

# Spirituality - Exercise

Working with spirituality issues can be a troublesome area for many clinicians. The common concerns expressed by staff is that exploring issues of spirituality with clients may lead to further distress, may validate the wrong things – such as ‘delusions’, may confuse the person further. Many staff have expressed spirituality as an ‘unknown’ subject and have expressed much anxiety about supporting their clients with a subject they don’t feel comfortable or confident with.

As discussed in Peter Gilbert’s chapter, spirituality and religion are not necessarily the same thing. Some examples (taken from the Royal College of Psychiatrists spirituality and mental health resource) of how to support people with their spirituality may include:

- opportunities and encouragement to make sense of, and derive meaning from, experiences including illness;
- permission and encouragement to develop a relationship with God or the Absolute (however the person conceives the sacred).

This involves (especially in an inpatient setting) access to a private place in which to pray, worship and the opportunity to explore spiritual or religious matters.

### **Recognising and assessing the religious and spiritual aspects of a person’s life**

It is important to be mindful of the intention behind spiritual assessment. If an assessment of an individual’s spiritual needs will lead to greater clarity about how support can be offered as an intended outcome, then this is to be encouraged. What is unhelpful to the person is having their spiritual needs assessed then not met.

There are different ways in which support can be offered, but many service users have had the experience of ‘opening up’ to this type of assessment, to then being told that their needs can not be met in this setting. For most people, spirituality is a deeply personal experience and cannot be separated from who they are and as such has a role to play in individual recovery.

### **As suggested by the Royal College of Psychiatrists -**

A helpful way to begin is simply to ask ‘what sustains you?’ or ‘what keeps you going in difficult times?’ A person’s answer to this usually indicates his or her main spiritual concerns and pursuits.

This is useful in determining what personal resources are helpful and can be encouraged (see self management chapter) and also to identify what external supports are available to the person from their social network, community or faith group.

It is important for inpatient staff to remember that they will have access to chaplaincy support and outreach support from local faith groups.

Spiritual or religious beliefs can often offer a reassuring framework or context in which to find meaning in people’s distress and can be important in the process of acceptance and personal responsibility for their recovery. When these frameworks conflict and cause confusion, it is important to provide gentle unhurried support to the individual to help resolve these issues.

For further information on spiritual assessment access the site below.

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation/therapies/spiritualityandmentalhealth.aspx>