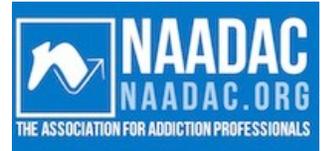


Questions Asked During Live Webinar Broadcast on 02/24/2016



I totally agree with the positive impact of spirituality in one's recovery. In the work of Ken Pargament there are also negative impacts in spirituality. It makes sense to discern the positive and the negative impacts. Do you agree? And what are the positive impacts? What are the negative impacts?

A: I agree; however, my focus is on the proven benefits of spirituality in recovery and in life in general. Nearly everything I can think of that has the potential for good, can be misused, abused, and/or misunderstood thereby becoming a hindrance instead of a help. Some of the positive impacts of spirituality in recovery that were noted in the webinar include: discovering meaning and purpose, connection, inner fulfillment, love, peace, joy, creativity, and service.

The rubrics for authentic spirituality that I noted should steer one in the direction of a healthy spirituality with no negative impacts. There are many inauthentic forms of spirituality that can lead people astray thereby exacerbating a problem. That's part of the reason why the topic of spirituality in treatment really needs to be addressed more in the education process for clinicians. There are some unhealthy concepts about spirituality out there that are being taught in a dogmatic way to people who really need some clear, informed, solid, and healthy information.

Thanks for the excellent question, and I think great topic for another webinar!

Does a higher power need to be a specific deity or can it be ideals or concepts?

A: I noted in the webinar that higher power can be: "A group or fellowship, God as one may interpret God, or ANYTHING BEYOND ONE'S INDIVIDUAL EGO." Ideals or concepts could fall into that category. I'd be curious to know exactly what you are referring to.

Is Faith and confidence in something different or the same?

A: In very basic terms faith is "having complete trust or confidence in someone or something." I suppose we could delve deeper into the semantics of the words, but for our purposes here, let's keep it that simple. (Unless you would like to give me a specific example to respond to...)

The topic seems complex. Any practical tips to start this discussion with clients?

A: Excellent question. Keep it simple and start with core values — everyone has them. What does your client hold dear to his or her heart? What means the most to him or her? What direction does he or she want her life to go in? Perhaps just open the door to discuss those spiritual states of consciousness that substances mimic (see slide) that perhaps he or she is seeking when using? What is he or she longing for? What's missing? What's a healthy way to go about getting that spiritual nature filled other than something artificial?

Would this not be the same with attending any support group, not necessarily religious?

A: Sure, it could be. I hesitate only because of the words "support group." If you're referring to a Twelve Step program or something similar, then absolutely. Those are spiritual programs. Other "support groups" might not necessarily be spiritual programs.

Remember what we saw on the presentation about the differences and commonalities between religion and spirituality? Religions offer creeds, codes, and cults, time-tested traditions, etc. that MIGHT help people to move forward in their spirituality. However, healthy spiritual support groups can (and do) accomplish the same thing. Here's a reminder from one of the slides: "Ideally religion and/or spirituality will be able to fulfill the spiritual nature of our humanity – pulling us towards ultimate values, towards community, towards connection and

towards service.” There are numerous beautiful and varied ways that people accomplish this in life — whether via religion or other spiritual programs.

Thanks for the question. I think that’s a topic for another webinar too!

We know that people who are spiritual but not religious do not have as positive recovery as do those who have both. Does this make sense to you?

A: I’d like to see the research that you’re referring to. What makes sense to me is that religions have time-tested traditions, rituals, etc. that ideally keep us on track and guide us in the right direction whereas if we attempt spirituality on our own, we can end up in unhealthy places. Honestly though, we can end up in unhealthy places in religions too. Remember what I said:

“You might have a client who is very religious – perhaps this person participates in all of the beliefs, practices, and lifestyles of his or her religion and yet that person CAN be still quite empty spiritually and may still be exhibiting symptoms of a deficient spiritual life – despite being active in a religion. Conversely, you might have a person who feels he or she is very spiritual, yet this person does not transcend the self. He or she might be stuck in a very selfish form of spirituality which is really no spirituality at all.”

Self-guided spirituality can end up being just plain selfish, unproductive, and even harmful. A person can pick and choose what he or she feels is spiritually best, and that can end up being very unhealthy or at very least unfruitful. It helps to have guidelines, rules, rituals, etc. which is probably what you’re referring to in your question. The spirituality of the 12 steps has rules, rituals, etc., which one might argue are similar to religions.

Another reminder is that spirituality is about transcending the self and about connection, so if someone attempts a personal/private spirituality that doesn’t involve getting out of the self and into the community, that’s not going to be very productive in the recovery/healing process.

But you can't force spirituality on someone...

A: We are all spiritual in nature. You might still be thinking in terms of religion or specific spiritual programs here in your comment. Remember what we saw about the spiritual states of consciousness that we all desire — love, connection, peace, joy, etc. That’s not something that you force on someone. Those are states of consciousness that we long for as part of the human condition.

It would be interested to know the percent of therapists themselves are religious? Those who are spiritual? Given that those who do not have such a practice just MAY therefore not be open to addressing the spirituality/religion in their client's lives. How can we address this?

A: Another excellent question. This remains a touchy subject — one that people are often afraid to discuss — probably because of the many fundamentalists out there who make the conversations difficult.

I think there will be a shift in thinking in this area as education progresses. Just as education in spirituality is now beginning to include psychology, psychology will hopefully include spirituality. (Perhaps it does . . . that’s not my area of expertise).

As I noted in the webinar — we are comprised of body, mind, and spirit. Therapists who want to steer away from that are really doing their clients a disservice. It’s understandable though because of the lack of education on the subject and the strong opinions of the fundamentalists who make everyone want to run in the opposite direction! Another difficulty is that one has to be fairly comfortable in his or her own spirituality to be able to safely guide another in the process.

Education . . . open-mindedness . . . self-discovery . . . more webinars!