



Spirituality

Recommendations from the society for diagnosis and therapy of
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1 General information

What is the meaning of spirituality for young people who have cancer?

Spirituality is a source of strength. But what is its meaning? For one, it means coming to rest, finding oneself and coming into contact with oneself. In this context, the term is understood more in an inner-worldly (immanent) way. For others, spirituality has more to do with faith, God, religious practices or a supernatural level (transcendent).

Spirituality is a completely normal part of life in many cultures. Prayers, rest, meditation or spiritual exercises are part of everyday life for many people. In the western world many people have lost touch with it. In difficult times, the need to find oneself again or to get in touch with the supernatural, nature or God can become very significant.

Even though we live in a very open society, spirituality has nowadays largely disappeared from public life and has become something purely personal, almost intimate. Therefore, it usually takes some courage to create free space for this and to follow an individual path.

The following article is intended to affirm the courage to find one's own ways of spirituality and, on the other hand, to create the free space for topics that are important to many people. No matter whether spirituality is rather the rest and search for oneself, the reference to God or a supernatural being or simply a source of strength - this article provides hints that proved to be helpful for those affected.

2 Good to know

How is spirituality expressed?

Spirituality has many faces and can be expressed, for example, in certain symbols or rituals to which meaning is attributed, as well as in meditation or prayer. Here are a few explanations:

2.1 Symbols

Fundamentally important for many people: symbols. For example, sharing a profile picture in social media can be such an important symbol of relationship. This picture can remind people of someone who is there for them, who loves and who belongs. Religious symbols can also remind people of deeper truth and thus give strength. Which symbols are important to the individual is very different. However, they can remind of meaningfulness and thus give strength. This also applies in connection with an inpatient hospital stay, which also offers opportunities for this!

We all need people to support us on a regular basis. In difficult phases of life, fellow human beings can help us to stay in touch with our own source of strength. These can be clergy or simply good friends. Young patients often experience that friends are overwhelmed by the illness

and contact them less or not at all due to insecurity. Here, an open and honest conversation with the persons concerned may help (see also Chapter 3 - Tips and tricks).

2.2 Rituals

Rituals are an integral part of life and provide stability and security. This can be breakfast together on Sunday, the TV evening, religious rituals or a fixed time for meditation. Muslims wash their feet in the mosque before prayer as a sign of spiritual purification. Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper together as a sign of God's love for people.

However, rituals are very different and, similar to symbols, are about making a deeper connection or truth visible or tangible for us humans. Spiritual rituals or "sign acts" are helpful reminders for many people in everyday hospital life that there is more between heaven and earth than we can understand or see. Furthermore, they can give security and help to cope better with the challenges that cancer brings with it.

2.3 Meditation and prayer

Being in contact with oneself or a "higher power"! The meditation or also the conversation with a "higher power" are something very personal and for many people a source of strength and confidence.

In times when illness, uncertainty or fear make life difficult, meditation or prayer can provide support, allow us to calm down and look beyond the horizon.

As differently as we humans live our relationships, faith and spirituality are also lived. No one wants to be disturbed while being with their boyfriend or girlfriend, sharing affections, or simply discussing important issues. This personal space of intimacy in a relationship is not so different from spiritual moments, which need just as much their place and their protected setting.

Sometimes there might be a lack of sensitivity or a lack of undisturbed settings for living spirituality in the hospital. It is then important and helpful to discuss with nurses or the medical team how and when it is possible to create undisturbed moments.

2.4 Spirituality has many faces

Hope, the feeling of being loved, trust, safety and security - all this can give spirituality. Some people experience it in nature, in art, in sports, in sexual experiences, in fellow human beings or in faith and religion. Each form has its justification and is good the way it is.

3 Tips and tricks

3.1 Talk about needs

For those affected, it is helpful to talk to friends, family members and close caregivers about their very individual needs. Open communication supports the patients and otherwise it is helpful for the environment to provide practical support. Tackling relieves people from the feeling of helplessness. Only when relatives know what they can do and how they can be there for the sick person, helpful support is possible.

This can also be very practical things and activities, such as doing laundry, watching movies together, listening to music, playing games, or spiritual support, such as praying together, talking, meditating, or just being silent.

3.2 Perform important rituals - even in the hospital

The inner source of strength is extremely important! It provides strength to persevere, even when so much is difficult for young patients in the phases of illness. Familiar rituals give courage and security.

In the hospital, the focus is naturally on medical care. But perhaps helpful conversations can still take place with empathetic nurses, doctors or psychooncologists.

Everyone can and must have an eye for their own rituals. It is certainly a good idea to take some time and think about which rituals have been helpful in life so far, or which new rituals could be tried out.

3.3 Create free space to live the personal source of power

In the clinic, there are often hardly any rest periods, which is not only the case for doctors and nurses, but also for many patients. The door opens all the time and every time someone wants something: making beds, ordering food, bringing breakfast, making rounds, cleaning the shower, taking vital signs, take a blood sample, ... and all that before nine o'clock!

With this constant activity, it is helpful if patients, nurses and doctors openly discuss when undisturbed time windows are possible. On many wards, for example, there are already door signs with the inscription "Do not disturb". Nurses and physicians appreciate this and thus allow those affected some privacy.

The intention of this brief overview of spirituality is to encourage patients to live out their spiritual needs. Perhaps it can motivate practitioners, caregivers and family members to find or rediscover and nurture their own spiritual approach.

4 Gender

Gender terms used in this text represent all gender forms.

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