



Retirement Community

A Model for Using the Spiritual Literacy DVDs with a Small Group of Seniors

About This Model: At the Linus Oakes Retirement Center in Oregon, 20 seniors, average age 84, are meeting weekly to watch the Spiritual Literacy DVDs and find ways to incorporate the alphabet qualities into their daily lives. This model includes some moving stories about what these elders have learned and shared with their community.

Group Makeup: This group consists of 20 residents at the Linus Oakes Retirement Center, home to 150 elderly residents with an average age of 84. They meet for one hour once a week.

Goal of Group: The staff of the retirement center wanted to add to their activity calendar a spiritual but not necessarily religious program to their offerings. They sought to build the program around material appropriate to a wide range of spiritual and religious belief systems. The staff's goal is to "facilitate awareness and appreciation of our religious diversity and to provide a focus on spiritual practices."

Participants were invited to a weekly gathering called "Practicing Everyday Spirituality," described as a time for reflection, discussion, and planning how to incorporate spiritual qualities into daily practice, and as an opportunity "to honor the sacred in you through an ongoing activity."

Preparation: The administrator of the retirement center and the director of activities lead the group each week. Preparation includes screening the DVDs and reviewing the material at the pages devoted to the various practices at SpiritualityandPractice.com.

Group Process: At the first session each person shared why they came and what had attracted them. They also were invited to declare what they hoped to get from the group and what they hoped to give to the group during the weekly sessions. For example,

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one reason for participating was this one: “As I approach the last years of my life I have questions, but I need help unlocking the answers that I know are within me. I want to do this work before I die.”

The group then watched the first episode of the *Spiritual Literacy* DVDs on attention and talked about how they could incorporate that quality into their daily practice for the week.

The following sessions each begin with a 15-minute check-in about what new learnings came up for the participants during the week, what surprised them, what felt right, what they wanted to keep moving forward on. They then watch the next DVD and spend the final 15 minutes talking about what specific triggers could help them practice that quality in the coming week.

Some Examples of Group Insights:

- “During the session on the Forgiveness DVD, one participant told of how difficult her relationship with her mother had been, and that she was ready to do some healing work around that. She had taken a photograph of her mother out of storage and hung it on the wall in her bedroom. She started with a simple greeting, ‘Hello mother’ and as time progressed a dialogue ensued and she was able to heal some of the wounds long after her mother’s death. One day, she even brought the photograph into the coordinator’s office to introduce her mother to her. She did so with love and forgiveness shining in her eyes.”
- “For the session on the Imagination DVD, the participants were invited to bring an object that sparked their imagination and a small altar was set up in the room where the group gathered. The table was graced with an oil painting of a street in a small, medieval Italian town and the group member explained that she had found peace and calm in wandering up and down that street, going in and out of shops and visiting with those who lived there. Another member brought a Foo Dog and shared how it had been a gift from an Aunt and seeing it both transported her back in time to when she had received this gift and also to wonder about how the ancient Chinese had created such a mythical creature. On the altar, there were also candles and stones and seed pods. And there was a small square of beautiful marbled pink and purple paper that had been turned on the diagonal and in lovely handwriting it was inscribed with only two words, ANYTHING and EVERYTHING.”

A Sample Group Practice:

“During our conversation on Compassion, the group agreed to enter the community dining room each evening with a mindful intention to make it a place of joy and inclusivity. Since that session, the group has made a daily visit to the kitchen while the evening meal is being prepared to share gratitude with those involved in creating their meal. The group thanks the soil, the sun, the rain and the wind; those who grow the food, those who broker it and those who transport it to us. The group asks for special blessings on the cooks and servers and also those who wash the dishes. During the visits, the food service staff has stopped their work and turned their bodies towards the group. Their faces beam

during the time they are 'blessed' and they return to their work with renewed passion for creating the meals that will nourish not only the bodies but the hearts and souls of those they serve."

Benefits of Participating in the Group:

"Group members share that the DVD works better than medication at helping them to relax, to center, even to relieve pain, and that they emerge from the hour together feeling more peaceful, aware, energized, and valued. They feel they leave the room with an increased state of well being.

"The group has grown closer through learning, openness, and acceptance of each other. One of the joys for me, as the coordinator, is seeing how the group is creating the world they want to live in through this active approach to spirituality."