

How do I talk to a loved one about their death?



Talking to a loved one about death can show them that you care deeply for their wellbeing.

The topic of end-of-life can be uncomfortable, but people often feel relief once they start talking. Following are four questions to get you started if you need to have this difficult conversation.



We avoid the uncomfortable.

Tender conversations about death may be slightly awkward, but there are also precious moments where loved ones come together to support and care for each other, despite apprehension.

Let's talk about death.

What's the best way to get started? Pour some tea. (Or something stronger.) Take a deep breath. Light a candle. Sometimes sitting at the kitchen table with a good meal can help facilitate conversation. For others, sitting on the porch or in a park might help. Keep some tissue nearby.

Four Gentle Questions to Start

1. *What do you know or understand about the prognosis?*

Listen carefully and take notes. This will give you insight into how they are processing the news. Repeat back what they're saying to make sure you understand correctly. Let the silent moments breathe. Stay quiet. Nod in affirmation and show compassion with a soft touch.

2. *What are your fears?*

Getting fears out in the open often takes away their power and allowing someone to open up may reveal deeper anxieties. You can provide support just by listening and validating. Right now is for hand holding, listening, and letting your loved ones know you understand them.





3. *What do you hope to do with your remaining time?*

Some people have wish lists or “bucket lists.” Your loved one might not yet know the answer to this question, and that’s okay too. Some folks are content to visit with friends and family at the end of their lives. This is how the end-of-life plan starts to come together.

4. *What trade-offs are you willing to make for added time?*

Dying individuals have a lot to think about. Every choice, it seems, comes with consequences. Deciding between curative and comfort care, for instance. Certainly, most people choose both for as long as they can. When sick people make the difficult decision to decline treatment, we must honor that choice. The opposite is also true. If someone continues treatment, a caregiver must support them through it.

That’s your role now. To love and support. Ask gentle questions and accept the answers. These uncomfortable conversations can lead families to better understand one another and grow closer.

How can CJE SeniorLife help?

We can refer you to the following CJE Senior Life supportive resources:

CJE Benefits Services—We are available to help you identify and apply for a broad range of benefits and supportive services available to older adults. Benefits Specialists are SHIP certified to provide guidance on Medicare.

CJE Care Management Services—We make assessments, develop Care Plans and refer clients to appropriate services. We work collaboratively with physicians, coordinate home care, guide families and find practical resources that support independence.

CJE Counseling Services— Our Licensed Clinical Social Workers are specialists in the field of mental health services for seniors. We offer individual, family and group psychotherapy, as well as support groups.

CJE Goldberg Legal Services—Our staff provide free legal consultation, advice, referrals, and drafting legal documents for older adults and those caring for older adults.

Catherine Durkin Robinson—is a Jewish death doula. She graduated from the University of Vermont's End-of-Life Doula program and belongs to National End-of-Life Doula Alliance. She was also a longtime hospice-trained volunteer and registered pre-need counselor. www.anityadoulaservices.org

To find out more about our many services and programs, call CJE SeniorLife at 773.508.1000.

THE CJE ADVANTAGE: Since 1972, CJE SeniorLife has been a central resource and champion for older adults and their families by providing community-based and residential care options. We provide solutions that enhance their quality of life while honoring their unique healthcare, lifestyle and socio-economic needs.

3003 West Touhy Avenue | Chicago IL | www.cje.net | 773.508.1000

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