

Illness, Meaning & Spirituality

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For people their family and friends who experience the impact of severe or chronic mental illness, the spiritual dimension of life may also be affected. It is not uncommon for people who face the impact of mental illness to experience grief and loss related to the function, abilities, relationships and dreams that may have been temporarily lost. At times, these may challenge the foundations of one's existence and for many people these experiences have a spiritual dimension. People believe Spirituality also highlights our interconnections with the world, nature and other people.

What Is Spirituality?

Spirituality is a contemporary term which attempts to describe the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationships with the sacred or transcendent. During times of suffering or hardship it is expected that such questions will arise about life's mysteries: Is there meaning to life? Is there a Being, Existence, or Force that is larger than ourselves? Why have we been given the conditions we've been given? Why are we suffering?

Eventually, suffering happens in the life of each person, each family, and each community. Individuals who have actively chosen a spiritual path in their lives often ask the very normal "why?" questions that most people ask, but also take the next step by seeking to understand suffering in relation to the spiritual life.

How is spirituality different from religion?

Religious traditions certainly include individual spirituality, which is universal. But each religion has its own

distinct community based worship, beliefs, sacred texts and traditions. It is thought Spirituality is not tied to any particular religious belief or tradition. Although culture and beliefs may play a part in spirituality, every person has their own unique experience of spirituality - it may be a personal experience with or without a religious belief.

Mental Health & Spirituality

Spirituality is a crucial but sometimes overlooked aspect of mental wellbeing and psychiatric care¹. Spirituality is the individualised need to understand the purpose of life, and underpins the meaning of everyday activities. Spirituality often becomes more important in times of distress, emotional stress, physical and mental illness, loss & bereavement². It is believed Spirituality emphasises the healing of the person, not just the disease. It views life as a journey, where good and bad experiences can help you to learn, develop and mature. Practitioners and researchers have evaluated the relationship between spirituality and mental illness and have concluded that spiritual beliefs and practices help to build hope and resilience also the capacity to withstand adversity and to build positive experiences. Exploring and experiencing spirituality may help to relieve suffering not just for people living with a mental illness, but also for their carers.

What difference can spirituality make?

It is thought Spiritual practices may help us to develop the better parts of

¹ See Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing NG26

² See Take Good Care of Yourself NG16

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ourselves. At times helping us to become more creative, patient, persistent, honest, kind, compassionate, wise, calm, hopeful and joyful. These are all part of the best health care.

Benefits of spiritual- based practices in mental health include:

- Better self-control, self-esteem and confidence
- Faster and easier recovery often through healthy grieving of losses and through recognising strengths
- Better relationships with self others and with God, creation, & nature
- A new sense of meaning, hope and peace of mind. Allowing people to accept and live with their continuing problems.

Spiritual Skills

- Being honest – and able to see yourself as others see you
- Being able to stay focused in the present, to be alert, unhurried and attentive
- Being able to rest, relax and create a peaceful state of mind
- Developing a deeper sense of empathy for others
- Being able to be with someone who is suffering, while still being hopeful
- Learning better judgement, for example about when to speak or act, and when to remain silent or do nothing
- Learning how to give without feeling drained
- Being able to grieve and let go

Poetry and walking

Music and nature

And quiet times

These are my tether

Love and compassion

Hold me together

By Ann Grahame Carer

Books

Man's Search For Meaning By Victor Frankl

Spirituality & Mental Health Care: Rediscovering a 'Forgotten' Dimension By John Swinton

Spirituality and Mental Health: Breakthrough By Phillip J. Barker

Spirituality, Values and Mental Health: Jewels for the Journey By Mary Ellen Coyte, Peter Gilbert & Vicky Nicholls

Creativity, Spirituality and Mental Health: Exploring Connections By Kelley Raab Mayo

Simply Sane: The Spirituality of Mental Health By Gerald G. May

Websites

www.newcastleanglican.org.au

<http://www.catholic.org.au/>

<http://www.rethink.org/>

<http://www.rpsych.ac.uk/>

<http://www.nationaldirectory.com.au> (search)

<http://www.truelocal.com.au> (search)

Places for Meditation & Spiritual Practice

Newcastle Anglican Diocese
34 King Street Newcastle (02) 49263733

Uniting Church in Australia
144 Marius St Tamworth NSW 2340
(02) 6766 5311

Sacred Heart Cathedral
Church Street Newcastle NSW 2300
(02) 4979 1101

Spiritualist Church
3 Swan St Cooks Hill NSW 2300
(02) 4926 3402

Newcastle Muslim Association
6 Metcalfe Street Wallsend NSW 2287
(02) 4950 0099

Harmony Centre (Shanti Mission)
Cooranbong Head Office (02) 49773300

Satyanada Yoga
River Arcade Victoria St Taree NSW 2430
(02) 6553 0789

Centre of Wisdom (Tai Chi)
125 Brisbane St Tamworth NSW 2340
(02) 6766 1522

Enlightenment Centre
100 Golgotha Street Armidale NSW 2350
(02) 6771 4340