

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

Jehovah's Witness (JW) Spirituality

History

At the end of the 19th century a small group of students in the United States analysed the Christian Bible, making a comparison of the doctrine taught by their churches with what the Bible teaches. They published their ideas and started the journal that continues today, 'The Watchtower – Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom'. They consider Jesus as the founder of their organisation, The Jehovah's Witnesses.

Beliefs (with Christian bible references)

- The Bible is God's Word.
- They worship only God whose name is Jehovah (Psalms 83:18)
- Jesus is God's son and the only means of salvation (Acts 4:12)
- They do not get involved with the political affairs of the nations (John 18:36)
- They preach God's Kingdom as humanity's only hope (Matthew 24:14)
- They do not believe they have an immortal soul that survives the body (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6)
- They strongly believe God will resurrect those who die at a future time. The majority of those resurrected will live on a paradise earth.

Jehovah's Witnesses' (JW) beliefs are extremely important to them. They truly appreciate it when others respect their deeply held convictions. You can do this by listening and showing your curiosity and interest in their life and beliefs.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Christianity

- JWs identify as Christians, with some different practices to most churches
- JWs don't celebrate birthdays or Christmas
- JWs don't use the Christian cross as a symbol of significance, believing Jesus died on a stake
- JWs avoid practices that they feel displease God, such as participating in warfare, gambling, or receiving blood transfusions

Spiritual Practices

- Prayer, reading and studying the Bible
- Meeting together, preaching the good news of the Kingdom, constructing and maintaining Kingdom Halls (where they meet)
- Helping those in need, and sharing in disaster relief

- They respect the right that all people have to make their own choices as to lifestyle, morals and religion

Maintaining Connections to Faith while Engaging with Aged Care

- Generally, a JW that has entered a residential aged care facility will still be a member of a local congregation. If requested by the aged care facility or staff, JWs can arrange to hold Bible discussion groups for JWs and any others wishing to attend in the aged care facility. Local JWs can also provide pastoral care through periodic visits.
- For older JWs who are unable to attend Kingdom Hall, there is a website that contains videos, songs, movies, Bible presentations etc. (<https://tv.jw.org/#en/home>)
- Maintaining existing links to their faith community is particularly important for JWs as they avoid affiliation with other religions and are against attending interfaith (or inter-denominational) events.
- There may be significant grief for an elderly JW entering into aged care. You could say, “I see you’re really sad right now. How can I best support you?”

End of Life Care & Death

- JWs are encouraged to make decisions based on their own understanding of the Bible, and so it is best to check with the person or their family in matters of healthcare. You can say, “What is your personal belief in this instance? Can you tell me more about that?”
- Death is a time of celebration rather than sadness. JWs believe that people who die pass out of existence. They don’t believe in hell. Burial practices are similar to those of other Christian faiths. As JWs don’t believe in an afterlife immediately after death, aged care staff should refrain from saying things such as “He’s in a better place now” in an attempt to comfort the family. Instead, you could say “I’m sorry for your loss”.

Further Guidance

- Some JWs have been subject to discrimination due to their beliefs. Maintain awareness of your own beliefs and attitudes, and bring an open and accepting manner. You could say, “Tell me about...”
- Many people have received negative messages about Jehovah’s Witnesses. The worldwide JW organisation has been the subject of debate.
- You may feel concerned about the possibility of JW residents engaging in preaching in the aged care facility.
- If you feel uncomfortable caring for a JW, or if this is causing inner conflict to the point where it is affecting your work, it is important to raise this with your team leaders to discuss your options. Inclusive practice is not about trying to change you or your values, but ensuring that everyone is treated with respect.

If you require assistance in locating a local congregation, please contact the Jehovah’s Witness office on 02 9829 5600, or visit the official website www.jw.org and click on About Us>Meetings>Find A Location Near You.

Deepen your understanding

- Film: *Knocking* (2006) Explores ways in which Jehovah’s Witnesses have shaped American history.
- Film: *Worlds Apart* (2008) A Witness teenager falls in love and has to choose between her faith and her love.
- Film: *Truth Be Told* (2012) Narratives of three people who grew up in Witness families, and left
- Film: *What Happens at a Kingdom Hall*. Produced by the JW Organisation.
- The ‘New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures’ version of the Bible.

For more resources and links to useful reading for your own information on *Jehovah’s Witness Spirituality* visit the Meaningful Ageing website Member’s Zone. Visit: <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/>

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