

# POSITION STATEMENTS

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## SPIRITUALITY

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People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities<sup>1</sup> have the right to choose their own expressions of spirituality, to practice those beliefs and expressions and to participate in the faith community of their choice or other spiritual activities. They also have a right to choose not to participate in religious or spiritual activity.

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## ISSUE

Spiritual or religious activities are seldom recognized as an important aspect of life or included in individual planning for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Some individuals may need assistance to participate in their chosen spiritual activities or faith communities.

Individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families also face a mixed response from faith-based communities, even though many faith communities have established model programs and strategies for including people with disabilities. Spiritual resources and faith communities are an underused resource in the community for people to exercise choice, develop relationships and social networks, demonstrate respect for cultural and family backgrounds, and serve others.

## POSITION

Spirituality, spiritual growth and religious expression that respect a person's history, tradition and current preferences are rights that must be honored by service systems and faith-based communities, as should the choice not to participate.

- Spirituality is an important part of human experience that may be expressed both through religious practice and through other spiritual activities which carry personal meaning and reflect the person's values;

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<sup>1</sup> Intellectual Disability (ID) is a lifelong condition where significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior emerge during the developmental period (before adulthood).

Developmental Disabilities (DD), first defined in 1975 federal legislation now known as "The DD Act", are a group of lifelong conditions that emerge during the developmental period and result in some level of functional limitation in learning, language, communication, cognition, behavior, socialization, or mobility. The most common DD conditions are intellectual disability, Down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, fetal alcohol syndrome, and fragile X syndrome.

The acronym "IDD" is used to describe a group that includes either people with both ID and another DD or a group that includes people with ID or another DD. The supports that people with IDD need to meet their goals vary in intensity from intermittent to pervasive.

- Supports and accommodations, such as transportation and easy-to-read materials, must be provided as needed to facilitate the individual's full participation in spiritual or religious activities of her/his choice;
- Supports and programs should be age-appropriate and inclusive;
- Faith communities should be encouraged to build their capacity to support and welcome individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families, and should be assisted in such efforts;
- Self-advocates, families, advocacy organizations, service providers, and faith communities should work together to develop training and other resources on the inclusion and support of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families; and
- People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities bring their own unique spiritual gifts and benefits to spiritual and religious communities, just as people without disabilities do.

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