

Faith and Spirituality

A deeper meaning to life

For some people a sense that there is a deeper meaning and purpose to life can be named as faith or spirituality. Providing a stability and resilience which helps them cope with stress and difficult times. This can be expressed in a number of ways including through organised religion, nature, community etc.

Focussing on feelings of purpose does not prevent you from feeling stressed or having mental illness. However, there is evidence that people who instead explore these feelings or belong to a faith community or hold religious or spiritual beliefs have better mental health.

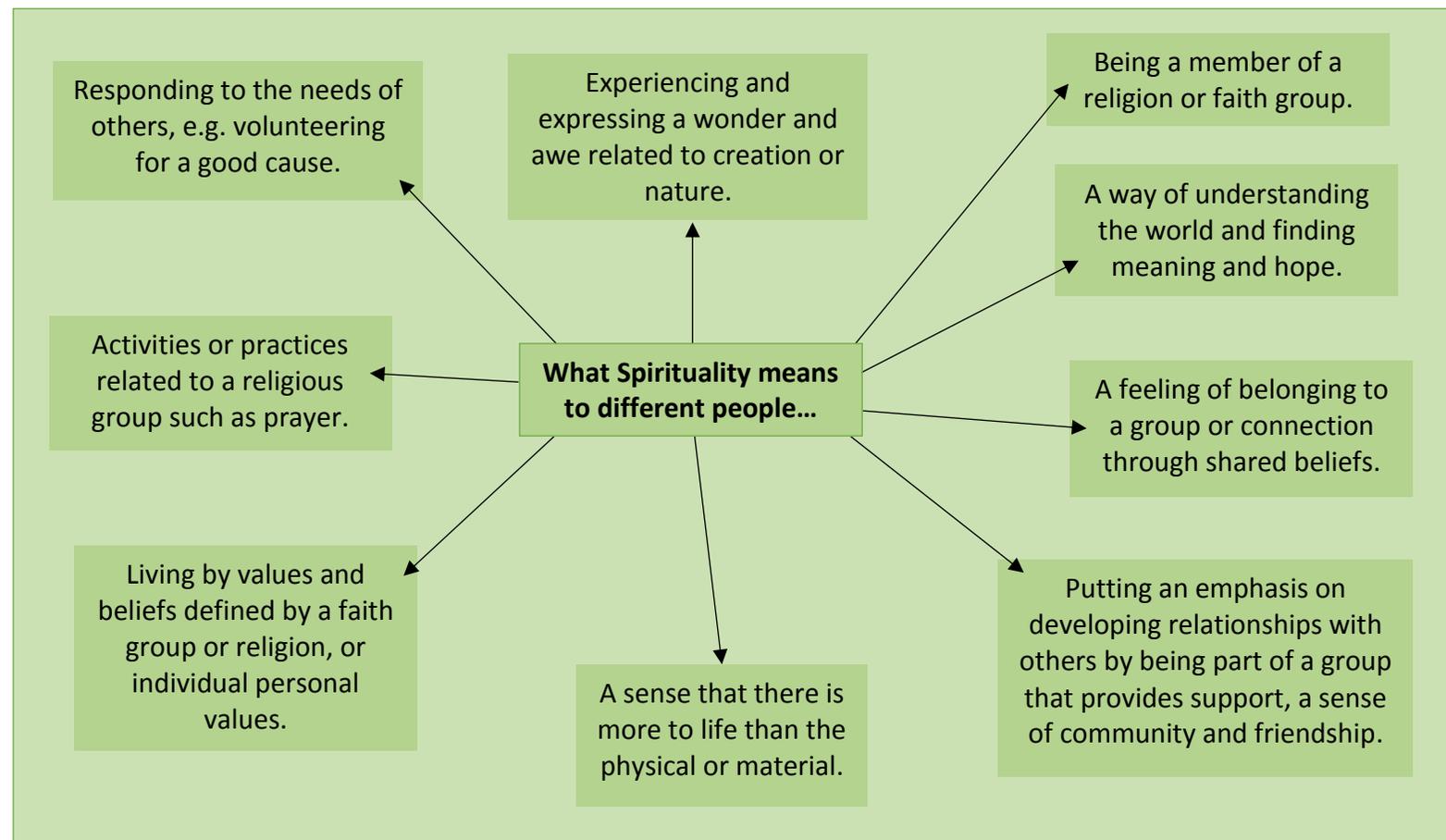
Faith can be important at times of deep emotional stress, physical and mental illness, loss, bereavement and when approaching our own death. Spirituality can give a sense of life being a journey, most religions see illness as part of the holistic experience of life. Ups and downs are part of the progress of life as we learn to live life to its full.

What is Spirituality?

Spirituality “is what is deepest in us – what gives direction, motivation. It is what enables a person to survive bad times, to be strong, to overcome difficulties, to become themselves.”

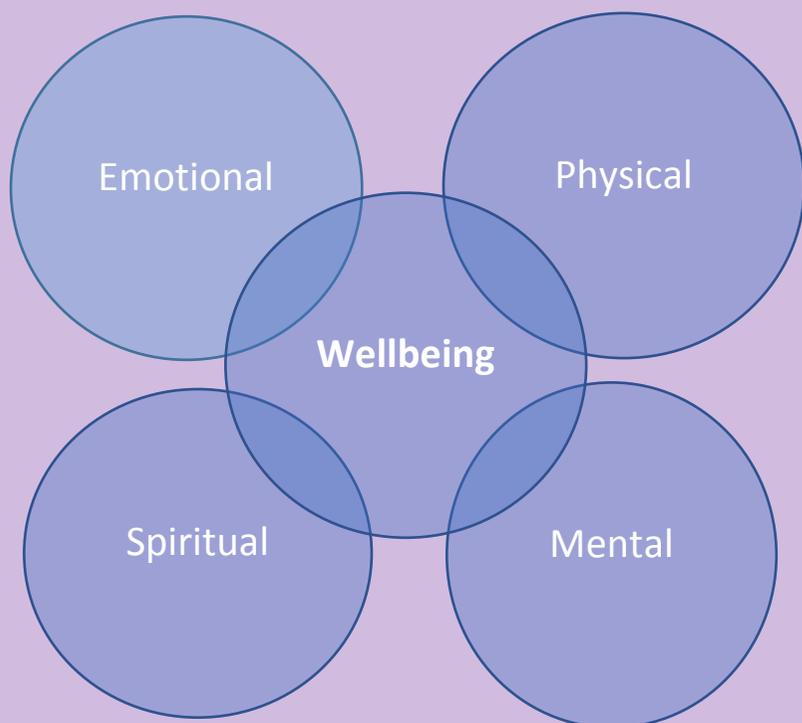
[Spiritual Well-Being: Policy and Practice, Bradford 2001] [Spiritual Well-Being: Policy and Practice, Bradford 2001].

Spirituality is not always about adherence to a religion, many people find the spiritual practices of a religion helpful as a way of expressing their faith, including: prayer, reading faith texts, meeting with people of similar beliefs.



Wellbeing

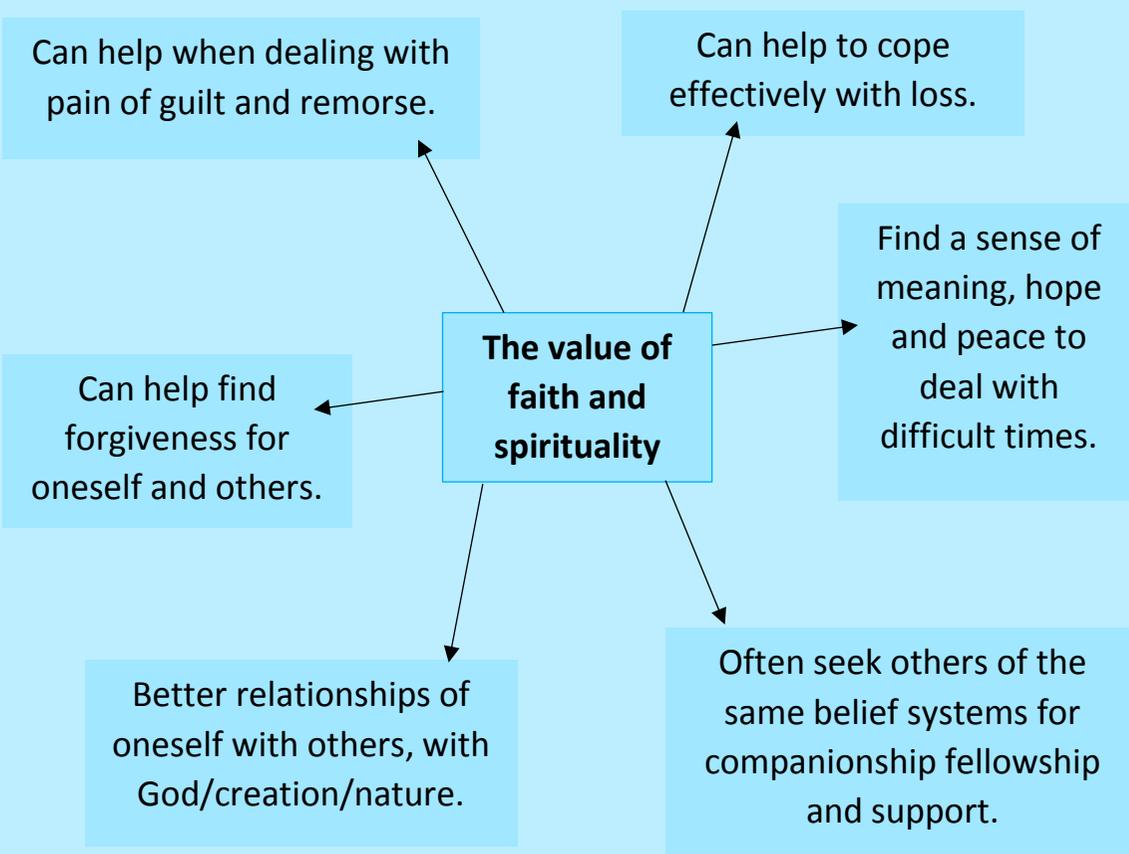
Wellbeing depends on the balance between biological, psychological and social factors, taking account of a person's faith and spirituality can add to the mix and help individuals live a balanced and motivated life. Religious belief can be part of that wellbeing, whilst for others exercise, socialising with friends, walking in the countryside can be an expression of that spiritual need.



Talking about Faith

For many people, articulating or expressing deep feelings of faith can be difficult, and at the same time those providing support and help are often reluctant to ask about spiritual values and beliefs. A simple question to help you or someone you are talking to open up discussion about faith and spirituality might be:

What gives my/your life meaning?



There are many writers and poets who give expression to the importance of a deeper meaning to life

The poet and author, Alison Webster wrote this prayer in the Christian tradition for World Mental Health Day:

God of compassion,
You meant us to be both fragile and ordinary.
Silence the voices that say we are not good enough,
Haven't achieved enough,
Haven't enough to show for our lives,
That we are not enough.
Help us to know that we are treasure,
We are prized,
We are cherished,
We are loved.
Infinitely.
By you.
So be with us in our corrugations of feeling:
When our hearts are in downward freefall, *be with us*
When our minds race with anxiety, *be with us*
When our throats close in fear, *be with us*
When sleep will not come, *be with us*
When waking hurts, *be with us*.
In the name of Jesus,
Who knew trauma, abuse, despair and abandonment?
And has nothing but love for us,
Amen.

In John Green's book 'Looking for Alaska' Pudge expresses a sense of the unity of life following the death of his best friend, Alaska, in an accident:

"But ultimately I do not believe that she was only matter. The rest of her must be recycled, too. I believe now that we are greater than the sum of our parts. If you take Alaska's genetic code and you add her life experiences and the relationships she had with people, and then you take the size and shape of her body, you do not get her. There is something else entirely. There is a part of her greater than the sum of her knowable parts. And that part has to go somewhere, because it cannot be destroyed"

Where to find further help?

www.farmwell.org.uk/faith-and-spirituality/

- Being able to express and explore spirituality is a basic human right: Under human rights law we all have the right to freedom of thought, belief and religion (Article 9 Human Rights Act) this includes practising religion and talking about religion.
- Don't be afraid to talk to trusted friends and colleagues about issues of spirituality including Counsellors when you are talking about your mental wellbeing.
- Contact FCN which can provide volunteers to help you talk through your journey. Tel: 03000 111 999.
- Talk to a leader of faith groups such as a chaplain, guru or imam.
- Talk to your GP and ask for a prescription for a Well book on spirituality and wellbeing.