

When Every Second Counts- Communicating with Your Loved Ones

Love- One of the grandest ways you can express love is by respectfully and compassionately listening to your loved one.

Individual- Honoring our loved one's unique needs and wishes is essential.

Strive to be non-judgmental. Make an effort to accept what your loved one has to say. Try putting yourself in his/her shoes.

Tips for communicating – (Please refer to the handout).

Encourage your loved one to reminisce. Providing opportunities for sharing life stories can be validating and very meaningful.

Now is the time; don't wait! Our ability to hear is the last sense to go. Assume that your loved one can hear you, even if she/he is unresponsive.

*Leigh Downing,
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Tips for communicating with your loved one

1. Be ready to accept the variety of feelings expressed by the dying person. Allow the person to grieve for his/her own dying and other losses.
2. Listen. Be aware of cues and signals individuals send out. Be prepared to discuss the dying person's concerns openly and honestly.
3. Be patient & allow time to think about and express feelings, concerns, and fears.
4. Spend time together. Families often need support in coping with a dying person and resolving conflicts which may exist between them and the dying person.
5. Recognize when the person needs time alone.
6. Help the dying person retain a sense of dignity and self-worth.
7. Use touch. This often relieves the fear of being untouchable and is an effective nonverbal way of communicating solace, care, and comfort.
8. Encourage life-review. This can bring a sense of accomplishment or completion.
9. Reassure the dying person that his/her fears are natural, and that you and others are there to listen and to help whenever possible. There are medications and therapies available which can address and typically alleviate many of the symptoms faced by a dying person.
10. Be prepared for normal expressions of anger, despair and hostility.

“WHEN WE HONESTLY ASK which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness...makes it clear that whatever happens in the external world, being present to each other is what really matters.” --- Henri T.M. Nouwen

Suggested Reading: Final Gifts by Maggie Callahan and Patricia Kelley

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