

How to Comfort a Loved One When Death Is Near

People need help during the time of death. During the last hours of life, it is the family and cherished friends who are needed at the bedside to reassure, guide and support. The person who is close to death needs to be helped through this unknown, with loving touch, gentle words, and great tenderness. Those who wish to help need information to guide them. This is a private time and a time for tender intimacy, where the sharing of the heart can be communion, and farewells safely made.

We hope these guidelines will be of help to you:

YOU are important. Have courage and trust your own open heart and perceptive sensitivity to show you how to be present.

SPEAK gently, clearly, simply. Look into the eyes of the one who is ill, even if closed or there is unconsciousness, as though the eyes of your loved one were open.

ASSUME you are heard...there is a good chance you are.

TOUCH and be close. If possible, put the railing of the bed down, (you might wish to speak with a nurse about this beforehand).

SHARE your tears and the feelings that seem unacceptable...this is necessary for intimacy and allows the one who is ill to reach out to you.

HONOUR the integrity and dignity of this human being...and after death, honour the life that had been there by continuing to hold respect for the body now dead.

HELP in the physical care. Bathe your loved one's feet. Massage their hands. Gently hold their head and smooth their hair.

SAY the things you need to say, to make peace in the relationship: forgiveness, appreciation and understanding the greater purpose of your relationship. Share the specific things you remember...the playful, the inspiring, the ordinary. And remember, until the moment of death, there is only life.

ALWAYS attend to the person you know to be there, not what is going on with their body, the machines, and the monitors.

ENCOURAGE the one who is ill to let go of the fearful 'holding on'. In this there is less pain and stress, and the body can more easily respond to any medication or oxygen being given.

FORGIVE yourself if you do something that is not as helpful as you had hoped...it is difficult to know exactly what to do in this strange and alien time.

TAKE care of yourself and your own personal needs. Get hugs and support. Take time out for yourself, and for your family and friends in your life. Be there only for the length of time that you are able.

BRING beauty, warmth and life into the room with: favorite music, poetry, news, flowers, a blossom pinned to their pillow or taped to the bedrail, pets, children, a handmade blanket, a lovely scarf or soft material to stroke your loved one's cheek.

WHEN death is very close, be a guide. Help in the 'letting go' and help to ensure a sense of being safe in their passage. Use words such as: "You are safe and loved. You are very dear to me. It's very important to me to be here with you. I'm so glad I am here with you. You are very important to me. It's okay...it's alright to let go...we will be fine."

OCCASIONALLY there needs to be peace and quiet. Honour this as you continue to be very near with your love.

IF you watch very closely, the one who is nearing their end of life may give you clues on what is needed.

HAVE confidence in yourself. Know that you can make a profound difference in both this life and your own. Years later you will be so grateful that you did.

EACH member of the family and individual friend needs to have time alone at the bedside, and given permission to be there in his or her own unique and special way. This is true, both before and immediately after death...for tears and words are so important.

REMEMBER these words while present with your dying loved one: SAFE, LOVED, VALUED.