

Disability and Faith: Empowering Spiritual Supports Resources

Policy Statements

The Council for Quality in Leadership: Quality in Practice: Spirituality
<http://www.thecouncil.org/spiritualityQIP.aspx>

Spirituality and the expression of that spirituality bring meaning to many people's lives. Belonging to a faith-based community is one of the most common ways to engage in spirituality with others. Organizations can support people to find and maintain such communities.

- Actively ask people about their spirituality and how they would like to express it. Go beyond the simple question of "what religion are you" to try to understand not only the denomination, but also the ways in which people might like to practice their religion.
- Support a person who expresses an interest in spirituality, but who does not already have a religious affiliation, to explore different options within the community. There are many, many different types of religious communities, and many people who have been segregated from the community for much of their lives may not be aware of all the possibilities.
- Spirituality and its practices are very personal and individual experiences - assure that people have the opportunity to explore and express their spirituality individually. Avoid taking a group of people with disability to the same church at the same time.
- Assure that people become members of their church/synagogue/mosque and have their names and pictures added to the member's directory.
- Assist people to participate in the life of the congregation taking a role in the regular service or volunteering for special events.
- Assist people to make financial contributions to their religious community in whatever amount makes sense for the person.
- Expect the congregation and its leader to accept people with disability into the congregation as a matter of course, not expecting any different or charitable acts.
- Support people to learn the rituals and routines and expectations for members of the specific congregation so that the person will know what to do in different circumstances.
- If the first congregation does not work out, try another. Congregations are like any other association - some are warm and welcoming and open and others are more closed and restrictive.
- Honor the need and/or desire to practice spiritual rituals or follow religious rules within the person's home.
- If a person chooses not to practice any religion, respect and honor that decision.
- Support staff members to respect and honor the spiritual needs and expressions of the people they support. Religion is often a topic of debate and people must feel free to follow whatever spiritual course they want.

AAIDD and ARC Policy Statement Religious Freedom and Rights

People with mental retardation and related developmental disabilities¹ have the right to choose their own expressions of spirituality, to practice those beliefs and expressions, and to participate in the religious community of their choice or other spiritual activities. The person also has a right to choose not to participate in religious or spiritual activity.

ISSUES

While many agencies providing services and supports recognize the right to religious freedom, they seldom include spirituality in individual planning. Nor do they often help people participate in the spiritual activities or religious communities of their choice and/or tradition.

Individuals and their families also often face a mixed response from congregations, even though many congregations and faith networks have established model programs and strategies for including people with disabilities. Spiritual resources and congregations are an untapped source of community supports and inclusion, beyond the practice of faith and belief. They offer opportunities to express choice, develop relationships and social networks, respect cultural and family backgrounds, and serve others.

POSITION

Spirituality, spiritual growth, and religious expression that respect a person's history, tradition, and current preference or choice are rights that should be honored by supports from service systems and religious communities, as should the choice not to participate.

- Spirituality is an important part of human experience that may be expressed both through religious practice and through expressions of personal meaning and values. Thus spirituality and religious preference should be part of all assessments of individual and family needs, interests, and strengths.
- Faith communities should receive assistance to build their capacity to support and welcome our constituents and their families, through partnerships with provider agencies and advocacy organizations that respect and honor spiritual needs and religious preferences.
- Agencies and spiritual communities should offer training and education regarding spiritual supports for people with mental retardation and related developmental disabilities.

Adopted: Board of Directors, AAMR - May 28, 2002

¹"People with mental retardation and related developmental disabilities" refers to our constituency, i.e., those defined by the AAMR classification and the DSM IV. In everyday language they are frequently referred to as people with cognitive, intellectual and developmental disabilities although the professional and legal definitions of those terms both include others and exclude some defined by DSM IV.

Spiritual Assessments and Guides

- New York Spiritual Assessment and Connections Guide: Toolkit “Spiritual Indicators Guide” and a congregational welcome book. Funded by the DD Council originally, and now coordinated by the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, led by the Reverend Catherine Patterson, one of the members of the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Division. The resources are now on line.
http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd_community_connections/faith_based_initiatives/training_material
- Including Adults with Disabilities in Religious Life and Education.
http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/kennedy_files/IncludingAdultswithDisabilitiesinRelEdMANUAL.pdf and other resources on their website related to spirituality and faith. Related, see ***Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Providers, Families, and Congregations.*** By Erik Carter. Paul Brookes Publishing. www.brookespublishing.com
- Protecting Religious Freedom: The Caregiver’s Responsibility. Tom Hoeksema. Paper with suggested policies for residential programs and training model.
http://www.aaidreligion.org/files/Protecting%20Religious%20Freedom_0.pdf
- Volunteers of America produced an excellent report and research study on helping group home staff and agencies to work on spiritual supports and inclusion in faith communities. VOA is producing extra copies, so if you would like one, email: Bessie Senette bessiesenette@gmail.com with your name and address and she will pass it on to the VOA.
- If you don’t know the writings of David Hingsburger, many of them focused on quality direct caregiving, including spirituality, he is a treasure. You can access newsletter issues at <http://www.vitacsl.org/client/newsletter.aspx>
- Summer Institute on Theology and Disability:
www.BethesdaInstitute.org/Theology
Videotapes from 2012-2014 are now online and mp3 audio files from 2010 and 2011. Also available: An AAR Session on disability and church history, mp3 file, Parker Palmer keynote on “Merging Two Worlds,” and Henri Nouwen’s response to the COMMISS Award sharing the impact of his work at L’Arche Daybreak.
- ***Spirituality: From Rights to Relationships:***
Fall, 2012 Issue of ***Connections***, the national TASH newsletter
<http://tash.org/about/publications/sample-tash-connections/>
<http://tash.org/connections-spirituality>
If you share or reference the issue, TASH has requested that you note the origin and include a link to this page on the website: <http://tash.org/connections-spirituality>. The title, volume number, issue and volume numbers are on the newsletter. You are welcome to share the link with others.

- ***Lifelong Faith: The Theory and Practice of Life Long Faith Formation.***
The Winter 2012 online issue of this journal is devoted to congregational inclusion and faith formation with children and adults with special needs. There are some excellent articles by leading writers. Download;
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/lifelong_faith_journal_6.4_winter_2012.pdf
- ***Impact:*** Feature Issue on Faith Communities and Persons with Developmental Disabilities
<http://ici.umn.edu/index.php?products/view/164><http://ici.umn.edu/index.php?products/view/164>
- ***Frontline Initiative:*** Feature issue on Spirituality
Newsletter from University of Minnesota .A newsletter issue for Direct Support Professionals offering various perspectives on spirituality within the framework of NADSP's Code of Ethics and providing training materials to more effectively support individuals with disabilities.
<http://ici.umn.edu/index.php?products/view/504>
- Foundation for Learning Disabilities in the UK.
<http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/publications/>. Then type: "Spirituality"
From a qualitative research project about a decade ago led by John Swinton and Chris Haddon, there are a number of briefs, booklets and manuals related to spiritual supports. "No Box to Tick" is one of the titles about spiritual assessments.
- The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities
Rutgers University: Robert Wood Johnson Medical School
http://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/products/Product_FaithBased.html
Two booklets on spiritual supports:

Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community
Brain Injury: When the Call Comes

Resources and Suggested Practices related to Grief, Loss, and End of Life Issues.
http://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/projects/end_of_life.html

Also, if you do not know The Quality Mall, <http://www.qualitymall.org/main/>,
Go there to find "stores" of resources related to spirituality and to grief, loss, and end of life issues.

Gleanings

[Gleanings](#) is a new bi-weekly (or so) resource, available by [free subscription from](#) the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) Religion and Spirituality Division, and edited by the Rev. Bill Gaventa. To subscribe go to <http://www.aaiddreligion.org/newsletter> It includes annotated links to blogs, videos, books, articles, and conferences on disability issues touching on politics, theology, faith, culture, science, and more that may be of interest to people interested in the varied intersections of faith and disability. Contributions welcome. Email: bill.gaventa@gmail.com.