

Do:

Remember that actually we are all dying. Conversations about dying can be held on an equal footing, with both participants talking about plans, fears and hopes for their own death and after.

Don't:

Fill silences: gaps in conversations can provide people with the opportunity to bring up subjects that are important to them.

Remember:

If you're worried about getting it wrong with someone you love, you can always discuss it first with someone else you respect and trust – a nurse, friend or a work colleague, for example.

"She said that it was such a relief that I'd brought it up – she said she'd wanted to raise the subject herself for a long time!"

Liz Manchester, who raised the subject of what happened after another stroke with her mum

No one relishes the prospect of talking about dying.

But if someone close to you is old or ill, it's a subject you may feel you want to raise soon.

There may be practical matters – care arrangements, wills - as well as emotional matters you want to address in preparation.

And you'd be absolutely right, because death happens to us all, and it's never too early to make provision.

It's such a hard subject to raise, because the last thing we want to do is hurt the feelings of someone close to us, or make them feel unwanted.

But there are ways of starting a conversation sensitively, which still make the other person feel cared for. The tips given here are not the only way – there are 101 ways people find to talk about dying. But if you find ways to break the silence, it can take a great weight off everyone's minds.

To find out how to get more help visit:
www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk
or call 0131 229 0538



Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief is working to make Scotland a place where there is more openness about death, dying and bereavement so that:

- People are aware of ways to live with death, dying and bereavement
- People feel better equipped to support each other through the difficult times that can come with death, dying and bereavement

We are interested to hear from any person or organisation who wants to work with us to make Scotland a place where people can be open about death, dying and bereavement.

This leaflet was originally produced by the Dying Matters Coalition which aims to change public knowledge, attitudes and behaviours towards dying, death and bereavement. Dying Matters is led by the National Council for Palliative Care, the umbrella charity for palliative, end of life and hospice care in England, Wales & Northern Ireland: www.dyingmatters.org
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Information to help those close to someone who is old or ill



Let's talk about it

Why we need to talk more about death and dying

We need to face the facts: many people don't die as they might have wished to. They may be kept alive longer than they'd have wanted, or die somewhere alien to them. They may not have left a will, or expressed wishes about their funeral, care arrangements for dependents, or donating organs. Or they may simply not have said what they wanted to say.

This isn't just sad for the person dying. For those left, there may be difficult loose ends to tie up, and sadness and regrets that can live on with them for a long time. It's in everyone's interests to deal with these subjects, to talk about the practicalities and emotions surrounding dying, before it's too late.

So if you're close to someone who may die within the next few years, you're right to want to raise the subject. The irony is that the other person probably wants to raise it too.

If the subject isn't raised, it's more likely that you'll feel emotionally isolated from each other. Dealing with the practicalities, and sharing feelings and anxieties, can bring you closer.

Talking about death doesn't bring it closer. It's about planning for life – because it allows you to make the most of the time that you have.

"I've tried to have a conversation with my family but they won't take me seriously. They say: 'Mum you're fine.'"

Subjects you might need to talk about

In the checklist below are some of the areas that people can leave it too late to discuss. Some of these may be more important to you than others. If you want to know more about any of these areas, then go to the Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief website: www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk

- The type of care someone would like towards the end of their life
- Where they'd like to die
- Whether they want to be resuscitated or not
- Funeral arrangements
- Care of dependents
- Save other lives - through organ donation
- How they'd like to be remembered
- Whether they have any particular worries they'd like to discuss about being ill and dying
- What they'd like people to know before they die

How to get the conversation started

There is no right or wrong way to start talking about dying: it will come down to not only your style and personality but also those of the person close to you. Here are some ideas that can help you get the conversation going.

- Look for little invitations to talk from the other person. If you're talking about future holiday plans and they say "Who knows where I'll be then" it may indicate that they're ready to address the subject.
- Encourage them to say more with open ended questions, for example "Do you really think so" or "How do you mean?"
- Provide them with obvious opportunities to talk about what's worrying them: turning the conversation to the future, or the stories of friends who have been ill or died might help. Or simply ask how they feel.
- Choose the right place, the right time. No one finds it easy to talk when they're rushed or in a stressful situation.

Taking the head-on approach

For some people, raising the subject directly and honestly is a good approach – particularly if opportunities to talk rarely seem to appear. If you're taking this approach:

- Try and be sure that it doesn't make the other person feel uncomfortable. If it does, don't pursue it. They may decide they want to talk at a later date.

- It can help to start with something direct but reassuring, like "I know that talking about these things is never easy..." or "We've never talked about this before but..."
- It can also help to start the conversation with something personal, from your own experience, rather than telling the other person what they should do: for example "I've always worried about what I'd do without you" or "I'm beginning to think whether I should start making plans for when I die." That may encourage them to talk in a personal way too.
- Be honest about you feel. Many of us find it hard to get emotional, but it's often the only way to deal with important things.

Keeping the conversation going

Once you've got started on talking about the future, try and make sure you don't close the conversation down straight away.

- Listen to what the other person is saying, rather than always steering the conversation yourself.
- It's good to be reassuring, but you can overdo it – for example, if you say "Don't worry Dad, you'll be fine", it might stop the other person from talking and being open about anxieties
- Keep encouraging the other person to say more. You can do this by saying the same thing yourself in a different way, or by asking a question. If they say: "I don't like thinking too much about what will happen" you could ask "How do you mean?", or "Do you mean what will happen when you die?"

"I want a Viking funeral with trumpets and fireworks, blazing boat floating away across the sea, champagne for everyone and NO hymns."