



Dying to be heard

Talking about death or grief can be hard for some people. If someone we know is dying to be heard, can we be the listener they need?

“There’s something I want talk about...”

It’s hard to talk about death, dying and grief. Yet it’s important: discussing and sharing our wishes makes it easier for our family and friends when we are gone. If we can’t talk about death, it’s harder to support a grieving friend.



All of us will need someone to talk to about death. Every conversation needs two parts: one to talk, and one to listen. If someone we know comes to us to talk about their will, or funeral plans, or just their fears or concerns about end of life care, we need to listen to them. It's too easy to just brush it off. You may not be ready to talk about death, but we all owe it to others to be willing to listen.

A conversation about death can emerge from anywhere. You might be discussing the recent death of a friend, or a celebrity or someone on TV. It might be a planned chat, or it might just happen. You don't need to be the expert: just let the conversation flow.

“Do you have five minutes? Something's been on my mind...”

Talking about death and grief can be hard, and for many people it takes time to be ready to talk about their own plans, concerns or just to ask questions. If we don't listen when they are ready to talk, the chance might be gone.

How to be a good listener

- Be patient – it might take a while to get to the point.
- Pay attention – you don't need to remember everything said, but you need to give it your full attention
- There will probably be a lot going on in the mind of the person speaking – it may be uncomfortable for them to hear themselves discussing these things. Be affirming – let them know you want to listen, and that it's OK for them to discuss these things.
- You don't need to be the expert, or to be able to answer the questions raised. There's lots of good information on the Dying Matters website, with links to plenty of other sites.

- Often people want to just unload all their thoughts, or just think out loud. The actual stuff they want to talk about, or the questions they want to ask, may come later.
- This isn't an interview – you aren't trying to get information out of them. Let them work through things.
- Don't judge – everyone responds to death and grief differently. But it is OK to steer people towards reliable sources of information or advice if you think they need it.
- Look after yourself – some of this might be upsetting for you. Make sure you have some means to process all of this after. Moreover, it might prompt you to want to talk about your own end of life plans – who will your listener be?

A good question to ask at any point is “What’s important to you?”. Asking this can help steer the conversation onto practical ground, and give the talker something to focus on.

We’re all different, and there are no right or wrong ways to cope with death or grief. What matters is that what we do and what happens to us as we are dying and after our deaths reflects our wishes. Asking what’s important can be a good way to get to the core of the issue. Once that’s clarified, any further detail can be added later.

Where to get more help

The Dying Matters website has lots of practical advice on talking about death, and the practical steps we all need to make. It also has links to help you find local information about wills, funerals, organ donation, end of life care, hospices and bereavement support.



Hospice UK's Compassionate Employers programme helps companies to better support their employees who are affected by terminal illness, caring responsibilities or bereavement.

To find out more and get in touch visit:
www.hospiceuk.org/compassionate-employers



Dying Matters

*'Let's talk
about it'*

For more information visit:
www.dyingmatters.org