

Care of the mind

Information for extended family and friends

When you are not immediate family it can sometimes be difficult to know how to best support someone who has a life-limiting illness and their close family. Here are some suggestions that may assist you:

- Find an outlet to express your fears and concerns that does not burden the dying person and their family. Instead, be available to hear their fears and concerns rather than adding to their emotional load.
- Generally it is more detrimental for the dying person and their immediate family if extended family and friends distance themselves. At this time they need to know they can rely on you.
- Through your practical support (e.g., take them flowers, cook them a meal, mow their lawn, make a short phone call to check in, join their care roster) the dying person and their immediate family will know you are there for them and that you care.
- In deciding how much you talk about dying and death, let the dying person and their family's readiness be your guide. Adjusting to a life limiting prognosis takes time and to force the issue before they are ready could cause more harm. Open questions allow them to take the conversation to where they are comfortable at that time. Open questions usually start with how, when, can or what. Some examples are:
 - How are you managing at the moment?
 - When is a good time for us to talk about your wishes for the future?
 - Can you tell me about the treatment you are undergoing and what it is like for you?
 - What is concerning you at the moment?

If you don't know what to say, don't feel you have to add anything. Simply listen and reaffirm what they have said so that they know you have heard them.

Your own discomfort can prevent open and helpful communication. If you notice you are uncomfortable listening to the fears and concerns of the dying person or their family, this may be a sign of an opportunity to work towards your own acceptance and comfort with dying and death.



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