Religion and spirituality can play an important role in people's lives. This factsheet looks at spirituality and religion in relation to mental health.

- Spirituality does not have one definition but it includes the meaning that people seek in their lives.
- Religion and spirituality are not the same.
- Health professionals are aware of the role that spirituality can play in mental health.
- Spirituality may be helpful when you are unwell. You may find it gives you hope and support during these times.
- Religion can also offer help and support. However, some religious beliefs about mental illness can be old fashioned and negative. People that are vulnerable may be influenced by certain beliefs and people.
- Mental health services could include spirituality in their work more often. If it is important to you, you should ask your care coordinator to include it in your care plan.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What is spirituality?](#)
2. [Are spirituality and religion the same?](#)
3. [Can spirituality be helpful during mental illness?](#)
4. [Can spirituality be harmful during mental illness?](#)
5. [How can I discuss spirituality and my spiritual needs?](#)
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. Spirituality can help you to develop inner strength and peace. Hope and optimism are important in spirituality. You can be spiritual without being religious.

Spiritual practices may include:

- belonging to a faith community,
- meditation and prayer, (Meditation can be helpful and there is a recognised therapy based on meditation known as “mindfulness”.
- living by a set of codes; for example, in your personal relationships with family and friends or how you treat others generally, and
- focusing on spiritual values such as honesty, kindness, hope and compassion.

Some healthcare professionals research the role that spirituality can have for people with mental health problems. The Royal College of Psychiatrists’ Special Interest Group on Spirituality is raising awareness of spirituality and mental health. You can find more information in Useful Contact.

2. Are spirituality and religion the same?

No. Spirituality includes religion but it is more general and includes many other things. It can mean different things to different people. You can shape your spirituality so it is unique and specific to you, or you can follow a common spiritual belief.

Religion is more specific and linked with a particular faith, tradition or institution. Religious beliefs may involve a belief in a god. Everyone who follows the religion will have the same understanding of it, or will be told how to interpret the religion by a religious leader.

If you follow a religion, this may involve accepting some guidance or practices. You may not be allowed to eat certain foods in some religions. You may have to do things at a certain time such as saying prayers at a certain time or going to church every Sunday.

3. Can spirituality be helpful during mental illness?

Spirituality may improve your mental health. Researchers are not totally sure why.¹ There are a few ways that spirituality may help your mental health.
• If you are part of a spiritual community you may have more support and friendship.
• Spirituality may help you feel connected to something bigger than yourself. It may help you to make sense of your experiences.²
• You may feel strength or hope from your spirituality that helps to get you through times when you are unwell.
• You may feel more at peace with yourself and other people around you.

4. Can spirituality be harmful during mental illness?

Some religious beliefs may not be helpful if you are unwell. They may lead you to feel guilty or in need forgiveness. This may impact on your mental health.

Some religions may say that people with mental illness are possessed by demons or spirits. Others say that someone has a mental illness because they have done something wrong. These beliefs might stop people from getting professional help. Religious groups may suggest different things to help the person such as exorcisms, herbal remedies or witchcraft. These approaches may be more harmful than helpful.

If you are vulnerable, members of faith communities may try to exploit you. You may be more open to people who want to impose their views on you. You may feel more vulnerable in times of difficulty and emotional distress.

Extreme religious groups may look for vulnerable people and draw them into their cult or group. They get people to follow their practices and their set ways of thinking. People that are isolated or lonely may be more vulnerable to this type of situation.

5. How can I talk about spirituality and my spiritual needs?

If you want to begin thinking or talking about your spiritual needs, think about the following questions.

• What keeps you going in times of difficulty?
• What do you think life should be about?

Talking about how you feel you fit into the world and your personal values may be useful. It may help you figure out your feelings, beliefs and attitudes towards spirituality. But be careful when you have these discussions and who you have them with. Asking yourself ‘big questions’ can sometimes make you feel worse. Doing this in a safe environment, with a trusted friend or mental health professional, is the best approach. Try to focus on your values and on what makes you feel fulfilled.
Healthcare professionals can do spiritual assessments to understand your spiritual needs. This could help them to understand how your beliefs could affect how you make decisions in your life.

You may feel that spirituality is important to you but your care plan does not mention it. If your spiritual beliefs would affect your treatment or if you feel that you need spiritual support, raise this with a healthcare professional. This could be your care coordinator, psychiatrist or support worker.

‘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

‘Making space for spirituality’

The Mental Health Foundation has produced a booklet called. It is aimed towards professionals and gives practical advice on how to support and respond to spiritual needs of service users.

Website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/making_space.pdf.

Some organisations support the faith-based or spiritual needs of people with mental health problems. Some of these organisations are listed below.

CHRISTIAN

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

Telephone: 020 3397 2497
Address: Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health, The National APCMH Secretary, c/o St Paul’s Church, 5 Rossmore Road, Marylebone, London, NW1 6NJ
Email: apcmh@pastoral.org.uk
Website: www.beingalongside.org.uk/
JEWISH

Chizuk
The Mental Health Organisation of the Orthodox Jewish Community is an organisation set up to meet the needs of strictly Orthodox Jewish men and women with mental health problems. There are separate drop-in sessions for men and women, a home befriending service, hospital visiting, groups and advocacy.

Telephone: 020 8800 7494  
Address: Chizuk, 91-93 Stamford Hill, London, N16 5TP  
Email: info@chizuk.org.uk  
Website: www.jewishmentalhealth.info/search_result/Y2hpenVr/214

Jewish Association for the Mentally Ill
Jami’s focus is on recovery. It is committed to helping members fulfil their individual potential, maximise their self-esteem and progress along their own unique recovery path.

Telephone: 020 8458 2223  
Address: JAMI, Olympia House, Armitage Road, Golders Green, London, NW11 8RQ  
Email: Online form via website  
Website: www.jamiuk.org

Jewish Care
This offers an extensive network of services for Jewish people who are experiencing emotional difficulties and distress or coping with mental health problems. This includes residential facilities, rehabilitation centres, employment and training initiatives and mental health outreach work.

Telephone: 020 8922 2000 (Central Office) or 020 8922 2222 (Direct Helpline)  
Address: Jewish Care, Amélie House, Maurice and Vivienne Wohl Campus, 221 Golders Green Road, London, NW11 9DQ  
Email: jcdirect@jcare.org  
Website: www.jewishcare.org

The MIYAD Crisis Helpline
This is staffed by professionally trained counsellors who provide a non-judgemental listening ear for Jewish individuals.

Telephone: 0800 652 9249 Open 12 noon – 12 midnight every day except Shabbat and Yom Tovim  
Website: www.jewishhelpline.co.uk

ISLAMIC

Mental Health 4 Muslims
Mental Health 4 Muslims aims to bring to light important mental health issues as they relate to the Muslim community.

Website: http://mentalhealth4muslims.com/contact-us/#&panel1-1
Muslim Youth Helpline
The Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH) is a registered charity which provides faith and culturally sensitive services to young Muslim people in the UK.

Telephone: 0808 808 2008 (10am – 6pm)
Email: help@myh.org.uk
Website: www.myh.org.uk/

SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality in Mental Health North East
The organisation is involved in promoting spiritual wellbeing which may be important for recovery from mental ill health.

Telephone: 01325 552045
Address: Spirituality in Mental Health North East, Colin Jay, Chaplaincy Co-ordinator, Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, West Park Hospital, Edward Pease Way, Darlington, DL2 2TS
Email: chairperson@simhne.co.uk
Website: www.simhne.co.uk/

Spirituality Forum
This forum brings together the main faith communities throughout the country, with a focus on mental health.

Telephone: 07500 352 158
Address: Spirituality Forum, PO Box 62247, London, N8 1BG
Email: info@mhspirituality.org.uk
Website: http://mhspirituality.org.uk/about.html

Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group
This is a forum for psychiatrists to explore the influence of the major religions that shape the cultural values and aspirations of psychiatrist and patient alike.

Website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/workinpsychiatry/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.asp

Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927
Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?
We’d love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:
RAIS
PO Box 17106
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We’re open 9:30am to 4pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)

Need more help?
Go to www.rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don’t have access to the web?
Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?
If you need practical advice, call us on 0300 5000 927 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

Can you help us to keep going?
We can only help people because of donations from people like you. If you can donate please go to www.rethink.org/donate or call 0121 522 7007 to make a gift. We are very grateful for all our donors’ generous support.

Leading the way to a better quality of life for everyone affected by severe mental illness.

For further information on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone 0121 522 7007
Email info@rethink.org

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twitter.com/rethink_
www.rethink.org