

THE ROLE OF  
SPIRITUALITY WHEN  
DISCUSSING SUICIDE

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2020

## 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 traumatic impact of the suppression of indigenous cultural and religious practices in the United States.

## **Group agreements**

- Take care of yourself
- Curiosity (not conversion)
- Prioritize direct experience in discussion
- Pay attention to the tension (notice discomfort without judging it)
- 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)

- connection to the topic
- 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, rituals, and rules of conduct. 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

## **The Role of Culture**

- Impact of Christianity on culture of United States, even for non-Christians
- Spiritual and religious beliefs can become part of individual or group narratives, even in non-religious settings (e.g. “suicide is selfish, sinful, etc”)

## **Cultural and religious narratives can impact discussions of suicide**

- “Prosperity gospel” (pressure to be happy, wealthy, successful)
- Individualism and self-sufficiency (not asking for help, loss of community)
- Growing understanding in faith communities of the impact of trauma, systemic oppression on human suffering

## **Reflection and Discussion**

What religious or spiritual messages were you taught about suicide in your faith community and/or culture?

Do you find those messages helpful, harmful, or a mixture of both?

*In discussion, please center the voices of people who have direct experience with suicidal thoughts or as suicide attempt survivors*

## **Telling a Different Story**

Creating environments where it is okay to talk about deep emotional distress.

Reclaiming stories that address suicide and suicidal thoughts in a compassionate way.  
(example: 1 Kings 19)

## **Shifting to Saying “Yes”**

Saying “yes” to spiritual supports that allow people to “seek and express meaning and purpose” and “experience connectedness to the moment

to self

to others

to nature

to the significant or sacred”

Reflection question: What does this look like in my own life? In the lives of people I care about?

**Questions, comments,  
further discussion**

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

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