

We use research and projects to promote the rights of people with learning disabilities and their families.

We do this by:

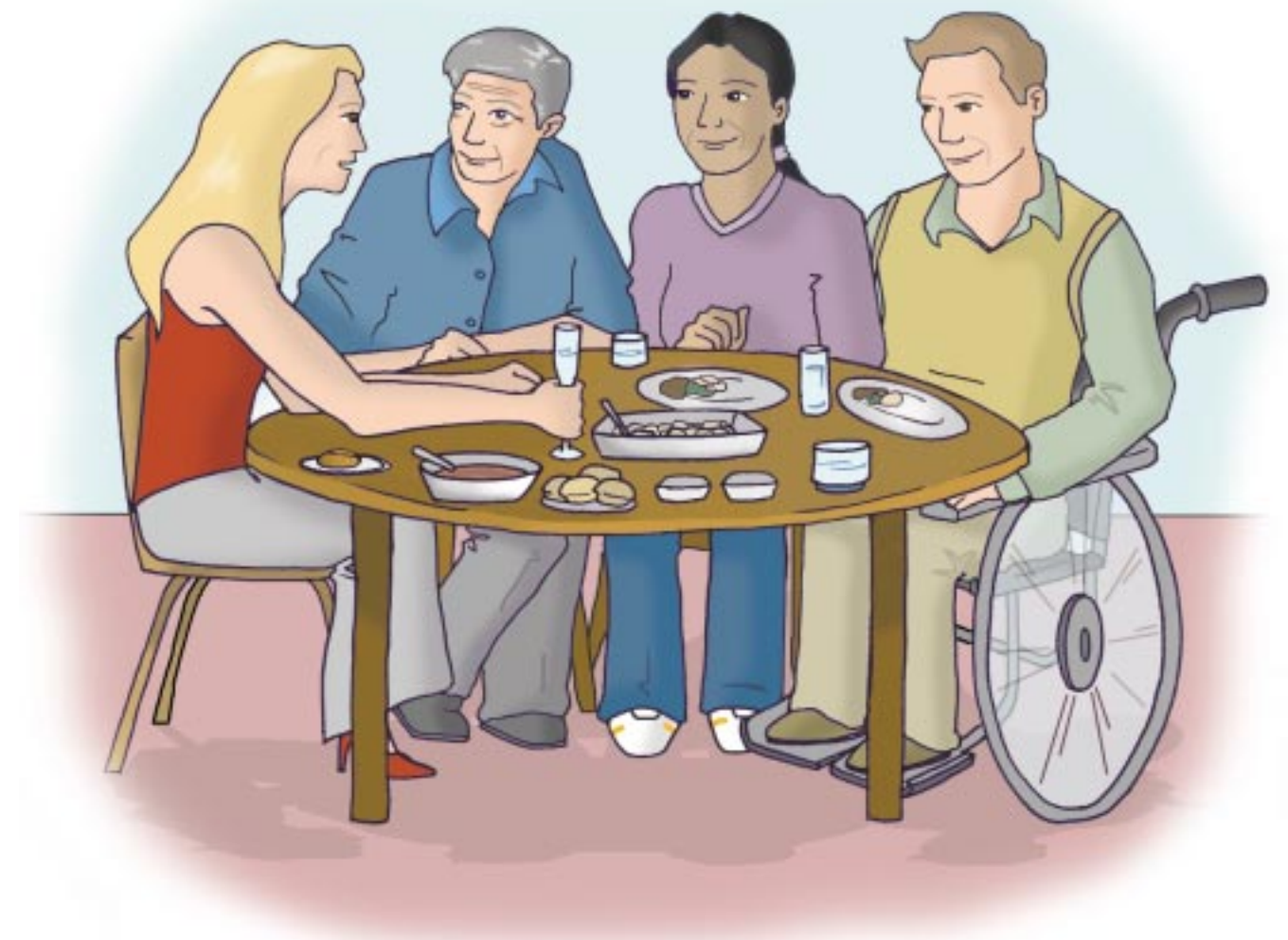
- Identifying work that is needed to overcome barriers to social inclusion and full citizenship.
- Communicating our knowledge to a wide range of people.
- Turning research into practical solutions that make a real difference to people's lives now and in the future.

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities
83 Victoria Street
London
SW1H OHW
Tel: 020 7802 0300
Fax: 020 7802 0301

Email: fpld@fpld.org.uk
www.learningdisabilities.org.uk

© The Mental Health Foundation
Published by the Mental Health Foundation April 2004
Reg. Charity No 801130

Price £2.00
ISBN 1-903645-55-7



What is important to you?

A booklet for people with learning disabilities

Words by John Swinton, Elaine Powrie and Hazel Morgan.

Thank you to Pat Charlesworth. She looked at the words and pictures and said what she thought. We then changed things to make the booklet better.

Before writing the booklet, John Swinton and Elaine Powrie talked to many people with learning disabilities about what is important in their lives.

This booklet contains information about the things that people with learning disabilities said are important for them. We hope that it will help you to think about what is important in your life and to help you to tell others what you need.

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities thanks The Shirley Foundation for their support.

If someone close to you has died and you need help, contact:

CRUSE - Bereavement Care
126 Sheen Road
Richmond
Surrey
TW9 1UR

Tel: 020 8939 9530

Email: info@crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Website: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

For books about different faiths, there are six books that might be helpful:

- Beliefs and Cultures: Hindu, by A Ganeri
- Beliefs and Cultures: Muslim, by R Tames
- Beliefs and Cultures: Christian, by C Watson
- Beliefs and Cultures: Judaism, by M Stoppleman
- Beliefs and Cultures: Sikh, by C Chambers
- Beliefs and Cultures: Buddhist, by A Ganeri

All of these books are published by Franklin Watts, London, and cost £11.99. You could order them from your local library.

You might want to ask someone you trust to help you to find out more.

About this booklet

This booklet is about the things that are important to you in your life. It is about the things that make you happy or sad. It is about the things that you look forward to and enjoy. It is about the friends you have. For some people it is about their belief in God. Some people call these things spirituality.

You might want to ask someone you trust to help you think and talk about the things in this booklet. You might want to ask them to read it with you.



The importance of friendship



Everybody needs to have friends. Friends look after one another. Having a friend makes you feel special. Friends are important because they accept you just the way you are. Friends enjoy doing things together.

Some people don't have many friends. This makes people feel sad and lonely. It can sometimes be hard to make friends.

Roland's Story

Roland is lonely. He does not have any friends but he really wants to find a friend. Roland lives in a house on his own. He sometimes goes to the cinema on his own but it is not the same as going with friends. Roland has a support worker who is very kind to him. But Roland wants a friend who is not a support worker. He wants somebody to choose to be his friend.

Some things you could do

- Take time to think about the friends that you have and how important they are to you.
- Invite one of your friends to come and visit you.
- Get in touch with one of your friends, have a chat and tell them how much you care for them.
- If you are lonely, phone someone you know and trust and have a chat with them.
- Join a group, like a People First group or a sports club or volunteer.

You might want to ask someone you trust to support you to do some of these things.



When friends or family move away

It can be very painful when we are separated from the people we love. Sometimes we are separated because people move away from the place we live. This can make us feel lost and sad.

When people we love die



Many people with learning disabilities have known somebody close to them who has died. Even though this might have happened a long time ago, people can still be very sad about this. Some people feel that they never get the chance to speak to anyone and to tell them how sad they feel about losing the person who has died.

Luke's Story

One young man called Luke told us that he felt sad and angry when one of his friends became ill and died. Luke wanted somebody to talk to and to share how sad he was feeling. Luke had lost a good friend and needed to talk about how he felt. He felt better when he had spoken to someone about his feelings.

Some things that you could do

- Find someone to talk to when you feel sad because someone you love has died. It is ok to be sad.
- Even if the person died a long time ago, don't be afraid to cry or tell people how sad you are feeling.
- If you belong to a faith community you might want to tell people there that you are sad and that you someone you love has died. Tell God about how you feel
- If you are angry with the person tell somebody how you feel.
- Tell the dead person's family or friends about how much you loved the person who has died, what they meant to you and how they helped you.
- Think about good memories of the person who has died. Think of all the good things about the person.
- Keep some pictures or things that remind you of the dead person.



Celebrating together



People told us that celebrating together is important. A celebration is an occasion where we do things to mark special events like birthdays or important things that happen in our lives. When people celebrate, they get together with their friends and family.

Religious people celebrate special occasions such as Christmas, Passover, Diwali or Eid.

People like celebrations because they give people time to be thankful for the good things in their lives. Celebrations make people feel that they are part of a group and that they have something important in common with others.

David's Story

David belongs to the Jewish faith. An important celebration for this religion is called the Passover. During this celebration David meets with his housemates to eat the Passover meal. He enjoys this celebration with his friends.

Some things you could do

- Get together with some friends and celebrate something that makes you happy.
- Get them to bring some photographs and you can talk about the good things that have happened to you. You can also talk about the good things that you are looking forward to.
- You might want to have a meal together or play music and dance.



Finding a quiet place



Some people might want to find a place where they can be quiet. Finding a quiet place helps us to relax when life feels difficult or stressful. It helps us to sit and think about the day and how we feel about ourselves. Some of us want space to pray to God.

Laura's Story

Laura told us that she thought that there are very few places in the world where there is tranquillity. She feels as if she needs a space, but it is very difficult to find.

Here are some things you could do

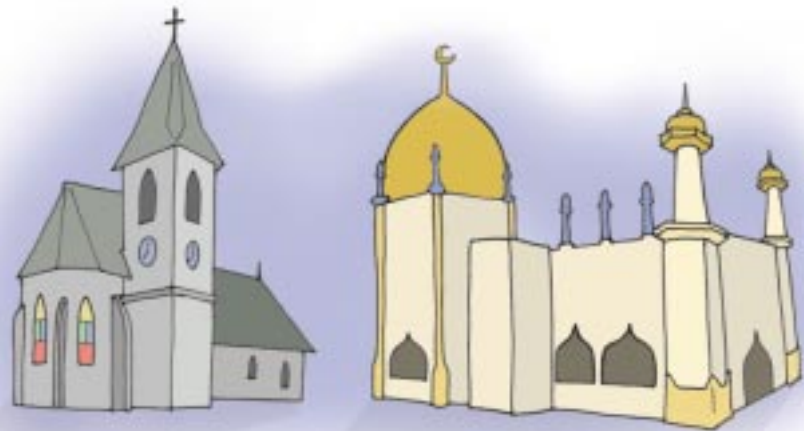
- You may be able to decorate your room to make it more relaxing and peaceful. That could be your quiet space.
- You could have ornaments or beautiful pictures to look at. This will help you relax and be at peace.
- Tell people when you want to be quiet and do not wish to be disturbed.
- Go out into a park or the countryside so that you can be quiet and think.



What you believe

People have many different beliefs about why we are here. Some people believe we are here to care for one another, but do not believe in God.

Other people believe in God. For them believing in God is the most important thing in their lives. Some people feel that God helps them to get through the day and that God looks after them because he loves them.



Faith communities

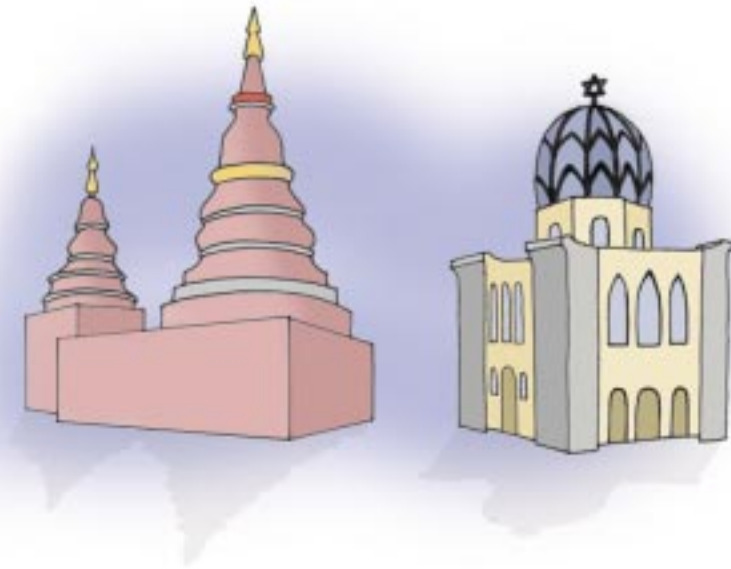
Faith communities can help people to believe in God and to find a place where they are accepted and loved. Some people go to the church, the temple, the synagogue or the mosque. They go there to worship God. People enjoy meeting together to pray, to sing songs and to learn about their religion. They also can enjoy friendships with other people.

Some churches, temples, synagogues or mosques are better than others about making people feel welcome.

Some people don't belong to a faith community but they still believe in God.

Steven and Michael's Story

Michael meets Steven at the door of the church every Sunday. Steven has Down's syndrome. They are the best of friends. Steven sits beside Michael during the service and they sing and pray together. As soon as the band strikes up Michael and Steven stand together, clap their hands and have a great time enjoying the music. Michael and Steven enjoy being together in church.



Some things that you could do

- You might want to talk with your friends about what you believe and hear about what they believe.
- If you believe in God you might want to pray to him every day.
- You might have gone to a mosque, church, temple or synagogue in the past and you might want to go again. You might want to join a faith community. You might want to ask someone you trust to help you.

Music, pictures and stories

Some people like to listen to music, look at pictures or listen to stories.

Some people like to play music, make up songs, draw or paint pictures or tell stories about things that are important to them. They want to have the opportunity to use their talents and skills.

When we create things we feel we have done something that is special.



Tom's Story

Tom and his mum use music to tell people how they are feeling. His mum plays the guitar and he sings. Tom makes up lots of songs. Singing makes him feel happy.

Some things you could do

- Take time to listen to music that you especially like.
- Go to an art gallery and see what pictures you enjoy. You might want to ask some one to go with you.
- Do a drawing or a painting that shows the way you feel.
- Make up a song that tells people about the things that make you happy or sad.
- Speak to your support worker, a family member or a friend about joining a group in your area where you can go do things like painting, telling stories or making music?
- If you cannot find a group like this, speak to your support worker or friends about starting a group where you tell stories or make music or paint.

What is spirituality?

The things we have been looking at in this booklet are things which people with learning disabilities have said make up their spirituality. They describe spirituality as a friendship with someone who makes them feel wanted and accepted and gives them a purpose for their lives. Some people like beautiful pictures or music or being in the countryside. For some people God is important. Each person will have their own ideas about what is important to them.

This booklet has shown some of the ways in which spirituality can make a difference and help people discover what is important in their lives. This booklet might have made you think of new things that you would like to do.



What support do I need?

You might want to talk to someone about the things that have been talked about in this booklet. You might want to tell your:

- group
- personal friend
- family member
- staff member.

It might be difficult to find someone who has the time to talk about these things. People might not feel comfortable discussing some of these things. Ask your support worker or a family member to help you contact the right people. This may take time.



Finding out more

You could ask in your public library about clubs and other groups that you might like to join. You could also ask about churches, mosques, synagogues and temples near you.

Circles Network could help you to set up a Circle of Support with your friends. Contact:

Circles Network
Potfords Dam Farm
Coventry Road
Cawston
Rugby
CV23 9JP

Telephone 01788 816671
Email: information.circles@btconnect.com
Website: www.circlesnetwork.org.uk

Action for Leisure can give you advice and information about leisure activities. Contact:

Action for Leisure
P.O Box 9
West Molesey
Surrey
KT8 1WT

Telephone 020 8783 0173
Email: enquiries@actionforleisure.org.uk
Website: www.actionforleisure.org.uk