



ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS

AIM: To extend participants understanding of how their own assumptions of difference may influence their relationship with a client.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the session, participants will have:

1. Recognised that a word can have different meanings and that these meanings need clarification.
2. Explored their experience of difference.
3. Identified possible assumptions they may make as a result of those differences.
4. Recognised the impact that difference and assumptions will have on their work with clients.
5. Listed a number of strategies to manage difference and assumptions.
6. Explored the difference between Religion & Spirituality
7. Explored what their own belief system might be and how this might impact on their life
8. Recognised how their beliefs might affect their work as a Brigitte Trust volunteer supporting clients facing their own death.

ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions are not just about what we see and hear they are part of our family culture. Our ways of doing everyday things can be different from another person. When ill and losing control of so many things a volunteer who does not do things 'my way' can be a source of irritation. Think about making a cup of tea:

1. Tea bags or tea pot with leaves?
2. Cup or mug, trolley or tray?
3. Milk in first or last?
4. Sugar in automatically or does the person drinking the tea put it in?

This is about respecting each other's difference and finding out how and where a client would like things, not assuming you know.

We frequently make assumptions.

For example:

- Daily Mirror reader versus Times reader
- Mercedes versus Vauxhall
- Waitrose versus ASDA
- Tenant versus home owner
- Private education versus state education
- Employed versus unemployed
- Wheelchair user versus able bodied person
- Young person versus old person
- Overweight versus thin
- Immigrant versus non immigrant
- Black person versus white person

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Spiritual Aspects of End of Life

Spirituality has been defined as:

- Pertaining to one's inner resources, especially one's ultimate concern; the basic value around which all other values are focused.
- The central philosophy of life, whether that be religious, non-religious or anti-religious, that guides our conduct; and the supernatural and non-material dimensions of human nature.
- Religion is usually recognised as the practical expression of spirituality; the organisation, rituals and practice of one's beliefs. It is a personal way of expressing spirituality through affiliation, rites and rituals.

While religion includes specific beliefs and practices, spirituality is much broader. Spirituality is about existence, about the individual's relationship with him/herself, with others and with the universe.

Spirituality extends beyond the physical, material and self. Both spiritual and religious beliefs give meaning and purpose to life, and they play an important part in an individual's ability to make sense of his/her existence.

The Dying Individual's Needs

Dying is a profound process of spiritual transformation, a spiritual event of enormous importance. Often attention is turned away from the outer distractions in the world and turned inward toward a greater peace and comfort in spiritual fulfilment. There seems to be three spiritual needs of the dying:

- The need to search for the meaning of life
- The need to die appropriately
- The need to find hope that extends beyond the grave

Spiritual or religious beliefs can be crucial in helping individuals meet these needs. As individuals search for meaning in their own death or in the death of a loved one, spiritual issues may surface. During this experience, bereaved people may ponder the existential issues of life, not only with regard to the loss of a loved one, but for themselves as well. Sometimes the dying person, as well as their family, will be angry with God or an Ultimate Being and may experience a crisis of faith and meaning. Finding meaning is individual and personal. However, finding meaning in life is especially difficult during the dying process. What each individual finds meaningful is not as important as the ability to look back on life, see what has been meaningful and realise that life can continue to be meaningful even in the last stages.

Most often there are at least five elements of spiritual care that can be helpful to the dying person:

- Engaging in prayer or meditation with or for the dying person
- Including the presence of loved ones in the provision of spiritual care and rituals
- Providing a time to share feelings and thoughts
- Assisting the person to complete any unfinished business
- Giving the person permission to die

Healthcare providers or caregivers who share these experiences with a dying individual share in his or her spirituality and the healing comfort of the special relationship they have established with that individual.

“The spiritual accompaniment of dying is a delicate task which requires that we find out where **each** individual patient is both emotionally and spiritually and work with them in that place.....a distinction between an **individuals** spiritual needs and his or her religious needs. While only “religious” people have **religious** needs, to do with prayer and ritual, we all have spiritual needs. They concern **the individual’s** quest for meaning, the search for an answer to the eternal questions of life. Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? What happens after death, and has my life been worthwhile?

Sheila Cassidy

Dr. Sheila Cassidy is an English doctor, known for her work in the hospice movement.