

# Spirituality, religion and mental illness

Spirituality and religion can play an important role in your life. This factsheet looks at what spirituality and religion is and how it may be helpful if you have a mental health issue. You may find this factsheet useful if you care for someone who has a mental health issue or you are a health professional.

## Key Points.

- Spirituality and religion are not the same.
- Health professionals should be aware of the role that spirituality and religion can play in mental health.
- Spirituality and religion may be helpful to manage your condition. You may find it gives you hope and support.
- Your health professionals could include spirituality and religion in your support. Ask your care coordinator to include it in your care plan if you would like to.
- You can write an advanced statement to let health professions know about your religious or spiritual needs. Professionals should look at your advanced statement if you lack mental capacity to make your own decisions about your care and treatment in the future.

### This factsheet covers:

1. [What is spirituality?](#)
2. [What is religion?](#)
3. [Are spirituality and religion the same?](#)
4. [Can spirituality and religion be helpful during mental illness?](#)
5. [Can spirituality and religion be harmful during mental illness?](#)
6. [How can I talk about my spiritual or religious needs?](#)
7. [Are my health professionals aware of spirituality and religion?](#)
8. [How can I let health professionals know about my spirituality or religion if I lack mental capacity?](#)

## 1. What is spirituality?

You can think about spirituality in different ways. One way of thinking about it is, the meaning and purpose that you look for in your life. It should give you a sense of your own worth and value.

Spiritual practices could be things like the following.

- Belonging to a faith community,
- Meditation and prayer. Mindfulness is a useful therapy that is usually available on the NHS. It is based on meditation.
- Living by a set of rules that you set for yourself. For example, how you treat people.
- Focusing on spiritual values such as honesty, kindness, hope and compassion.

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## 2. What is religion?

Religion is linked with a particular faith, tradition or institution. If you are religious you may believe in a god. Everyone who follows the same religion will base their values on shared beliefs. But religion is open to interpretation. This means that even though people have shared core beliefs, they may have different values. Religious leaders are there to guide you through your religious journey.

If you follow a religion, this may mean that you accept guidance or certain practices. For example, you may have to do things at a certain time such as saying prayers. Or not eating certain foods.

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## 3. Are spirituality and religion the same?

Spirituality and religion are linked. But spirituality can be more general and include many other things. It can mean different things to different people. Or you can follow a common spiritual belief. You can be spiritual without being religious.

Religion and spirituality can help you to develop inner strength, peace, hope and optimism.

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#### 4. Can spirituality and religion be helpful during mental illness?

Spirituality and religion can be helpful to manage stressful life events and improve your mental health.<sup>1</sup> There are a few ways that spirituality and religion may help your mental health.

- If you are part of a spiritual or religious community you may have more support and friendship.
- You may find it helpful to feel connected to something bigger than yourself.
- It may help you to make sense of your experiences.
- You may feel strength or hope from your spirituality or religion. This may be more important to you when you are unwell.
- You may feel more at peace with yourself and other people around you.

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#### 5. Can spirituality and religion be harmful during mental illness?

Although some religious and spiritual beliefs may be empowering, some beliefs may be unhelpful. They may lead you to feel guilty or in need of forgiveness. This may have a bad effect on your mental health.

Some religious groups may believe you are possessed by demons or spirits if you have a mental illness. Others may say that mental illness is a punishment for something you have done wrong. These beliefs are unhelpful and might stop you from getting professional help when you need it.

Certain groups may suggest different things to help you such as exorcisms, herbal remedies or witchcraft. They may be more harmful than helpful.

As in all areas of society, there are people in spiritual or religious groups who may take advantage of vulnerable people. You may feel more vulnerable in times of difficulty and emotional distress. You may be more willing to listen to people who want to make you believe their views.

Extreme religious groups may look for vulnerable people to believe in the values of their group. Extremists are people who have very strong beliefs about politics or religion which are:

- hateful,
- dangerous,
- not shared by most people, or
- against the law.

They may try to get you to believe and follow their extreme views and practices. This is known as 'radicalisation.' People with mental health issues are more vulnerable to extremism.<sup>2</sup>

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## 6. How can I talk about my spiritual or religious needs?

Over half of people who use mental health services find religious or spirituality helpful to manage their mental health issues. But often they find it difficult to speak about with their health care professionals.<sup>3</sup>

If you want to begin thinking or talking about your religious or spiritual needs, you could think about the following questions.<sup>4</sup>

- What keeps you going in times of difficulty?
- What do you want your life to be about?
- What is important to you?
- Has something happened to you which has changed your point of view?
- Do you have a feeling of belonging and being valued?
- Do you feel safe?
- Are you being listened to as you would wish?
- What makes you feel supported?
- What makes you feel happy?

Talking about how you feel you fit into the world and your personal values may be useful for your mental health recovery. It may help you figure out your feelings, beliefs and attitude towards religion and spirituality.

But asking yourself 'big questions' may make you feel worse. Think carefully about who you talk to about your views and beliefs. You should talk to someone who you trust and who respects you. This could be a friend or a mental health professional.

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## 7. Are my health professionals aware of spirituality and religion?

Your health professionals should be aware of the positive impact that spirituality and religion can have on your recovery.

Your recovery should be based around things that are important to you and things you believe in. This is called a 'meaning centred approach.'<sup>5</sup> For example if you hear voices, your health professionals should ask about the following kinds of things:<sup>6</sup>

- How the voices are affecting your life?
- What you are doing to make sense of them?
- How you are coping with them?

Your mental health professional should record what the voices mean for you personally as part of your assessment. They shouldn't record the symptom on its own.<sup>7</sup>

Talking about your personal beliefs and values with professionals can help them to understand you better. This can have an impact on your treatment plan.

There are some organisations such as 'The Janki Foundation' that focus on helping professionals to understand the importance of spirituality in healthcare. The Royal College of Psychiatrists have a spirituality special interest group for psychiatrists. The forum is there to help psychiatrists to explore spiritual challenges that can come with mental illness. The forum also helps psychiatrists to learn how to best respond to patients' spiritual concerns. You can find more information about The Janki Foundation and the Royal College of Psychiatrists specialist groups in the 'Useful Contact' section at the end of this factsheet.

You can find out more information about, '**Recovery**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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## **8. How can I let health professionals know about my spirituality or religion if I lack mental capacity?**

Sometimes you may not have the ability to make decisions, or explain your choices to healthcare professionals. This is known as losing mental capacity. You may lose mental capacity if you are unwell. This could be short term or long term. Not everyone who is unwell will lose their mental capacity

When you have capacity, you can make an 'advanced statement' to say how you would like to be treated if you lose capacity.

An advance statement is a general preference about your treatment and care.<sup>8</sup> You can explain what your values, beliefs and views are as part of your advanced statement. This information will be useful if people have to make 'best interest' decisions for you in the future. Such as decisions about your daily care. People will only make decisions for you if you lack mental capacity to make them for yourself.

An advanced statement isn't legally binding, but healthcare professionals should still make a practical effort to follow your wishes.

You can find out more information about, '**Planning you care. Advanced statements and advanced decisions**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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## Further Reading

### **'Healing from within: A guide for assessing the religious and spiritual aspects of people's lives'** (Culliford & Johnson, 2003)

This is a leaflet that can help health professionals talk to you about your spiritual needs.

**Website:** [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/CullifordJohnsonHealing.pdf](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/CullifordJohnsonHealing.pdf)

### **'Making Space for Spirituality'**

The Mental Health Foundation has produced a booklet called 'Making Space for Spirituality'. It is aimed at health care professionals and gives practical advice on how to support and respond to spiritual needs of people who need support.

**Website:** [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/making-space-spirituality](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/making-space-spirituality)

## Useful Contacts

### **The National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum**

They have a list of spiritual and religious resources and organisations that are linked to mental health. Some of these organisations are listed below.

**Address:** The National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum, 36 Greenacres, Hendon Lane, London, N3 3SF

**Email:** [admin@spiritualitymentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:admin@spiritualitymentalhealth.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.spiritualitymentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.spiritualitymentalhealth.org.uk)

## **CHRISTIAN**

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### **Being Alongside**

A national Christian-based voluntary association that recognises the importance of spiritual values and support in mental health.

**Telephone:** 020 8647 3678

**Address:** BA/ APCMH , c/o St Paul's Church, 5 Rossmore Road, London, NW1 6NJ

**Website:** [www.beingalongside.org.uk/](http://www.beingalongside.org.uk/)

## **JEWISH**

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### **Chizuk**

Chizuk aims is to help people and their families in the Orthodox Jewish community who have mental health problems. They have drop-in groups, drama and art therapy, family support, befriending, organising carers hospital visits and advocacy.

**Telephone:** 020 8800 7494

**Address:** Chizuk, 91-93 Stamford Hill, London, N16 5TP

**Email:** [info@chizuk.org.uk](mailto:info@chizuk.org.uk)

### **Jewish Association for the Mentally Ill (JAMI)**

Jami are committed to helping people within the Jewish community to recover from mental illness.

**Telephone:** 020 8458 2223

**Address:** Martin B Cohen Centre, Gould Way, Deans Brook Road, Edgware HA8 9GL

**Email:** [info@jamiuk.org](mailto:info@jamiuk.org)

**Website:** [www.jamiuk.org](http://www.jamiuk.org)

### **Jewish Care**

They offer different services for Jewish people who are experiencing emotional difficulties and distress or coping with mental health problems. Such as housing, rehabilitation centres, employment and support groups.

**Telephone:** 020 8922 2222

**Address:** Jewish Care, Amélie House, Maurice and Vivienne Wohl Campus, 221 Golders Green Road, London, NW11 9DQ

**Email:** [helpline@jcare.org](mailto:helpline@jcare.org)

**Website:** [www.jewishcare.org](http://www.jewishcare.org)

### **The Jewish Helpline**

They are staffed by trained volunteers who provide a non-judgemental listening ear for Jewish people.

**Telephone:** 0800 652 9249. Open 12 noon – 12 midnight Sunday to Thursday.

**Website:** [www.jewishhelpline.co.uk](http://www.jewishhelpline.co.uk)

## **ISLAMIC**

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### **Mental Health 4 Muslims**

They are an American website that give information about mental health issues that are both clinically supported and helpful for Islamic people.

**E-mail:** Online form on the website

**Website:** [www.mentalhealth4muslims.com](http://www.mentalhealth4muslims.com)

### **Muslim Youth Helpline**

The Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH) is a charity which provides faith and culturally sensitive services to young Muslim people in the UK.

**Telephone:** 0808 808 2008 Open 4pm to 10pm

**Email:** [help@myh.org.uk](mailto:help@myh.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.myh.org.uk/](http://www.myh.org.uk/)

## SPIRITUALITY

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### **Spiritual Crisis Network**

They recognise the link between mental health and spirituality for some people and have support groups across the country.

**E-mail:** through the website

**Website:** [www.spiritualcrisisnetwork.uk](http://www.spiritualcrisisnetwork.uk)

### **The Janki Foundation**

They are a UK charity who promote that spirituality should be linked to healthcare. It supports healthcare professionals through values-based dialogue and training, and offers support with general wellbeing through books, CDs and lectures.

**Telephone:** 020 8459 1400

**E-mail:** [info@jankifoundation.org](mailto:info@jankifoundation.org)

**Address:** Moran House, Suite 12, 449/451 High Street, NW10 2JJ

**Website:** [www.jankifoundation.org](http://www.jankifoundation.org)

### **Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group**

This is a forum for psychiatrists to explore the influence that spirituality and religion can have on patients.

**Website:**

[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/workinpsychiatry/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/workinpsychiatry/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.aspx)



## References

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<sup>1</sup> Dein, S., Cook, C.C.H., Powell, A., & Egger, S. Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health. *The Psychiatrist* 2010; 34, 63-64

<sup>2</sup> HM Government. *Prevent Strategy*.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf) Para 10.135

<sup>3</sup> Royal College of Psychiatrists. *Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group*.

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.aspx> (accessed 30th July 2018)

<sup>4</sup> Royal college of psychiatrists. *Healing from Within*.

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<sup>5</sup> Dein, S., Cook, C.C.H., Powell, A., & Egger, S. Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health. *The Psychiatrist* 2010; 34, 64.

<sup>6</sup> Dein, S., Cook, C.C.H., Powell, A., & Egger, S. Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health. *The Psychiatrist* 2010; 34, 64

<sup>7</sup> Dein, S., Cook, C.C.H., Powell, A., & Egger, S. Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health. *The Psychiatrist* 2010; 34, 64

<sup>8</sup> National Institute for Clinical Excellence. *Information for the public: glossary*

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg136/ifp/chapter/glossary#advance-statement> (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018)



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**Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm**  
**(excluding bank holidays)**

**Email [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)**

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**or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:**

RAIS  
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Birmingham B9 9LL

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Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



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### Don't have access to the web?

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### Need to talk to an adviser?

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