

The place of spiritual beliefs in my support work

Some years ago, and I don't remember the context, I was asked why I haven't acknowledged my Faith on my website.

These are my reasons.

I haven't stepped forward about my Faith in relation to my counselling practice firstly because I actually haven't had formal Christian counselling training and I don't want to make any false claims.

Secondly, the focus of my support work since 2003 has been the experiences of people married to or in a long-term relationship with an individual on the Autism Spectrum. This affects people regardless of gender, race, religion or any other variation and counselling or support needs to meet people where they're at first and foremost. Applying matters of faith to these situations actually perpetuates the masking and scripting that is already taking place and can add to the spiritual bypassing that often happens in dysfunctional Christian situations, thus preventing relationships being negotiated truthfully into growing and flourishing entities.

Thirdly, I acknowledge that it is hard not to include my Faith when I write because it holds much deep meaning for me, but the right context is important for this to be appropriate.

For now, I will share the following. To this day I continue to hold a lot of pain in my heart in relation to my experience for many years, that of being isolated and disbelieved and misjudged by my church family who I trusted, who were the only community I knew. This does affect me a lot, and I believe what my children and I experienced was in contradiction to what Jesus role-modelled for Christians.

I am reluctant to be too "out there" about my Faith as well because, on the whole, I do find that Christians can tend to be less accepting of people than non-Christians, and in fact can be quite abrasive and sometimes severe. I have noticed time and time again how Christians will initially analyse new people they meet and weigh them up according to their own Christian values, and then accept them if they measure up or have values in common. I actually reject this approach.

I believe it's important to accept people in the same way Christ did, and meet them where they're at and remember that they're human beings first. Faith and values can come into an interaction once those first steps of rapport are built, but I think Christians often do it the wrong way around. Like anyone we meet, we don't have to go on and become friends with those we have little in common with, but it is important to always be approachable and genuinely accepting.

Additional to my private counselling, I have also worked in a rural health and community services setting and I admired the attitudes of the people I worked with, none of whom were publicly of "Faith". These wonderful people recognised the right of every human being to be heard and supported, and they did all in their power to make this happen. It was a privilege to work with them, and quite eye-opening. For them, the human needs come first. Like the Scriptures talk about a cup of water

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being given in Jesus' Name. If this was a Church or Christian organisation, then the opportunities would follow for spiritual support, but people need to first be safe, warm, fed, and have some dignity as a human being. Matters of Faith should only ever be offered with consent anyway, never forced or imposed.

It is my observation that many churches and Christians can sadly hold some very unfortunate attitudes.

In my counselling, I approach every client as a valuable human being who needs to be heard and supported. If a client is a Christian and wants to discuss things from a Christian perspective I will be comfortable to participate in this. Otherwise, my approach is based on my ongoing general training and professional development as a Counsellor and I respect all cultures, Faiths and preferences.

Carol Grigg, July 2012, edited May 2026