

religion. In a few instances, such as in the Mennonite and Amish communities, religion is the basis for a common way of life that determines where the children are raised and their lifestyle. It is also important to remember that families that do not subscribe to a particular religion or that are atheist also have beliefs and convictions about family, the surrounding world, and life in general that influence the children in these families.

Religious Beliefs

Religious and spiritual dimensions are among the most important influences in many people's lives (Fig. 2-8). The terms *religion* and *spirituality* are often used interchangeably, but this is incorrect. According to Mercer (2006), spirituality is “concerned with the deepest levels of human experiencing, the places of deepest ... meaning in and for our lives.” According to Yates (2011), spirituality is “a dynamic and personal experiential process.” For children in particular, spirituality possesses a relational consciousness; it concerns the child in relation to the source of power (God, Allah) that gives meaning to the relationship, other people, the surrounding world, and within oneself (Mercer, 2006). Religion, on the other hand, is a particular and culturally influenced representation of human spirituality. Children and teens who are supported in their spiritual expression can develop a foundation for understanding social relationships, making lifestyle decisions, and demonstrating resilience. Spirituality and religion can also have deleterious effects on children's health if preventive health care or treatment of health conditions is discouraged or if it promotes or allows abusive behavior (Mueller, 2010). Nurses promote holistic nursing care through an integration of spiritual and psychosocial care. The care focuses on activities that support a person's system of beliefs and worship, such as praying, reading religious materials, and performing religious rituals. In addition, it means being attentive and open to children's unique spiritual experiences and insights. Mueller (2010) states, “Children are spiritual beings, but may be limited by adults' ability to understand them.” Unfortunately, as Mercer (2006) reports, “such insights may be dismissed as cute or the product of an overactive imagination.” Meeting the spiritual needs of both the child and the family can