

Care of the mind

Emotional care during illness

The essence of optimal care is captured by His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

Real care of the sick does not begin with costly procedures, but with the simple gift of affection and love People respond to kindness even when medicine is ineffective and in turn, cultivating a kind heart is a cause of our own good health.

Whilst health care professionals can care for the physical needs of your loved one, family and close friends are in the best position to provide love, acceptance and other types of emotional support in the final months, weeks and days of life.

Your support will be most beneficial when it is in harmony with your loved one's beliefs and wishes. In doing so, you will avoid creating unnecessary fear, anxiety, confusion, or doubt for them. To help you understand your loved one's wishes we have created a worksheet for them called [*Making Your Wishes Known*](#). Once they complete this it will give you a sense of confidence in a time of much uncertainty.

Here are some ways to support your loved one emotionally:

Love and security

A fundamental need for all human beings is to feel secure and loved. This is especially important for those who are dying as they face separation from everyone and everything they cherish. The connection they share with you as family or friend must be nurtured if they are to feel safe during such a time of fear and uncertainty. Depending on their spiritual beliefs they may also gain love and security from the Divine, however this makes sense to them.

Positive self-regard

To be peaceful when approaching end of life, people need to feel content with who they are and the life they have lived. You can give your family member a sense of positive self-worth by talking with them about how they have helped others and given joy to their family, friends, and even pets. Remind them of their positive qualities, life achievements and special contributions, no matter how small they may seem. These things are often not spoken about until the funeral service, which is unfortunate.

To acknowledge your loved one beforehand may help them

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feel a sense of achievement and affirm that their life has been meaningful.

Communicate Openly

Allow the dying person to express themselves freely and frankly. Acknowledge and accept their expressions of love and gratitude while also allowing them to express their concerns, regrets and disappointments. When people are approaching the end of life they may remember many previously forgotten things and will wish to share or resolve them at this time. Listen whole heartedly and if possible support them to find self-acceptance and peace of mind.

Healthy Connection

During illness your loved one may be highly sensitive and therefore likely to be affected by others' intense emotions. Your own state of mind can help them feel peaceful and calm, whereas displays of grief, anxiety, aggression, frustration and even arguing with other family members can cause them distress. As much as possible protect your loved one and focus on their comfort. Find alternative sources to help you manage your stress and grief. When close family and friends visit, encourage them to communicate in a peaceful and supportive way. Even someone who is disliked by family should be allowed to visit if this is the wish of your loved one. In the last few days of life, some dying people wish to be alone and to not have visitors. If you are the primary carer, you may need to ask visitors to respect this wish.

Karuna also has experienced people you can talk with on:
07 3632 8300 or karuna@karuna.org.au



This is a **Support and Learning** resource. More resources available at www.karuna.org.au/resources. Karuna is affiliated with www.fpmt.org



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