

4. The Dying Process

Death and Dying Matters

These information sheets have been created to demystify some beliefs and misconceptions around dying, death and funerals. They are designed to inform and empower individuals as well as communities, by providing practical information to help make better decisions and more considered choices in relation to end of life matters. This is not anything new, rather a return to a traditional approach, where families and friends are involved at every stage. Choices may be influenced by culture, beliefs, community, finances or sustainability issues.

These sheets may assist you to:

- better understand what is involved in the process of dying, death and bereavement
- participate more fully in any of the stages
- complete the relevant and important legal paperwork
- talk to others about your or their wishes and needs
- clarify your or their instructions around dying and after death
- create a more meaningful funeral to honour and celebrate a life
- have an easier and healthier bereavement

Death is the natural end of our lives; an ordinary and sacred experience. Being aware of and able to talk about death, as a part of life, can help you live more fully. Talking about death does not make it happen, just as not talking about it can not stop it happening. Being more informed and prepared may empower you to hold an attitude to death that creates a greater freedom.

Adjusting to the understanding and reality that you are nearing the end of your life, and your death is coming, is a unique experience for everyone. You may want to create some time in your life to think about what needs to be in place if you died tomorrow. Beginning the process of considering, recording and communicating these things can be an empowering, kind and life affirming act.

Preparation

Death can be sudden or expected, coming in its own time and its own way. A dying process may take years, months, hours, minutes or be instantaneous. Being prepared covers, among other things, legal, practical, medical, emotional, social and spiritual matters. These areas are often intertwined.

An expected death can offer an opportunity to connect and talk about what matters to you, but in the event of your sudden death that opportunity is not there. Being prepared is good for everyone involved. Whatever your circumstances, you may want to:

- Understand and put your legal and personal documents in order (see Information Sheet 2). Leave them in an easy to find place, or tell the relevant people where the documents are, and even what they contain. This can make a huge difference to the people you leave behind.
- Speak to the person(s) who you want to be responsible for carrying out your wishes. Ensure what you are asking of them lines up with their values and beliefs, and that they will action it for you. If they

are unwilling or unable, this gives you the chance to talk about it and rethink who you need to appoint.

- Consider and communicate your wishes about the quality of life, or medical treatment, you would and would not want to prolong life or hasten death; and who you would like to act as guardian(s) to act on your behalf if you lose capacity. The two documents that ensure you receive the care and guardian you want are an Advance Health Care Directive and Enduring Guardian respectively.
- Have as little unfinished business as possible for your self, your relationships and your professional life.
- Convey what you want to happen to your body after your death.
- Communicate what sort of funeral and disposal method you want: burial, cremation or no preference. Bare in mind the Will is often only read after the funeral, so cannot be relied on to provide this information.

The dying process can begin long before death actually occurs. Dying happens to your whole being, not just your physical body. All parts of you may experience pain or suffering, and comfort or healing. Your quality of life, medical treatment and pain control are all important matters in this.

Pain control is important, as there is no need to suffer unnecessarily. If you are physically comfortable you can do things like relax into your dying, complete unfinished business, both personal and professional, reflect on your life and your relationships with others, and even find new meaning in your life. It may be a time of growth, emotionally and spiritually for you and those you love. Your dying is uniquely yours, it is different for everyone, and you will probably die in a similar way to how you have lived your life.

You can be active and live your dying, and your responses may change as you move through your process. Talking about things can provide relief or comfort to you, and to all those involved. You could discuss:

- Your care needs, as a support network may need to be created
- How you would like to be cared for, to assist your carers and allow for the death experience you want
- Appropriate pain relief, if your priority is to remain as conscious as possible
- Any preference to die at home, in a hospice or a hospital

Discuss with those who may be caring for you to clarify what is really important to you about the environment and atmosphere you will be in. Discuss your independence, friends, family, conversation, silence, access to nature, pets, art, photos, music, aromas, candles, and lighting, for example. Your psychological, religious or spiritual needs may also be important and you should communicate what is required to meet them if this is the case. Share these things with those around you to support them and you. Access social workers, counsellors, clergy, prayer, meditation, solitude, and friends and family, as needed.

Be as honest as you can with yourself and others about what you need to feel comfortable and supported. This may mean finding ways to express or release emotions as they arise. There are people who can help with this. So if you need help, ask for help.

You may want to consider your emotions and feelings:

- **Love** – to express your love and to allow others to do the same
- **Gratitude** – to express your gratitude and allow others to express theirs
- **Forgiveness** – to forgive yourself and others, and ask others for forgiveness
- **Regrets** – to express any regrets and allow others to do the same
- **Saying goodbye** – to say goodbye to your loved ones, your possessions, the world and your life, and let others say their farewells to you
- **Acceptance** – that things are as they are and may not be able to be resolved

Considering and talking about personal things could be new or difficult. You may have no experience in speaking about your feelings and thoughts. If this is the case for you, it may be easier to write letters or notes, or you may choose to just make peace within yourself. What you consider and do can be a journey of incredible discovery.

It's your life and your death, so it is entirely up to you.



Natural Death
Care Centre



The Natural Death Care Centre and Tender Funerals are both not-for-profit organisations based in NSW, committed to informing, educating and empowering individuals, communities, and medical and health professionals. We have a natural, holistic and respectful approach to dying, death, disposal, ceremony and bereavement.

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