

SPIRITUAL CARE

considerations series

The Spiritual Care Considerations series equips all carers with basic information to help you think about the spiritual needs of the person in your care. They are a prompt to give you ideas for conversation with the person you are supporting and/or their loved ones. Meaningful Ageing Australia members can access more information under the Member's Zone Resources Clearing House www.meaningfulageing.org.au

Jewish Spirituality

1. Are all Jewish people religious? When in doubt, ask!

- You could ask: *Is the Jewish religion important to you?*
- Not all Jewish people are religious but most respect the Jewish religion.
- Not all Jewish people believe in God.
- It is possible that the Jewish person in your care is Jewish culturally but not religiously. This means that the person in your care may not believe in God. At the same time they may value certain Jewish cultural and religious customs.
- Jewish older people who are not religious may still appreciate spiritual care that is not religious, such as someone to listen to them when they are asking questions that relate to meaning and relationship.

2. Listen and observe even when a person does not self-identify as a Holocaust survivor.

“The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators (www.ushmm.org).”

It is highly likely that the person in your care will be a holocaust survivor or closely related to a holocaust survivor. There are important things to know about holocaust survivors.

- There are different opinions about what holocaust survival is. Even though **some people don't call themselves survivors** they may have spiritual needs related to surviving the Holocaust such as living with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), complex family relationships due to family trauma and questions of meaning and suffering.
- PTSD is common in Jewish older people who survived the holocaust. Behaviour due to PTSD may include hoarding food, night terrors, repeated attempts to exit (if in an aged care facility), distrust and even fear of authority figures and uniformed staff or trades professionals, trauma responses to barred or screened windows, fences, barbed wire and dogs. As you care with gentleness and compassion it is important to understand these behaviours as responses to trauma.
- Some families of Holocaust survivors will be very protective of their loved one. This may lead to some quite strong emotions being expressed by family members. Your role is to listen carefully and understand that high levels of emotion are most likely related to Post-Traumatic Stress in the survivor and in their family members.

3. Listen carefully with the person and their loved ones about end of life hopes.

Example questions: How are you feeling about the last part of your life? Have you thought about what dying means to you? What is important to you as you think about dying?

The person in your care and their loved ones may have very specific ideas about end of life care. Some Jewish people will not want to accept any health care that might be perceived as *hastening death*. The belief in *maintaining life at all costs* will be very strong in these cases and may be even more important to families of Holocaust survivors.

4. Build your resources in preparation for responding to spiritual need.

If some form of prayer is asked for it is important to use prayers from the Jewish scriptures (often the Psalms) or well-known Jewish liturgy.

A simple, good resource is the **Prayers for Healing** pamphlet published by the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and Spiritual Health Victoria. The link is [here](#) or can be found on the Spiritual Health Victoria website (www.shv.org.au).

5. Talk about funeral requirements, hopes and desires earlier rather than later.

Many Jewish families will require culturally and religiously appropriate funeral rites. This may include important rituals in relation to preparation of the body of the deceased loved one and aversion to cremation. Always refer to the Rabbis and trained spiritual care practitioners who you know. Resources to assist you with referrals:

Chevra Kadesha - www.mck.org.au

Bet Olam Funerals - www.jewishfunerals.org.au

6. Be prepared to refer to the professionals.

Call the Chaplain or Spiritual Care Practitioner based in your organisation, if there is one.

Contact the Rabbi (Jewish religious leader) from the nearest Jewish community and have their details available to use when needed.

7. Deepen your understanding.

Educate yourself in the cultural and spiritual identity of the Jewish people.

mmlearn.org has published an excellent series of short films that raise cultural awareness amongst people caring for Jewish older people. Look for the topic 'Cultural Sensitivity'.

Caring for Jewish Patients This excellent resource published by Jewish Community Council of Victoria and Spiritual Health Victoria focusses on the health care sector but has significant benefit for others. Go to shv.org.au.

Jewish Museums will often have very informative training sessions and tours that will expand your knowledge of and sensitivity to the issues related to Holocaust survival and immigration.

For more resources and links to useful reading for your own formation in listening with Jewish older people visit the Meaningful Ageing website Member's Zone.

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