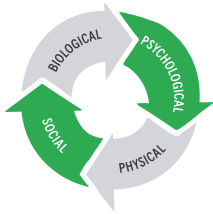


Spiritual and faith-based support



The main focus of this approach is social, psychological and spiritual.

What is it?

Faith or religion involves beliefs, practices and rituals related to a higher power (in western countries we usually call this higher power a god).

Every faith has its own god or spiritual lead (such as Allah for Islam, and Buddha for Buddhism). Different faiths usually have different beliefs about life after death, as well as rules about how to behave in life and socially.



Remember, a sideways thumb just means not enough people have done research yet that shows that this approach works. This might be really helpful (and some people say it is), we just don't know for sure!

Spirituality and religion are linked. But spirituality can be more general and include many other things. It 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.

Many people within the UK have a religious or spiritual belief. There are some religions that are more common in the UK than others such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism and Buddhism.

What does it aim to do?

Religious beliefs and spirituality tend to be experienced positively. For example, people often find that having a religion or spiritual belief helps them to cope with a variety of life events such as illness, loss and general stress.

In addition, religion and spirituality might help to improve your wellbeing, hope, optimism, meaning and purpose, and inner peace. This may be because religious and spiritual beliefs provide tools to help you to cope with stress. These coping tools include faith and beliefs that give meaning to difficult life circumstances.

Religious and spiritual beliefs might provide answers to big questions in life such as 'where did we come from?', 'why are we here?', and 'where are we going?'. But asking yourself 'big questions' can sometimes make you feel worse.

Religions might also provide a positive worldview that may involve the existence of a caring god.

Additionally, within many religions prayer is common and this can provide a sense that you have control over some of your life events by communicating with a higher power that you trust.

You may practice meditation as part of spirituality or religion, and this may bring a sense of control, understanding and connectedness.

In addition, most religions emphasize love, compassion and being kind to others, as well as meeting together during faith-based social events. These behaviours may give you a sense of belonging as well as making you feel good about yourself.



Lots of people who use mental health services have said they find religion or spirituality helpful for managing their mental health issues. But often they find it difficult to speak about with their health care professionals.

If you want to begin thinking or talking about your religious or spiritual needs, you could think about the following questions.

- What keeps you going in times of difficulty?
- What is important to you?
- Are you being listened to as you would wish?
- What makes you feel supported?
- What makes you feel happy?

Talking about how you feel you fit into the world and your personal values may be useful for your health and recovery. It may help you figure out your feelings, beliefs and attitude towards religion and spirituality. Try talking to someone who you trust and who respects you. This could be a friend, chaplain or faith leader as well as your mental health professional.

Does it work?

Overall, there is not enough evidence to draw any firm conclusions about whether having religious or spiritual beliefs can help with unusual distressing beliefs and experiences such as psychosis.

Some small studies have found that positive religious and spiritual coping, such as turning to god or a spiritual leader during difficult times, can help improve your quality of life.

Although some religious and spiritual beliefs may be empowering, some beliefs may be unhelpful. They may lead you to feel guilty or in need of forgiveness. This may have an adverse effect on your mental health.

Some religious groups may believe you are possessed by demons or spirits if you have a mental illness. Others may say that mental illness is a punishment for something you have done wrong. These beliefs are unhelpful and might stop you from getting professional help when you need it.

Certain groups may suggest different things to help you such as exorcisms and herbal remedies. They are sometimes more harmful than helpful.

Recently, researchers have developed a new treatment called religiously integrated cognitive behavioural therapy (RCBT), which is similar to CBT (see page 70), but also includes a person's religion to help identify and replace unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

“ Even at the church I was going to, I was still torn because they were convinced that healing came from Jesus and that medication, you shouldn't need it, and, you know, I disagree – I disagree completely ”

Lucia, 35

Several small studies have found that RCBT can help with anxiety and depression, but these are small studies with poor quality, meaning there is still not enough evidence for us to make a conclusion about whether it works or not.

With regards to psychosis, the majority of the research found that adding a religion aspect to CBT did not improve people's outcomes, or only improved them in the short term. More research is needed before we can make strong conclusions about the effectiveness of this treatment.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

NICE do not mention the influence of religion or spirituality in their guidelines. RCBT has not been reviewed or recommended by NICE. This is likely because there are still very few studies that look at the effectiveness of this treatment for psychosis. More research needs to be done before NICE will review this treatment.

How can I find out more?

Speak to your religious or spiritual leader about what support they can offer you if you are struggling. Also, you can ask your care coordinator how they might include aspects of your spiritual beliefs or people from your religious/spiritual circle in supporting you.

✓ Main pro

Lots of people find having a religious or spiritual belief helpful during difficult times as you have a god, spiritual leader or community to turn to for help or direction if you wish.

✗ Main con

Sometimes people say that there are conflicts in the information they receive from health care professionals and religious/spiritual leaders – speak to your care coordinator if you are confused about any information you have been given and they can help you to get the best support from everyone.