



# Faith, Spirituality, & Peer Support

Stigma and disparities in mental health and substance use treatment access can be deterrents for people to get the care they need. Faith and spirituality can play a vital role in a person's recovery. It is imperative for Certified Peer Specialists (CPS) to understand how faith and spirituality can impact a peer's access to care and the longevity of their recovery journey.

This infographic accompanies the [on-demand recording by Dr. Monty Burks](#) on faith, spirituality, and peer support. It discusses stigma as a barrier to treatment and care, the relevance of faith and spirituality in recovery, and the crucial role of peer support in promoting lifelong recovery.

## Stigma

### What is Stigma?

Stigma is defined as “a mark of disgrace or infamy.” The stigma of addiction and mental health stems from behavioral symptoms. The public may judge the outward symptom not realizing it may be related to a situational adjustment from a disease or lack of resources.



Factors such as experiences with incarceration, job loss, and family loss can exacerbate the presence of mental health conditions including depression and anxiety. People may experience restricted access to mental health and substance use treatment services because of these factors.



## Types of Stigma:

- Public stigma involves the negative or discriminatory attitudes that others have about mental illness.
- Self-stigma refers to the negative attitudes, including internalized shame, that people with mental illness have about their own condition.
- Institutional stigma is more systemic and involves policies that intentionally or unintentionally limit opportunities for people with mental illness.



## Language can be helpful or hurtful.

Recovery-Oriented Language (ROL) is an approach which focuses on the individual rather than the diagnosis. It describes what a person "has" rather than asserting what a person "is". It is intended to avoid marginalization or dehumanization (either consciously or subconsciously) when discussing people with a chronic illness, disability, or possible life controlling issue.

## Faith & Spirituality

### What is Faith?

Faith is when a person is able to envision the greater good within themselves and in others around them. While faith is a term interconnected to spirituality and religion, one does not have to experience religion or believe in a Higher Power for faith to play a role in recovery.

### What is Spirituality?

Spirituality is a process in which a person finds oneself through seeking a meaningful connection with something bigger than themselves. Traditionally, spirituality referred to a religious process of reformation which "aims to recover the original shape of a person."

Faith and spirituality can be a very helpful component of someone's recovery from mental illness. For example, a place of worship can create a safe and welcoming space where one feels an instant sense of support and community. Similarly, spiritual practices, like meditation, can help one focus on being present and in the moment.

## Faith Communities

A faith community is a group of people who share a particular set of beliefs and who have chosen to belong to a particular faith community. Members of a faith community engage in spiritual growth and support one another. Faith communities may be based on religious faith but it is not required.

Faith communities can help support an individual's mental health recovery in many ways. They can provide a sense of belonging and support to those who are struggling with mental health issues. Like Certified Peer Specialists, they often meet people where they are. [\(NAMI\)](#)

### Did you know...

- Faith leaders tend to be some of the most frequent first responders in mental health crises — especially in communities of color.
- Churches, temples, mosques and other faith communities reach more than half of the American population each month.
- Members of the clergy outnumber psychiatrists by nearly 10 to 1 and are more equitably distributed geographically than most health professionals. [\(NAMI\)](#)



SAMHSA's [Faith-Based and Community Initiatives \(FBCI\)](#): FBCI is a model for how effective partnerships can be created between federal programs and faith-based and community organizations. FBCI supports several programs in mental health services, substance abuse prevention, and addiction treatment at the national, state, and local levels. Current SAMHSA and faith-based collaboration programs include Youth Violence Prevention, Increasing Access to Substance Use Treatment and HIV/AIDS Services, Reducing Homelessness, and Crisis Counseling.

[Click here](#) to learn more about ways to work with faith communities and leaders to identify opportunities to support people with mental illnesses. [\(SAMHSA\)](#)

# Peer Support

## What is Peer Support?

Peer support encompasses a range of activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences of being diagnosed with mental health concerns, substance use disorders, or both. Through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, peer support workers help others become and stay engaged in the recovery process.



## The Role of Peer Support

Certified Peer Specialists “point to the open door,” by sharing their own lived experiences. For some, faith and spirituality may have been an integral part of their recovery journey but that may not be true for everyone. It is important to remember that faith, religion, and spirituality can be a source of negativity or trauma for some. It should not be a challenge to one's identity to listen. Simply be prepared with other resources to share.

Certified Peer Specialists, regardless of whether they have a faith-based background, can benefit from knowing how integral faith communities are in providing connectedness and support - two important pieces to long-term recovery. Below are a few tips to help provide peer support regardless of a shared faith-based background or not.

## Model, Hear, Acknowledge, and Reflect to provide adequate support.

### Be the MODEL Peer

- Share personal experiences.
- Share personal pain and emotions.
- Remember, we all have a wealth of experience!

### HEAR and listen to what is said

- Pay attention to the depth of share.
- Look for commonality in the share.
- Use the commonality in the affirmation.

### ACKNOWLEDGE

- Allow everyone to know they are being heard.
- Respect others' thoughts and opinions.



### REFLECT

A few phrases to provide reflection while helping your peers are:

- "What I heard you say is..."
- "So, you talked about..."
- "Everyone mentioned..."