and
- our connectedness with other people, nature, God, the universe.

What creates our identity and spirituality?

Our identity and spirituality are integral with our perceptions which are built on a set of internal factors such as:

- assumptions
- beliefs
- values
- attitudes, and
- behaviours.

These are developed through our life experiences, links and interactions with others such as through:

- relationships: with partners, children, extended family, friends, and work colleagues
- connections: neighbourhood, communities (including faith communities), leisure, hobbies, and
- connections with God, or the Other, in experiences of transcendence.

Identifying spiritual needs and wishes

It takes time to learn about and get to know an individual. Understanding how they see their internal and external world is important.

Relationships as above are important to this. They will vary and may be with a place, an animal, or a friendly neighbour or shopkeeper. A person's faith/belief system is likely to mean that prayer times, meditation, sacred spaces, diet, and links to the faith community will be important to the individual.

HOPE

HOPE is one way of helping you to think about such issues and how you might facilitate a service user to address their needs.

- H** sources of **hope**, meaning, peace, comfort, strength, love, connection, relationships, a sense of vocation, prior coping strategies
- O** **organised** religion
- P** **personal** spirituality and practices
- E** **effects** on care, end of life issues, support, treatment, empowerment, affirmation, respect, handling of challenging experiences and feelings.

It is relatively easy to discover a person's religion, but their spirituality may be more complex and require careful and respectful listening from staff.

NB: *Case studies and exercises are in the main document accompanying this leaflet.*