



Spiritual Care Assessment for Elders with Dementia

A spiritual care assessment goes beyond simply knowing which church, if any, a person attended; it evolves over time and will help you customize meaningful spiritual care for a person with dementia.

These open-ended, non-religious questions¹ serve to form a “spiritual landscape.” Take your time; you don’t have to (and probably shouldn’t) ask all of these questions all at once, and you can (and probably should) repeat the questions at different times.

As you listen, you’ll develop a picture of what matters to the person, what helps them feel comfort, safety, and hope, and what you can do to be present with and encourage their spiritual reality.

- What things bring you joy in your life right now? (touches on meaning, renewal)
- What would be good day for you? (touches on happy memories, present positive associations)
- What are the things that are hardest in your life right now? (touches on past sorrow or regret, present concerns or worries, fears)
- What helps you feel peaceful? OR What helps you feel closest to God? (touches on tradition, rituals, service; e.g., prayer, meditation, nature, art, helping others, family, friends, faith, scriptures, worship, music)
- *If you know the person identifies with a particular denomination (e.g., Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox), ask: What did you / your family do on church days? (touches on family custom, community, service)*

If a person is nonverbal, try these ideas to get a sense of their spiritual landscape.

- Use the above questions to gather information from family members and friends.
- If you learn that a resident has a faith tradition, call a local clergy or religious leader from that faith tradition. Ask what kinds of rituals or activities are most common within that tradition and thus are likely to be meaningful to the resident.
- Experiment with tangible items, such as a rosary, Bible, yarmulke, dreidl, wooden cross, singing bowl, nature, etc. Watch for reactions.

¹ Berry, K. (2018). Addressing the Spiritual Needs of People Aging with Dementia and/or Lifelong Disabilities. *Age in Action*, 33(2), 1-5.

- Pick up nonverbal cues. Does the person respond well to hymn music? Do they gravitate toward a Nativity scene or electric candles? When they hear something like the Lord's Prayer, do they mouth the words or put their hands together in a prayerful posture?