

# Spirituality, religion and mental illness

Spirituality and religion can play an important role in your life. This factsheet looks at what spirituality and religion are. This information is for people affected by mental illness in England who are 18 or over. It's also for their carers, friends and relatives.

## Key Points.

- Spirituality and religion aren't 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 care plan. 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 professionals know about your religious or spiritual needs.

### 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 for mental health?](#)
5. [Can spirituality and religion be harmful to mental health?](#)
6. [How can I talk about my spiritual or religious needs?](#)
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### 1. What is spirituality?

You can think about spirituality in different ways. There are no rules to being spiritual. One way of thinking about it is, the meaning and purpose that you look for in your life. It can give you a sense of your own worth and value.

This can also help you to find a sense of hope. It can help to feel support at times of loss and suffering.<sup>1</sup>

Spiritual practices could be things like the following.

- Belonging to a faith community.
- Meditation and prayer. Mindfulness is based on meditation and it's usually available on the NHS.
- 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.

You can get more information about mindfulness here:  
[www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started](http://www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started)

Spirituality can have a different effect on people with different mental health difficulties.

The Mental Health Foundation and the Royal College of Psychiatrists have published information on spirituality and mental health:

- [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/impact-spirituality.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/impact-spirituality.pdf)
- [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/spirituality-and-mental-health](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/spirituality-and-mental-health)

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## **2. What is religion?**

Religion is linked with a particular faith, tradition or institution.

If you're religious, you may believe in a god. People who follow 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. Spirituality 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.

Religion is based on shared beliefs whereas spirituality can be seen as an individual belief or feeling. This can be your own experience or belief in something beyond yourself.

A religion is usually institution that has a set of organised practices and a structured belief system.<sup>2</sup> These beliefs are usually formally documented, such as in the Bible. With spirituality a person's individual stages can grow and change.<sup>3</sup>

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#### **4. Can spirituality and religion be helpful for mental health?**

Spirituality and religion can be helpful to manage stressful life events and improve your mental health.<sup>4</sup> There are a few ways that spirituality and religion may help your mental health, such as:

- 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, which can help if you're unwell, and
- you may feel more at peace with yourself and other people around you.

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#### **5. Can spirituality and religion be harmful to mental health?<sup>5</sup>**

There are sometimes 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, and
- be more willing to listen to people who want to make you believe their views.

Extreme religious or spiritual groups may hold ideas or beliefs that most people think are unreasonable or unacceptable.

Some people's faith is so important to them that they feel justified in acting in extreme ways. This is to try and make others share the same beliefs as them.

Extremist views can be from things like:

- how someone interprets a religious or holy book,
- a belief that they will be rewarded in life or an afterlife,
- the influence of others, or
- the belief that they're doing it for god.

‘Radicalisation’ is when someone tries to get you to believe and follow their extreme views and practices. People with mental health issues are more vulnerable to extremism.<sup>6</sup>

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

1 in 2 people who use mental health services find religion or spirituality helpful to manage their mental health difficulties. But they often find it difficult to speak about religion or spirituality with their healthcare professionals.<sup>7</sup>

If you want to talk about your religious or spiritual needs, you can think about the following questions.

- What do you want your life to be about?
- What keeps you going in times of difficulty?
- 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 think 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 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 loved one or a mental health professional.

When you first join an NHS mental health service, they should ask what your religious and spiritual beliefs are. They should continue to ask you throughout your care and treatment.<sup>8</sup>

It is your choice if you share your religious and spiritual views with your mental health team.

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

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>9</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.

Some organisations, such as The Janki Foundation, 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 contacts](#)' section at the end of this factsheet.

You can find out more information about:

- Hearing voices, and
- 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 plan in case I lose mental capacity?**

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 mental 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>10</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:

- Mental capacity and mental illness, and
- Planning your 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/docs/default-source/members/sigs/spirituality-spsig/spirituality-special-interest-group-publications-johnson-culliford-healing-from-within.pdf?sfvrsn=c09a2544\\_2](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/members/sigs/spirituality-spsig/spirituality-special-interest-group-publications-johnson-culliford-healing-from-within.pdf?sfvrsn=c09a2544_2)

### **Making Space for Spirituality**

The Mental Health Foundation has produced this booklet. 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:** [www.spiritualitymentalhealth.org.uk/contact](http://www.spiritualitymentalhealth.org.uk/contact)

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

### **Christian organisations**

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#### **Being Alongside**

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

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

### **Jewish organisations**

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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

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

**Website:** [www.chizuk.org.uk/](http://www.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, Deansbrook 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)

### **Jewish Care - Helpline**

Staffed by trained volunteers who provide a non-judgemental listening ear for Jewish people.

**Telephone:** 0800 652 9249 or 020 30962875.

**Website:** [www.jewishcare.org/how-we-can-help-you/jewish-helpline](http://www.jewishcare.org/how-we-can-help-you/jewish-helpline)

## **Islamic organisations**

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### **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

**Whatsapp:** 0808 808 2008

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

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

## **Spirituality organisations**

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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:** Online - <https://spiritualcrisisnetwork.uk/contact-us>

**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)

**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

- <sup>1</sup> Royal College of Psychiatrists. *Spirituality and mental health*. [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/spirituality-and-mental-health](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/spirituality-and-mental-health) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).
- <sup>2</sup> Happier Human. *What is the difference between Religion and Spirituality?* [www.happierhuman.com/difference-religion-spirituality/](http://www.happierhuman.com/difference-religion-spirituality/) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).
- <sup>3</sup> Happier Human. *What is the difference between Religion and Spirituality?* [www.happierhuman.com/difference-religion-spirituality/](http://www.happierhuman.com/difference-religion-spirituality/) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).
- <sup>4</sup> Dein, S., Cook, C.C.H., Powell, A., & Eagger, S. Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health. *The Psychiatrist* 2010; 34, 63-64
- <sup>5</sup> BBC. *Human rights and social justice -Religious extremism* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z3npjty/revision/5> (accessed 31 January 2022 )
- <sup>6</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 accessed 7th January 2022).
- <sup>7</sup> Royal College of Psychiatrists. *Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group*. [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.aspx) (accessed 7th January 2022 )
- <sup>8</sup> Mental health Foundation. *The Impact of Spirituality on mental health*. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/impact-spirituality.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/impact-spirituality.pdf) (accessed 15th December 2021)
- <sup>9</sup> Dein, S., Cook, C.C.H., Powell, A., & Eagger, S. Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health. *The Psychiatrist* 2010; 34, 64.
- <sup>10</sup> National Institute for Clinical Excellence. *Information for the public: glossary* [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg136/ifp/chapter/glossary#advance-statement](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg136/ifp/chapter/glossary#advance-statement) (accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022)

This factsheet is available in large print.

### Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

**Phone 0808 801 0525**

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

Email a [largeprint@rethink.org](mailto:largeprint@rethink.org)

### Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you

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

RAIS  
PO Box 18252  
Solihull  
B91 9BA

**or call us on** 0808 801 0525

We're open 9:30am to 4pm

Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)

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### Need more help?

Go to [rethink.org](http://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: 0808 801 0525 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.

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