



Spiritual Direction Guidelines

A resource recommended by the



**Spiritual Direction
Network**

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www.spidirnetwork.org.uk

Retreat Association Spiritual Direction Guidelines © 2016, revised 2017, 2019
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The story behind the Guidelines

These guidelines are a resource issued by a working party of those involved in spiritual direction training. They are supported by the Retreat Association following their affirmation and adoption by a National Consultation for those involved in Spiritual Direction Training in February 2015 organised by the Association. They are not prescriptive and are intended to be more servant than master. The vision behind developing these guidelines is a desire to promote greater consistency of practice across different training schemes and Christian traditions. It celebrates the strength of ecumenical goodwill and co-operation that already exists in this field.

Adapting the Guidelines for your own use

You are welcome to adapt these for your own context. We would be grateful if you could let us know if you have used the guidelines for your own purposes and for your feedback, including implementation in practice.

(Please acknowledge any alterations or additions that you make to the original document and include a reference to the original, which can be found at www.retreats.org.uk/spiritualdirectionguidelines)

Who these Guidelines are for:

- Individual spiritual directors and supervisors
- Those involved in training spiritual directors
- Those involved in the allocation and referral of spiritual directors
- Those with oversight of spiritual direction training and provision
- Those with oversight of safeguarding

Suggested context of use:

The Guidelines may be used in the following contexts:

1. A reference point for reviewing practice for:
 - those who hold training – considering the course content
 - an individual spiritual director – reflecting on their daily practice
 - a supervisor – ensuring best practice in a supervisee
2. A reference point for local based training initiatives
3. For denominations and local training schemes to enable greater consistency of practice

The Guidelines

A. What is spiritual direction?

A Relationship: the ministry of Christian spiritual direction involves relationships between God, the person offering this ministry and the person receiving this ministry. In these Guidelines 'director' is used to describe the one offering the ministry and 'directee' for the person receiving. The terms 'director' and 'directee' have been used, while acknowledging that they are problematic. Other terms sometimes used are 'accompanier' and 'companion'.

- The role of the director is to help the directee focus on their relationship with God and so enable their personal vocation (to become the person they were created to be) to grow and be better lived out through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.
- The directee's life is lived in relationship to God, creation, the world, local and faith communities. Spiritual direction seeks to enable the directee to reflect on the dynamic interaction between their experiences of prayer and life, and theology and spirituality.
- The director has significant potential power and responsibility which should be exercised with great care to ensure the intention of the relationship and the autonomy of the directee are not undermined. This involves care in the use of language, in the expression of moral judgements and in the handling of decision-making.
- The director will be offering this ministry as part of their expression of their personal vocation and within the context of their own spiritual life in relationship to their faith community and their own director.

The Focus

The focus of the director is primarily on the inner life of the directee, and attention to this in the context of the experience of life and spiritual activities rather than as a moral guardian or confessor. The director will seek to:

- listen discerningly to what is shared
- respond in ways that are conducive to the directee's discernment of God in their life
- offer insights and perspectives that are helpful to the directee in their communication and response to God and living this out in their life

B. What is the difference between spiritual direction and counselling?

Like counselling, therapy and coaching, spiritual direction rests on careful listening to the 'client'. All these helping ministries place value on the confidentiality of the relationship and may lead to increased personal wellbeing and a more fruitful and productive life. What makes spiritual direction distinctive is its focus on listening and responding to the Holy Spirit. While spiritual direction may help someone come to terms with disabling low self-esteem, or help someone make a career choice, or provide a supportive space to work through how to act within a difficult relationship, none of these fruits are its primary focus.

Underpinning a spiritual direction relationship is the understanding that both parties seek the same thing: namely to be open to the Spirit's forming and guiding for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Spiritual Direction enables people to notice, hear and discern the movement of God within their daily experiences, helping them as they seek to draw closer to God and to respond to his work in their lives. The focus of the interaction is between the directee and God. Counselling, Therapy and Life Coaching enable people to work on thoughts, emotions and behaviours that impact their lives and relationships, generally in a more goal-centred and problem-solving way. The focus of the interaction is between the therapist and client.

C. The nature of the relationship of the director and directee

The relationship is based upon trust and mutual respect within the awareness that both director and directee are within the gracious love of God.

Common and significant areas of exploration in the relationship will include:

- personal experience and inner (emotional and spiritual) reactions to that experience
- discerning reflection on that experience, seeking to enable in the directee growing discernment of the movements and leading of God's Spirit in their life
- the practice of prayer and the ongoing development of spiritual life, sources of further insights and perspectives, other ways in which their journey might be explored and supported

D. Core skills and qualities of a spiritual director

These skills and qualities are aspired to, and a spiritual director would be committed to continuing development in these areas.

The core skills and qualities of a spiritual director listed below should make it clear that spiritual direction is not about being directive, but a work of great humility in the service of transparency to the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: The primary requirement is that the person should have an ongoing relationship with God and a commitment to deepening that relationship. It is essential that any person offering the ministry of spiritual direction should themselves meet regularly with a spiritual director.

Listening: A person who shows themselves able to listen on many levels and pick up deeper resonances ('holy listening'), and is able to foster the directee's skills of articulating their thoughts and feelings.

Restraint: A person who is able to hold themselves in check and hold the safe, welcoming and hospitable space in which the spiritual direction conversation can develop. This affects listening, holding boundaries and handling the power balance in the direction conversation with integrity.

Clarity: A person who can enable clarity in establishing agreement with the directee on the length and frequency of sessions and the process for evaluating and terminating the relationship, e.g. contracting, negotiating to establish clarity of relationship, process and expectation.

Self-awareness and humility: A person who recognises their own strengths and limitations and when to refer, e.g. to a counsellor. A person who holds the awareness that God is at the centre of the conversation and that they must step back, but who is also aware of their own worth.

Able to say 'No': A person who does not need to be needed and is aware of the dangers of mutual dependency. A person who can distinguish between being a 'soul friend' and a friend; the closeness and mutuality of friendship militates against the objectivity which is necessary for the direction relationship to serve the directee's spiritual growth.

Learning: A person who never stops being a learner ('beginner's mind') and is open to new perspectives. A person who is willing to participate in ongoing training.

Discernment: A person who enables the directee to learn the skill of discernment and exercise it themselves, primarily through modelling good discernment: a mutual process of waiting on the Holy Spirit and sharpening awareness of the moral and spiritual significance of the directee's inner processes. A person who already practises good discernment with regard to their own spiritual life.

Accountable: A person who models transparency, integrity and accountability by participating in supervision.

Communion: A person who shows awareness that the spiritual direction relationship is in service of the wider church and wider world.

Difference: A person who is able to be with otherness, variety, uniqueness and difference – e.g. gender, age, race, culture, sexuality, theology – including the recognition that to get to know another involves acknowledging ignorance, and preparedness to work at understanding another's life and experience.

Openness: A person open to the surprise of God, the freedom of the Spirit, who blows wherever [she wills].

Many of these skills are essential for all listeners, while some are particular to spiritual direction, specifically those skills relating to awareness of God in the conversation: 1, 5 and 8.

E. Some key areas in formation of spiritual directors

The following are some of the key areas of experience, knowledge and skills needed in the formation of spiritual directors:

- attending to their own spiritual life – including regular prayer, reflection and spiritual direction
- ability to facilitate an environment where humility, openness and embracing of process is fostered
- skills in listening
- practice – e.g. triads
- formation in a reflective discernment process
- experience of life and the spiritual dimension of life
- some knowledge of the spiritual traditions, theology and psychology
- knowledge of good practice

F. Good practice guidelines

It is suggested that, in respect of good practice, spiritual directors will:

- themselves be in receipt of regular spiritual direction
- take their ongoing training and development seriously, availing themselves of opportunities to further develop their skills and understanding
- receive regular supervision to help them reflect on and develop their practice
- not (ordinarily) relate to the directee in a separate context (for example as a friend, colleague or supervisor). This enables the directee to be free in sharing whatever they wish and the director to respond with objectivity and balance; it also avoids any confusion of roles
- keep matters shared between the director and directee as confidential unless a legal obligation is involved. Other disclosures may be made in certain cases of serious harm in agreement with the directee
- have knowledge of, and abide by, local and national legal and ethical guidelines – for example in relation to safeguarding, and data protection. (Find the SpiDir Network *Data Privacy Notice* and *Safeguarding Contact* on our website: www.spidernetwork.org.uk)
- reflect on ongoing practice and vocation
- ensure there is clarity about the nature of boundaries and confidentiality in the relationship
- at all times act in a way that respects the personal and spiritual integrity and wellbeing of the directee. Have a contingency plan in place in the event of incapacity or death
- Be informed on legal liabilities and ensure they have taken appropriate legal cover

G. Suggestions for implementing the Guidelines:

1. Hold a discussion event for spiritual directors to reflect together on these questions:

- How am I with the definitions of direction and directors offered here?
- To what extent do the Guidelines express what I am already doing?
- To what extent do the Guidelines introduce new material? Are there particular areas I need to address in my own practice?

The list holder/facilitator/network co-ordinator can then offer specific information regarding any known diocesan (or other) requirements about which spiritual directors will need to be aware. It will be important to stress that the guidelines are intended as a supportive rather than restrictive structure, and that the Holy Spirit will continue to work through and bless directors' ministry in creative freedom. The network is the main place of accountability for this ministry providing supervision groups, training events and mutual support.

2. After the event, a review of current practice could be made, allowing directors to opt-in to the new guidelines, with written agreement to abide by them and possibly a structure for regular review (annual return).

These guidelines are intended to be a working document and will be revised regularly following feedback from those who use them.