

Encountering a Divine Presence Critical for Healing

The positive effects of spirituality on health can be difficult to measure. But a new study finds that teens who encountered a “divine presence,” during treatment for substance abuse had a greater likelihood of kicking the habit, showed better social behavior and became less self-centered.

Researchers at The University of Akron, Case Western Reserve University and Baylor University, looked at the spiritual habits of nearly 200 substance-dependent kids from ages 14-18 who were in a court-ordered treatment program at a residential facility in Ohio. Most of the teens were marijuana-dependent.

The emphasis on spirituality and a connection to a higher power made a significant and positive impact on the teens. The Ohio facility uses the 12-step recovery program of Alcoholics Anonymous, along with cognitive and motivational therapies. Researchers made a point to clarify that “spiritual experiences,” were not bound to any particular religious beliefs.

Study co-author, Dr. Matthew T. Lee, professor and chair of sociology at The University of Akron, said the positive impact of spirituality on addiction was tangible.

“The key message is that changes in spiritual experiences are associated with better outcomes, including lower toxicology, reduced self-centeredness, and higher levels of helping others,” Lee said in a news release.

Study leader Dr. Byron R. Johnson, a social sciences professor at Baylor, said teens in the program also made forward progress on their spiritual journey during their time in treatment.

“Although about a third of the teens self-identified as agnostic or atheist at intake, two-thirds of them claimed a spiritual identity at discharge, a most remarkable shift,” Dr. Johnson said.

This is a great reminder of the power of spiritual practice and connection to heal and transform and how hungry our young people are to connect with a divine presence!

Prayer: May we help the young people in our congregation and community connect to the Divine Presence as a source of healing and hope in their lives.

Wishing you joy and good health,
Mary Bohlen RN
SJParishNurse@comcast.net