

Spirituality

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities¹ have the right to choose their own expressions of spirituality, to practice those beliefs and expressions and to participate in the faith community of their choice or other spiritual activities. They also have a right to choose not to participate in religious or spiritual activity.

Issue

Spiritual or religious activities are seldom recognized as an important aspect of life or included in individual planning for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Some individuals may need assistance to participate in their chosen spiritual activities or faith communities.

Individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families also face a mixed response from faith-based communities, even though many faith communities have established model programs and strategies for including people with disabilities. Spiritual resources and faith communities are an underused resource in the community for people to exercise choice, develop relationships and social networks, demonstrate respect for cultural and family backgrounds, and serve others.

Position

Spirituality, spiritual growth and religious expression that respect a person's history, tradition and current preferences are rights that must be honored by service systems and faith-based communities, as should the choice not to participate.

- Spirituality is an important part of human experience that may be expressed both through religious practice and through other spiritual activities which carry personal meaning and reflect the person's values;
- Supports and accommodations, such as transportation and easy-to-read materials, must be provided as needed to facilitate the individual's full participation in spiritual or religious activities of her/his choice;
- Supports and programs should be age-appropriate and inclusive;
- Faith communities should be encouraged to build their capacity to support and welcome individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families, and should be assisted in such efforts;

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- Self-advocates, families, advocacy organizations, service providers, and faith communities should work together to develop training and other resources on the inclusion and support of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families; and
- People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities bring their own unique spiritual gifts and benefits to spiritual and religious communities, just as people without disabilities do.

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Joint Statement with the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD).

¹ “People with intellectual disability and/or developmental disabilities” refers to those defined by AAIDD classification and *DSM IV*. In everyday language they are frequently referred to as people with cognitive, intellectual and/or developmental disabilities although the professional and legal definitions of those terms both include others and exclude some defined by *DSM IV*.

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