



“Lighting the way with better patient care.”

Anova
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Home Health · Hospice · Palliative · Home Care

HOSPICE PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

SAYING “GOODBYE”

As end of life approaches, there is a feeling of detachment from the physical world and a loss of interest in things formerly found pleasurable. There is a tendency to sleep more. There is a less desire to talk. This is the beginning of “letting go” of life and preparing for death. Days or hours before death, the dying person becomes less and less responsive to voice, touch and may not awaken. Sometimes, quite unexpectedly, the person may appear well and even look as if he/she is going to recover. The person may be alert and talkative, a sort of “rebound.” This does not mean that there will be a recovery as the person is still dying.

Persons who are dying often want “permission to die” from those they love. Often, they want to be assured of five things:

- Things they were once responsible for will be taken care of
- The survivors will survive without them
- All is forgiven
- Their life had meaning
- They will be remembered

Saying goodbye is not easy. Yet, it is important for the dying person and his/her loved ones to do so. Take advantage of opportunities when the person is more awake and communicative to facilitate the “saying goodbye process.” If the dying person is not lucid, or in a coma, remember that hearing is the last sense to leave. Assume everything you say can be heard and understood, even if the person is not responsive. Never speak about the dying person as if he/she was not in the room.

Some people feel comfortable lying in bed next to their loved one as they say their parting words. Others may want to simply hold hands. Music, chanting, praying or singing may be comforting as well. Whatever is done, let it be comforting and familiar. The dying person’s body language will let you know if these sounds are welcoming and soothing.

The person may only want to be with very few or even just one person. This is a sign of preparation for release and affirming of who the support is needed from in order to make the appropriate transition. If you are not part of this “inner circle” at the end, it does not mean you are unloved or unimportant. It means you have already fulfilled your task with him/her and it is time for you to say “goodbye.” If you are part of this final “inner circle” of support, the person needs your affirmation, support, and permission.

Giving permission to your loved one to let go without feeling guilty for leaving or trying to keep him/her with you to meet your own needs can be difficult. A dying person will normally try to hold on even though it brings prolonged discomfort in order to be sure that those who are going to be left behind will be alright. Therefore, your ability to release the dying person from this concern and give the assurance that it is alright to let go whenever ready is one of the greatest gifts you have to give your loved one at this time.

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What you can do:

- Use gentle touch
- Speak gently and lovingly and identify yourself before speaking
- Dying requires energy and focus. Try not to distract the dying person from this necessary preparation. Allow time for silence.
- Remember that you are supporting the person to "let go"
- Use that "rebound time" to say what you need to say and have closure

Being Present at the Moment of Death:

Even with all the preparation and knowledge that death is coming, the moment of death is not always easy to see. Even those people who are closest to the dying person may choose to be absent. The decision to be present at the moment of death depends on many things. Do not judge others if they choose not to be present at the moment of death.

It is not uncommon for the dying person to wait to die until loved ones have left the room. Make sure you allow for this. Sometimes, if a person seems to be holding on, you may simply say: "I am going to leave the room for awhile. I love you."