

Where to get more support

The Hospice UK website hospiceuk.org/talking-about-death has lots of advice on talking about death and being a good listener, along with information about the practical steps we all need to take.

There are lots of stories there, too, from people sharing their experiences of grief and loss. And there are links to help you find local information about end of life and hospice care and bereavement support.



Dying
Matters

Sign up to our newsletter

for more support, stories and advice:
hospiceuk.org/dm-newsletter

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Being a
good listener
in conversations
about dying



Why it matters

Some people find it hard to talk about death, dying and grieving. The way we respond when people bring up the subject can make a big difference.

If we struggle to talk about death, it can make it harder to support a grieving friend or answer questions from loved ones. But if we're ready to listen, it makes it a lot easier to discuss things like Wills, funeral plans, how and where we want to be cared for, and worries about the future.

You don't need to try and be an expert – the main thing is to let the conversation flow, rather than brushing it off or looking uncomfortable.

Tips for being a good listener

Listen carefully

Make sure you give the conversation your full attention.

Don't worry about saying the wrong thing

No one is expecting you to be an expert. The person has come to you because they trust you, not because they expect you to have all the answers. If you do want more information about death and dying, you can find lots at hospiceuk.org/death-and-dying

Be patient

It can take people a while to get to the point, especially if they are feeling nervous. Let the person know it's OK to take their time and work through things.

Be encouraging

If someone asks to talk to you about death, they might have a lot on their mind. So try to be encouraging, and let them know you want to listen and you're there for them.

Try not to judge

Everyone responds to death and grief differently, so remember that advice that works for you might not work for someone else. Often what people appreciate most is the chance to unload their thoughts.

Look after yourself

It can be upsetting to talk about death, especially with someone close to you, so make sure you make time for yourself afterwards. If the conversation makes you think about your own end of life plans, could it be a good time to think about who you would like to have a similar conversation with?

Ask 'What's important to you?'

This can be a useful question because it helps people focus on what they want. We're all different, and so are our wishes for when we're dying. Asking this encourages people to reflect on what's really on their mind.

