

How you may feel

A guide for carers and families



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It is hard to be with someone as they come to the end of their life. If your relationship has been good, you may have concerns about what life will be like when they are no longer with you. If your relationship has been difficult, you may have regrets about how things have been. Either way, it can help to talk with someone about what you are going through.

Be natural

This may be a new experience for you, and you may feel uncertain about how to be with the person you are visiting. The best advice is to be yourself, be natural. Dying is a natural process, so be the way you always have been with them. Talk about familiar things: things they enjoy, things you have done together, people you both know, good memories. It's okay to laugh with them or with others who are visiting; it's also okay to cry. Even though they may be in a very deep sleep, it seems people can hear and often do respond to things that are said. They are likely to find your presence comforting.

Spiritual preparation

Being with a person who is dying, we can be surprised by their inner strength. Their body may be weak, but their determination of spirit may be very strong. You may see something of the person you have always known. All people have spirit, which is seen in the things that are important to them. These may be relationships, or achievements, or their values, and they may like to be reminded of these things. For some people, religion is important, and having religious support is likely to help them die well.

Unfinished business

Even though a person is approaching the end of their life, they may still desire to reach some special anniversary or event. They may want to see someone close who is travelling a long way, or to know that a grandchild has married or graduated. In the waiting, the person may seem restless, and you may be concerned that they are troubled by something. Some relatives or friends feel that they need to give the person who is dying permission to go. But dying is a natural process, and it happens in its own time. It might feel hard to sit and wait with them, but it might help to accept that they will go when they are ready.

Look after yourself

It's impossible to know how long this experience will last. Most of us don't realise how emotionally demanding, if not exhausting, it can be. So don't expect too much of yourself, and be open to accepting help from others. Look after yourself. Try to eat meals rather than just snack, and think about taking rest away from the bedside. It is important to remember that, although we can do much to relieve any pain or discomfort, dying is a process that is beyond our ability to control. It wouldn't be unusual to feel that you could have done more. But don't be harsh with yourself. This is a normal part of grieving. You might take comfort from knowing that if things had been different you would have done things differently.

Thinking ahead

Everyone is different and the way they care for a dying person is particular to them. Some people can hardly bear the thought of what is to come. Others are very practical and want to think ahead. For some, this may involve thinking about a funeral. There is no correct way to deal with this. If you find it helps you, there is no reason why you shouldn't contact a funeral director.

Our support

When a loved one is dying it is likely to be a very difficult time. It can be hard to know what to do, what to say and how to cope.

Remember that we are always here to help and support you. Please do come and talk to us about how you are feeling and any concerns you may have.

Contact us

Princess Alice Hospice
West End Lane, Esher
Surrey KT10 8NA

Bereavement Support Team

01372 461805
bereavementsupport@pah.org.uk

www.pah.org.uk

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