

7 Care Tips for When Someone You Love Is Dying

Adapted from:

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As your mother, father, grandparent or someone close to you nears the end of life, your loving care matters more than ever. But, as the family caregiver who shared the following story found out, sometimes it's hard to know how to best navigate those challenging circumstances.

"Looking back, I regret how much I tip-toed around the fact that my mom was dying. When we moved her into a room at the hospice house she said, 'Well I guess I'll miss Christmas this year.' It was early December and we had brought a small tree to decorate her room. My immediate reaction to her gloomy comment was 'Aw, no Mom! We'll bring Christmas to you!' But the look on her face told me she knew just as well as I did that she wouldn't make it to Christmas."

Here are seven tips that may help you and your dying loved one confront the reality of your circumstances and approach the end of life with more restful reassurance.

1. **Acknowledge the elephant in the room.** The big "Ds," death and dying, can seem awkward to talk about. Tiptoeing around death can actually add stress. If you don't know where to start, just follow your loved one's lead.
2. **It's okay to express your emotions, even your sadness, in front of your loved one.** You may feel the urge to pretend that everything is all right, but expressing your feelings gives your loved one freedom to be honest about his or her feelings in front of you. Your loved one will likely feel relieved that you understand what's occurring.
3. **Your presence matters.** Even if hospitals make you uncomfortable or you'd rather remember your loved one fully functional, showing up probably matters more than your loved one can say.
4. **Create meaningful conversation.** People at the end of life usually prefer to recall happy memories with those they love and find closure. Try to focus conversation around themes like forgiveness, thankfulness and love between friends or family members and themselves. Use the [Life Legacy Worksheet](#) to assist in having meaningful conversations with your loved one.
5. **Listen carefully for any messages your senior loved one would like to convey.** Sometimes, people approaching death may try to communicate an important message to those around them, even if they're unable to speak clearly. If this happens, don't immediately assume it's nonsensical babble; try to understand what your loved one is trying to say.
6. **Find out answers to typical end-of-life questions.** If your loved one can still think rationally and communicate clearly with you, have a conversation to learn about your loved one's

end-of-life preferences. Knowing the answers to questions like “where do you hope to spend your last days?” can help you ensure your loved one remains comfortable until the very end.

7. **Be mindful of legal documents.** Know what end-of-life legal decisions have already been made, such as a living will or a designated healthcare power of attorney. A living will describes wishes for medical treatment, including the use of life-prolonging treatment at the end of life. A healthcare power of attorney is appointed to act on behalf of your loved one regarding medical treatment decisions. Knowing and respecting these decisions can help you carry out your loved one’s wishes with confidence.

With these tips for supportive care, you’ll likely be able to make the most of the time you have left with your loved one, help that person feel as comfortable as possible, and bring the closure needed to move on peacefully.

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