

Understanding Spirituality

- Spirituality relates to sources of life meaning, purpose, hope, and connection to what has greatest importance to the person.
- Consumers take the lead in defining and naming this, such as spirituality, religion, faith, culture, or worldview.
- Notice and follow their terms such as God, Higher Power, nature, the universe, personal medicine, vision, voice, spirits, angels or anything else.
- Spirituality may be connected with any or all life domains.
- Provider's role is to seek understanding of the person's view, not to impose beliefs, judgments, or terminology.
- Providers focus on the function, actions, and results of people's engaging spirituality related to their recovery goals.
- When necessary to start conversation, providers use a tentative definition of spirituality that is consistent with professional ethical standards (such as bullet 1 and 2 above) and then follow the cues of the consumer.
- Spirituality can sometimes involve difficulties and struggles, such as excessive guilt, bad experience in a religious group, or aggravating symptoms. If so, address within the consumer's recovery goals.

For related information and resources:

Rapp, C. A. & Goscha, R. J. (2012). *The Strengths Model: A Recovery-Oriented Approach to Mental Health Services*, 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Starnino, V. R., Gomi, S., & Canda, E. R. (2012). Spiritual strengths assessment in mental health practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcs179.

Gomi, S., Starnino, V. R., & Canda, E. R. (2013). Spiritual assessment in mental health recovery, *Community Mental Health Journal*, doi: 10.1007/s10597-013-9653-z

Spiritual Diversity and Social Work Initiative:
<http://spiritualdiversity.ku.edu/>

Center for Mental Health Research and Innovation:
<http://mentalhealth.socwel.ku.edu/>

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Assessing Spirituality Within the Strengths Model of Mental Health Recovery

Purpose

This pamphlet provides guidelines for assessing spirituality when using one of the primary tools of the Strengths Model: the Strengths Assessment.

The Strengths Model supports the mental health recovery process by focusing on people's personal and environmental strengths and resources. A Strengths Assessment assists the worker and client to explore collaboratively the strengths and resources a person can use to achieve meaningful and important life goals.

The Strengths Assessment identifies strengths in various life domains including:

Home/Daily Living
Assets (Financial/Insurance)
Employment/Education
Supportive Relationships
Wellness/Health
Leisure/Recreational
Spirituality/Culture

The recommendations included in this pamphlet focus on assessment of spirituality in the Spirituality/Culture domain and also as it may connect with any other life domain.

Principles for Assessing Spirituality

- Use a person-centered approach.
- Develop a trusting therapeutic relationship.
- Support the person's strengths and resources.
- Identify and describe them in usable form.
- Engage in natural conversation.
- Use a flexible and individualized approach.
- Focus on the person's priorities.
- Assess the person's readiness and interest.
- Identify whether the person wishes to address spirituality in the recovery process.
- If the person wishes to address spirituality, then identify relevant goals as connected to any life domain.
- Identify practical actions to achieve the goals.
- Encourage the actions, and, if the client wishes, assist.
- If there is no interest, discontinue.
- Offer questions and suggestions as invitations to clients, not as expectations.
- Choose, adapt, or change our suggested questions (see other side) to fit the situation.

Suggested Questions for Assessing Spirituality

When beginning a conversation about spirituality, some words you can use:

Indirect Approach

- What gives you hope?
- What helps you feel good about your life?
- Tell me about a time in your life when you really felt at peace.
- When do you feel most positive toward yourself?
- What brings inspiration to your life?

Direct Approach

- How do you use spirituality (or religion, faith, etc.) to get through tough times? For example, do you meditate, pray, go to a religious event, visit nature, or do any rituals?
- Holidays are coming soon. What are your plans or family celebrations?
- Is spirituality important to you? If so, how?
- What motivated you to start your spiritual journey in life?
- Has spirituality been helpful to you? Would you be willing to share examples?

Following up when clients mention about spirituality:

Inviting More Conversation

- You mentioned your spirituality (or religion, faith, etc). Is it okay if I speak with you more about it?
- You mentioned that your (family member, friend, religious group, or mentor, etc.) helps you with your spirituality. Could you say more about that?

Following up: [Regarding anything mentioned]

- Please give a specific example of how that works for you.

Moving to Action

- You described what gives you a sense of hope (or peace, inspiration, etc.). Would you like to talk more about how this might connect with your recovery goals?
- You mentioned ways that spirituality (or religion, faith, etc.) has been (or is) helpful to you. Would you like to discuss how that could be applied to your recovery goals?
- You mentioned ways that you've had difficulties or struggles with spirituality. Would you like to address that in your recovery goals?
- Can you describe (the spiritual strength) in terms of something specific you can do to support your goals?
- Can you share examples of how you can use (the spiritual strength) to support your goals?
- Would you like to take this action on your own or would you like me to play a role in helping?
- Would you like help to access any supports or sources of information that could help you take this action? If so, please tell me what I should keep in mind about your beliefs and interests to help me make this connection.