

ADDRESSING
SPIRITUAL CONCERNS
IN PEER SUPPORT
SETTINGS

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Invitation to Brave Space

Together we will create *brave space*
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space”
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be
But
It will be *our brave space together,*
and
We will work on it side by side

By Micky ScottBey Jones

Land Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement of the impact of the suppression of indigenous cultural and religious practices in the United States

Group agreements

- Take care of yourself
- Curiosity (not conversion)
- “Move up” (into listening or speaking more)
- Pay attention to the tension (notice discomfort in your body)
- No one knows everything, together we know a lot

Introductions

My perspectives

- trauma survivor, peer supporter
- theologian
- person of faith, “cultural Catholic”

Your perspectives (write in comment)

- location
- faith tradition or current practice

Defining Spirituality

“Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose, and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature and to the significant or sacred.”

(Pulchalski et al, *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 2009)

Religion

A formalized expression of spirituality that often includes sacred texts and rituals. Often practiced in community.

Faith Community

A formal or informal gathering of people who share a common religion or spirituality.

Congregation, sangha, support group, scripture study group, etc

What is the role of spirituality?

- In your own healing or recovery?
- In the place where you give and receive peer support?
- What model(s) of understanding impact how spirituality is addressed?

Self-Reflection Matters

Knowing ourselves and the worldview we bring to a peer support setting can prevent proselytizing or imposing our own beliefs onto another.

We can instead create space to allow others to express their own beliefs and spiritual needs.

The role of spirituality in different frameworks for understanding mental distress and extreme states

Examples:

- Medical model
- Trauma-informed (social) model
- Spiritual model

Medical model

- Also known as illness model, biological model
- Little or no role for spiritual exploration
- Spiritual experiences may be seen as symptoms, delusions, distorted thinking
- Meaning of experiences are determined by an “expert” giving a diagnosis

Spiritual model

- Also known as spiritual emergence, awakening, Dark Night of the Soul
- Extreme states and distress may be an opportunity to grow, a sign to the community
- Meaning of distress may be positive, negative, or a mystery to explore more deeply
- Some clergy may lack expertise or may impose a spiritual explanation, similar to a clinical “expert” making a psychiatric diagnosis

Trauma-informed Social model

- “What happened to you” vs “What’s wrong with you”
- Extreme states may be reaction to trauma
- Healing the whole person and also healing community (inequality, oppression, abuse)
- Connecting with a faith community may be part of healing process
- Freedom to choose what the experience means for the person experiencing it

Reflection and Discussion

What model (medical, spiritual, trauma/ social model) makes the most sense for defining your own experience? More than one model? Or other models?

Is that model different from the setting where you do peer support?

[break]

What is needed to create “brave space” for spirituality in peer support spaces?

How can peer supporters address spiritual concerns in ways that are respectful and not endorsing one faith tradition over another?

- Curiosity instead of converting
- Options instead of advice

F.I.C.A. spiritual reflection tool

Used in palliative care settings

- **F**aith and belief - what do I value? What do I believe?
- **I**mportance - How do these values impact my health and wellness?
- **C**ommunity - Am I/do I want to be part of a faith community?
- **A**ction (address in care) - What actions or changes can I make?

(adapted from the Washington Institute for Spirituality & Health)

Awareness about “tender spots”

- Historical and generational trauma related to spirituality and cultural
- Religious rejection due to identity
- Clergy abuse (spiritual, sexual)

Practicing cultural humility

- Not appropriating spiritual practices
- Learning about spiritual traditions

Spiritual practices that can be “religion neutral”

defining values

music*

devotional/meaningful reading*

service to others

seasonal rituals

offering gratitude

storytelling

**Questions, comments,
further discussion**

**Thank you for your
presence here today.**

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