

Stressed or Rest: Assessing for Spiritual Care

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To start, the spiritual-care-team member assesses for Rest or Stressed, i.e., assesses whether a person's affect appears either calm or distressed.

1. Next, if the person's affect appears calm, does it arise from hopefulness or, perhaps, depression? (Note: outward calm does not always reflect inner peace.)
 - a. If the calm affect reflects hope, then offer affirmation and appropriately share in the sense of joy that hope brings!
 - b. If the calm affect reflects depression, then offer compassionate support, possibly conduct further assessment, and refer the person to appropriate resources. (Chronic depression often requires specialized therapy.)

2. Or, if the person's affect is distressed, is the distress acute or is it chronic?
 - a. If the distress seems acute, then facilitate compassionate and supportive interactions as appropriate, which may include*:
 - Reflective listening
 - Prayer, meditation, and the reading of scriptures
 - Involvement of friends and family and personal clergy
 - Music
 - Exercise, Humor, etc.(Acutely stressful circumstances can include any situations involving potentially significant change, such as disruptions to employment, personal relationships, health, etc.)
 - b. If the distress seems chronic, then (in addition to facilitating the supports listed above) the spiritual care provider, with the person's permission, assess for impediments to spiritual growth, for example:
 - Is the stressed-to-rest transition functioning, i.e., is the person readily able to find (mentally) a place of inner calm and peace?
 - Does the level of uncertainty overwhelm other life experiences?
 - Are a person's spiritual symbols and imagery richly invested with meaning, or do they appear mechanical?
 - Has spiritual trauma / abuse contributed to Toxic Faith?
 - c. Next, with the person's permission, conduct spiritual care interventions* that facilitate constructive moments of self-discovery, for example:
 - Empathic prayer may evoke a cathartic response that aids a transition from feelings of stress to an inner state of rest and calm.
 - Value conflicts may benefit from clarification to aid in identifying or developing life themes that help build a sense of meaning and purpose.
 - Investing relevant symbols with significance helps people internalize values and discover meaning. (Here, storytelling can be very useful.)
 - Also, modeling a hopeful yet realistic perspective can facilitate an intuitively sympathetic or complementary response.
 - d. Finally, refer the person to a caring faith-community that can provide ongoing support and nurture (case manage the referral transition).

* Persons with acute stress may also benefit from some of the suggested interventions for chronic stress.