

Spiritual Care for Children Living in Specialized Settings: Breathing Underwater

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Sal was a fifteen-year-old Hispanic boy who ended up in an institution for children after a drug deal/robbery went bad. Mike was abandoned by his mother as a young child and left a ward of the state. Kelly had experienced rape, abuse and suicide attempts by the time she was a teenager.

These may not be their real names, but any social worker, minister or other professional who works at a children's institution or social service agency will recognize the circumstances are real and repeated every day. Friesen, an ordained minister, has worked with such children at St. Joseph's Home for Children in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for more than twenty years and offers a practical guide on how to offer spiritual nourishment within this context. He compares their lives to being swept under the water and contends that spiritual care is like teaching them to breathe in an environment that is unlikely to change.

Arguing that this aspect of care need not, and should not, be left entirely to a staff pastor, he shows how any professional can incorporate such care into a program.

Beginning with a review of the four biggest, most common, organized religions-Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism-he outlines common themes on suffering. He moves into a discussion of spirituality's place in American culture, and especially in the culture of abuse shared by most of these children.

Personal stories on children like Sal, Mike and Kelly provide a springboard for targeting the spiritual issues and struggles they face. Friesen offers practical suggestions and reflection exercises that workers can put into practice. He also addresses the ten most common questions asked by professionals concerned about adding a spiritual component. Does spiritual care go against the separation of Church and State and what are the boundaries? - is question number one. Once answered, he guides readers through designing a spiritual-care program, the important issues at each step of childhood and finally, offers three assessment models.

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