

## Connecting Thread

# Spirituality as a Guide and Support

### BACKGROUND

Spirituality means different things to different people. It can mean finding a source of strength, direction, and hope from a transcendent or higher power through prayer, meditation, or faith. It can be building a connection to nature to find inner peace. Recognizing and supporting the role of a person's spirituality in managing their diabetes can be just as important as understanding their education, cultural beliefs, knowledge, and skills. Spirituality can promote resiliency, reduce anxiety, and offer comfort and support.

For some groups, discussions about spirituality and faith will come naturally. Others may be uncomfortable with these discussions. If you are unsure, you can anonymously survey the group about whether they are comfortable with this topic.

Some groups may like general discussions about the role of spirituality in their lives without discussing specific religions or religious practices. Discussions that use the word "spirituality" may be safer for groups with participants that come from different religious backgrounds.

Other groups may find it helpful to talk about their faith as an expression of their spirituality. For groups of participants who have the same or similar religious backgrounds, it may be more appropriate to use the word “faith.” Some groups may not be comfortable with any discussions about spirituality or faith. You should take guidance on this topic from the group.

### KEY POINTS

- 1. Expressions of spirituality and faith look different for different people.** Listen to your participants about when, if, and how to incorporate this topic into *New Beginnings* modules.
- 2. For some people, spirituality can support diabetes self-management. It can provide a greater sense of responsibility for their health.** It can also help them accept their diagnosis, cope with their emotions, overcome their self-doubt, manage their stress, and solve problems.
- 3. Spirituality can be tied to core values.** Making the connection between core values and health can help motivate people to take steps to protect their health.
- 4. Many faith-based organizations offer diabetes self-management education and support (DSMES) services.** You can find local programs that may provide spiritual resources to help people manage their diabetes through the American Diabetes Association or the Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists.

### SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How, if at all, does your spirituality or religion motivate you to manage your diabetes?
- How are your core values related to taking care of your health?
- What motivates you to take steps to manage your diabetes?
  - Do these motivators come from within you or does someone/something else motivate you?
- What, if any, are some of your personal spiritual practices or practices that you experience through organized religion that help you in daily life?
  - Could you find a way to make these practices more a part of your life as it relates to your diabetes self-management?



## **SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)**

- How can your spirituality or faith help you to do the following:
  - Work toward goals
  - Cope emotionally
  - Overcome self-doubt
  - Deal with problems
  - Manage stress
  - Communicate with family



## **SAMPLE ACTIVITIES**

### **Think-Pair-Share: Spirituality and Health**

The goal of this activity is for participants to think about the role of spirituality or faith in their lives. For some people, spirituality may support diabetes self-management.

- Ask participants to think about the role of spirituality or faith in their lives and to write down specific examples of how spirituality or faith might help them manage their diabetes or support a loved one with diabetes.
  - For example, how can it help them cope with emotions, work toward goals, overcome self-doubt, solve problems, or manage stress? Pick one example that is relevant to the topic discussed during the session.
- Ask participants to pair up with another group member and discuss their ideas.
- Ask one person from each pair to share some of the ideas discussed.

### **Prayers and Positive Thoughts**

The goal of this activity is for participants to identify positive thoughts or affirmations to recite when they are trying to overcome self-doubt or cope with emotions and stress.

- Ask participants to create their own special prayer, meditation mantra, or positive thought to recite at a specific, quiet time of day.
- The special thought should be something simple to remember that gives them inner strength. For example: “Every day, in every way, I am getting stronger and stronger.” or “My blessings are many and my spirit is strong.” or “I can do it. I know I can.”
- Ask participants to write their positive thought in a notebook, journal, or somewhere meaningful so they can remember or re-read the words when they are reciting them, if necessary. Another idea is to record a voice memo on a mobile phone that can be played back whenever it is needed.

### **Filling Your Cup**

The goal of this take-home activity is to identify a small moment that can be set aside each day for focusing on spirituality, calmness, reassurance, or self-love. Practice together so that participants can take this daily activity home with them.

- Describe the activity to the group by saying, “We’re going to practice a take-home activity that you can use each morning.”
- As you start each morning, don’t rush through your first cup of coffee, tea, or water, and don’t grab a travel mug and go. Set aside time—even 1 minute—to sit with this morning drink as a spiritual time, however you experience it.
- Sit down, hold the cup in your hands, and focus. Ask yourself: “From where can I draw my inner strength today? Where can I find more strength to nourish my spirit today? What do I want from my full cup today? How can I fill it tomorrow?”
- Ask participants to try the “filling your cup” activity every day for a week.



## **REFERENCES**

Gupta PS, & Anandarajah G (2014). The role of spirituality in diabetes self-management in an urban underserved population: A qualitative exploratory study. *Rhode Island Medical Journal*, 97, 31-35.

Sung Ah Choi & Julia F. Hastings (2019) Religion, spirituality, coping, and resilience among African Americans with diabetes, *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 38:1, 93-114.