

# Life is for living

So it goes against every instinct we have to start planning for our death: in fact, only one in ten of us have talked to anyone about how or where we'd like to die. But every adult, of whatever age, needs to look ahead and ask "What if?"

## What if I was told I had a week to live?

Would those around me know how best to support me?

Would they know about any strong wishes I have about how I want to be cared for?

Would I have made a will?

Would those I love know how I feel about them?

Would relatives know about any plans I've made for after my death?

Do you want to spend your final days worrying about sorting all that out?

The earlier you talk about dying wishes, the easier it is emotionally and practically for everyone.

To find out how to get more help visit:

[www.dyingmatters.org](http://www.dyingmatters.org)

or call freephone

08000 21 44 66

Dying Matters

*Let's talk about it*

This is number one in a series of leaflets focusing on dying, death and bereavement produced by Dying Matters.



## THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR PALLIATIVE CARE

The National Council for Palliative Care (NCPC) is the umbrella charity for all those who are involved in providing, commissioning and using palliative care and hospice services in England, Wales & Northern Ireland.

Registered Charity no. 1005671

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Information to help you think about dying plans

Dying Matters

*Let's talk about it*

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## Why we need to talk more about death and dying

Many of us have specific wishes about how we'd like to die, or how long we want doctors to try to keep us alive, or what we'd like to happen after our deaths. There are wills, care and legal arrangements to be sorted – perhaps even issues surrounding who looks after children.

You may have worries about what will happen in the future when you're gone, or there may be important emotional matters you want to address now rather than when time is short.

Some of this can be done in an impersonal way: sorting out a will, or organ donation, takes a phone call to the right person. But for some of the most important matters, such as how you'd like to be cared for, the first starting point is your family or loved ones. You need to talk to them about your wishes.

### Subjects you might need to talk about

- The type of care someone would like towards the end of their life
- Where they'd like to die
- Whether they want to be resuscitated or not
- Funeral arrangements
- Care of dependents
- Save other lives - through organ donation
- How they'd like to be remembered
- Whether they have any particular worries they'd like to discuss about being ill and dying
- What they'd like people to know before they die

## What to do if you want to start a conversation

Talking about death doesn't bring death closer. It's about planning for life, helping you make the most of the time that you have.

All the same, starting the conversation, particularly with those close to you, is never easy. But families commonly report that it comes as a relief to everyone once the subject is brought out into the open.

### Sowing the seeds for conversation

- Choose the right place, the right time. No one finds it easy to talk when they're rushed or in a stressful situation.
- Look for a prompt that the other person is happy to talk about the future – discussing retirement plans might provide a good opportunity, for example. Or perhaps the recent death of someone close has raised issues in both your minds about your own deaths: this may be a good time to talk about it.

### Directly starting a conversation

- If you start the conversation, consider beginning with a question rather than a statement: "Have you ever wondered what would happen...?"; "Do you think we should talk about...?"

"It's not that I'm afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Woody Allen, writer, actor and director

- Sometimes it helps to start with something direct but reassuring, like "I know that talking about these things is never easy..." or "We've never talked about this before but..."
- If you're starting the conversation, you may need to reassure the other person that you're not raising the subject because you're very ill, and have been withholding the information from them.
- Be totally honest about how you feel from the start. If you're open, there may be either laughter or tears – don't be afraid of either.
- Listen to what the other person is saying, rather than always steering the conversation yourself.

### Bear in mind...

- Though others may initially want to change the subject when you talk about dying, talking about it will make their lives easier in the end.
- If you're very worried about getting it wrong with those you love, you can always discuss it first with someone else you respect and trust – a nurse, friend or work colleague, for example.

