

Talking with someone who is dying



Knowing what to say to someone who is seriously ill or dying and when to say it can be difficult. Relationships are complex. Not all of these considerations will feel right for you. Some or all of the following information may be helpful for you.



Follow the dying person's lead.

If they are able, let them set the tone, the topic, and if they want to discuss dying.



Listen.

Listen for cues from the person and use gentle responses such as "Can you tell me more about that?" or "What do you need from me, others, or your health team."



"I love you" – You might consider saying it freely, saying it often or saying it with a touch.

Placing your hand gently on the person's hand, shoulder, or head can be a way of saying, "I am here; I love you. You are not alone."



Let the person know what they've meant to you and what you've learned from them.

You might consider a sincere and specific "thank you" to let them know.

If this feels right for you, address regrets by saying, "Please forgive me or I forgive you."

You and the dying person may benefit from hearing it.



Respond to the person's comments about symptoms or wonderings about death.

Let them know they are heard by asking: What are you experiencing? What do you think is happening? Can I make a list of questions you have for your health team?



Opportunities to say "Goodbye."

When the person is nearing death, if you are given a chance, try to end each conversation in a way that will be okay if it is the last.



If you weren't able to say "Goodbye".

It may help write a letter to the person after they died. The letter might include what the person meant to you and how the person's life impacted yours. You might wish to share this letter with a trusted friend or family member or choose to keep it private.



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