“I’m Going to Church Anyway”
The Impact of Spirituality on Parental Grief,

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Bereaved parents have spiritual needs

Spirituality helps parents find meaning in loss.

Spiritual coping strategies improve mental health outcomes among bereaved parents.
Study Aims

To describe the impact of spirituality on bereavement for parents who have lost children to cancer

To evaluate how bereaved parents’ spiritual journeys impact grief and meaning making
Methods

29 parents; 1-3 years after the loss of their child to cancer
Semi-structured interview specific to bereavement coping strategy
Did not specifically query spirituality
Completed grief-related questionnaires
Interviews were transcribed then coded using content analysis technique; spirituality codes were noted
Spirituality codes were categorized as having positive, negative, or neutral valence
Valence of Spiritual Experiences

29 Transcripts

- 27 with full questionnaire data

Overall Experience
- 13 Positive
- 3 Negative
- 11 Neutral

62 Codes
- 58% positive
- 23% negative
- 19% neutral

224 Codings
- 79% positive
- 12% negative
- 9% neutral
Spirituality Before and After Death

224 Codings

Before Death (n=114)
- 91% positive
- 2% negative
- 7% neutral

After Death (n=110)
- 66% positive
- 23% negative
- 11% neutral
# Representative Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Codes (n=224)</th>
<th>Transcripts (n=29)</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven</td>
<td>29 (12%)</td>
<td>15 (52%)</td>
<td>“We’re one day closer to seeing her again.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>24 (11%)</td>
<td>10 (34%)</td>
<td>“You know, I still, every night, I say my prayers, um, I come to finish with my prayers and um, I come to finish with my prayers and talk to (Child).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prayers not answered</td>
<td>7 (3%)</td>
<td>5 (17%)</td>
<td>“God answers your prayers, and… we prayed, prayers weren’t answered… what happened?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why God?</td>
<td>6 (3%)</td>
<td>5 (17%)</td>
<td>“But, you know, at the end of the day, I still wonder why God saves one child but didn’t save (Child).”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Faith is a struggle</td>
<td>5 (2%)</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
<td>“As far as faith… that’s been a struggle since she passed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargaining with God</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>“Take me instead of him.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Impact of Valence of Spirituality on Grieving

Integration of Stressful Life Experiences Scale

- Positive
  - Mean Score: [VALUE]*
  - p = 0.02

- Negative
  - Mean Score: [VALUE]*

- Neutral
  - Mean Score: 19.7

Parental Grief Questionnaire

- Positive
  - Mean Score: [VALUE]*
  - p = 0.009

- Negative
  - Mean Score: [VALUE]*

- Neutral
  - Mean Score: 30.5
Conclusions

Many bereaved parents rely on spirituality to cope during their children’s illnesses, death and bereavement.

Parents’ experiences with spirituality are complicated by their children’s deaths.

Positive spiritual experiences in bereavement are associated with increased meaning-making and decreased symptoms of prolonged grief among bereaved parents.
Clinical Implications

Clinicians must recognize the importance of spirituality in coping and provide spiritual support (either personally or via other team members).

Many bereaved parents are comforted by beliefs in seeing their children in the afterlife and the belief that they maintain a connection with their children.

Families for whom spirituality is not an important coping mechanism may still benefit from exploring ongoing connectedness with their deceased children.