

## **Chaplaincy and Mental Health: Reviewing the Evidence**

# **Educational Strategies**

The goal of these educational strategies is to empower chaplains with basic knowledge to respond compassionately to the mental health dimension of care across all care settings.

### **Strategy One: Develop Mental Health Literacy**

### **Strategy Two: First Person Accounts**

### **Strategy Three: Reflection on Stigma, Personal Experiences and Values**

### **Strategy Four: Theological and Faith Resources**

## **Strategy One: Develop Mental Health Literacy**

As chaplains build mental health literacy, the following websites offer credible resources for basic education across a range of mental health topics. These recommended resources include basic trainings and resources related to suicide prevention and the role of trauma in mental health.

#### **Mental Health Basics**

- [NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness » Mental Health Conditions](#)
- [SAMHSA: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration » What is Mental Health](#)

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- [NIMH: National Institute of Mental Health » Health Topics](#)
- [NIDA: National Institute on Drug Abuse » Research Topics](#)

### Organizations and Trainings

[Mental Health First Aid](#) is a skills-based training course that teaches participants about mental health and substance-use issues. This program aims to increase mental health literacy, reduce stigma, and improve overall well-being of individuals and communities.

[Pathways To Promise](#) is an interfaith, mental health organization that promotes a holistic approach to mental health that incorporates both clinical and spiritual perspectives. Pathways to Promise also offers information and support for faith communities in creating welcoming environments for individuals with mental illness.

### Suicide Prevention Resources

[LivingWorks](#) provides trainings on suicide prevention and intervention

[Upstream Suicide Prevention](#) series of educational videos designed for an audience of VA and military chaplains, though offer useful information for other chaplains as well.

[Faith. Hope. Life. | National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) Faith-specific resources for suicide prevention

### Resources Related to Trauma

Two classic works that explore trauma and its impact on health are Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* and Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*.

[Crisis And Trauma Resource Institute](#) offers training materials related to trauma and mental health, with some resources available for free.

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### Strategy Two: First Person Accounts

First-person accounts offer insight into the lived experiences of people impacted by mental illness. Engaging these accounts is a humanizing approach that nurtures compassion, challenges stigma, and acknowledges the expertise borne from the firsthand experience of living with mental illness. These narratives are particularly relevant for chaplains as they emphasize personal strengths and ways of making meaning, rather than focusing primarily on symptoms and clinical diagnoses. Chaplains will likely find these accounts personally and spiritually meaningful, equipping them to attentively listen to and empathetically support the narratives and journeys of others affected by mental illness.

#### First Person Accounts: Digital Resources

- [Watch Psychosis First Person Accounts | SPIRIT Lab at the University of Washington](#)
- [The struggle of mental health | TED Talks](#) (video collection features several first-person accounts of mental illness)
- [Personal Stories | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [Live Through This](#) (a collection of stories of suicide attempt survivors across the United States)

#### First Person Accounts: Books of Interest

- [Suggested Reading | Deconstructing Stigma](#)
- [50 Must-Read Memoirs About Mental Illness | Book Riot](#)

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## **Strategy Three: Reflection on Stigma, Personal Experiences and Values**

Chaplains' ability to respond compassionately to the mental health dimension of care depends on the crucial task of challenging the stigma surrounding mental illness. Chaplains can develop the ability to respond compassionately by reflecting on their personal and family experiences and their beliefs around mental health. This type of self-reflection will be familiar to chaplains as an important component of chaplain education and professional practice. The following questions, though not exhaustive, serve as prompts for chaplain self-reflection, including on the language employed when discussing behavioral health problems and experiences. Thoughtful and deliberate use of language is a pivotal step in combating stigma, and the recommended resources include avenues for familiarizing oneself with preferred language for addressing concerns related to mental health.

### **Reflection on Personal and Family Experiences**

- What are your own personal and family experiences around mental health concerns?
- How do you think about the mental health challenges that you and your family have experienced and what emotions do you associate with these challenges?
- How have you responded when you or someone close to you have experienced a change in their mental health?

### **Reflection on Personal, Cultural and Spiritual Beliefs**

- What beliefs do you hold about addiction? suicide? about individuals' personal responsibility for maintaining their health?
- What do you believe about the causes of mental illness and substance use disorder? What do you believe about how people recover from these problems? How do you understand the experiences of people who don't get better?

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- What beliefs do you hold about the spiritual lives of people with mental illness?

### Reflection on Faith/Spiritual Tradition and Beliefs

- What have the religious, spiritual or other communities that you have been part of believed or taught about addiction and mental illness?
- What faith, spiritual or theological resources do you draw from within your own faith tradition that support your provision of care to individuals with mental health problems? What resources and perspectives exist within your tradition around disability, illness, or dealing with spiritual struggles?

### Reflection on Professional Experiences

- Do I avoid or fear providing Spiritual Care to individuals or in settings impacted by mental health problems?
- What experiences have I had in providing Spiritual Care to individuals with serious mental illness and how do I feel about those experiences?
- What are my beliefs about the appropriateness of Spiritual Care and its benefits for people with addiction and mental health problems?
- What are my attitudes toward people who routinely seek care in my context for problems related to addiction or mental illness?
- What language do I employ to describe mental health challenges, and what beliefs and values are reflected in this language?

### Resources Related to Stigma and Language

- [Educational video on how language impacts mental health care](#)
- [Words Matter: Preferred Language for Talking About Addiction | National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\)](#)
- [Words Matter: Suicide Language Guide](#)
- [Use Person-First Language to Reduce Stigma - Mental Health First Aid](#)

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### Strategy Four: Theological and Faith Resources

One of chaplains' core professional practices is to reflect on our work through the lens of our specific religious or spiritual traditions. These traditions offer unique viewpoints and resources that chaplains can draw from to provide compassionate support for individuals impacted by mental health concerns. The recommended resources provided below offer opportunities for chaplains to engage in exploration within the content of their own faith tradition. Additionally, these resources encompass educational materials aimed at clergy and faith leaders to provide support that is attuned to the emotional and psychological challenges confronted by those in their care.

Books
Address, Richard F., ed. <i>Caring for the Soul-R'fuat HaNefesh: A Mental Health Resource and Study Guide</i> . Union of Hebrew Congregations Press, 2003.
Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, Ed Shoener, and John P Dolan. <i>Responding to Suicide: A Pastoral Handbook for Catholic Leaders</i> . Ave Maria Press, 2020.
Capps, Donald. <i>Fragile connections: Memoirs of mental illness for pastoral care professionals</i> . Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014.
Johnson, W. Brad, and William L. Johnson. <i>The minister's guide to psychological disorders and treatments</i> . Taylor & Francis, 2023.
Kehoe, Nancy. <i>Wrestling with our inner angels: faith, mental illness, and the journey to wholeness</i> . John Wiley & Sons, 2009.
Mason, Karen. <i>Preventing Suicide: A Handbook for Pastors, Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors</i> . InterVarsity Press, 2014.
Rosmarin, David H. <i>The Connections Paradigm: Ancient Jewish Wisdom for Modern Mental Health</i> . Templeton, 2021.

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Rosmarin, David H. *Handbook of Torah and Mental Health*. Mosaica, 2019.

Roukema, Richard W. *Counseling for the soul in distress: What every religious counselor should know about emotional and mental illness*. Psychology Press, 2003.

Stanford, Matthew S. *Grace for the afflicted: A clinical and biblical perspective on mental illness*. InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Swinton, John. *Spirituality and mental health care: Rediscovering a 'forgotten' dimension*. Jessica Kingsley, 2001.

Tan, Siang-Yang. *ACT for clergy and pastoral counselors: Using acceptance and commitment therapy to bridge psychological and spiritual care*. New Harbinger Publications, 2016.

### Digital Resources

[Institute for Muslim Mental Health](#)

[Resource Directory - Institute for Muslim Mental Health](#)

[National Catholic Partnership on Disability](#)

[NAMI FaithNet | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (an interfaith resource network of NAMI members, friends, clergy and congregations of all faith traditions who wish to encourage faith communities who are welcoming and supportive of persons and families living with mental illness.)

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