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## Talking about dying

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### Summary

- People who are dying, their families, friends and loved ones need to talk with one another.
  - When you are dying, it is important that you convey your wishes to your family and that they listen to and respect what you have to say.
  - You might find talking about dying is difficult and it might be easier to talk to someone who is removed from the situation, like a trained counsellor.
  - Organ and tissue donation is an important issue to discuss with your family when you are dying.
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You may find it difficult to talk about dying with your loved ones, especially how you want to be treated when you are dying. However, it is important to talk about this with your family, friends and healthcare team, even if you find the topic of dying difficult to discuss.

Even if you are dying, you are still living and will continue to have life experiences. You will probably have family and friends around who want to spend time with you. It is important that you make as much quality time as possible to spend with those you love and that you talk to them about dying.

### Communicating with each other

People who are dying need to talk with their families, friends and loved ones about the situation. It's important for your family and friends to listen to you and understand what you want for your death.

When you are dying, you may want to spend your last days at home with your loved ones around you, and this can include your pets as well. However, you may not want to die at home. You might want to be in a palliative care unit away from home and not want your family to have the responsibility of looking after you 24 hours a day. This may especially be the case if you become quite ill and very dependent on your carer for medical care and support.

Whatever you want and wherever you want to be, it is important that you talk about your wishes with your family and that they listen to and respect what you have to say.

It may make it easier when talking about dying to create some family memories together. You could write your obituary, put together a lifetime photo album, create a time capsule (with surprises to be opened at a later date), create video or audio recordings, and write a diary. You can also write letters to people you have not seen or heard from in a long time or write letters to loved ones to be opened at a later date, perhaps on their birthday or another special occasion.

Sometimes families are not as close as they used to be and when someone in the family is dying, it may create an opportunity to mend broken relationships and bring the family together again. Saying goodbye to someone for the last time is very difficult. Asking for forgiveness, saying 'thankyou' and 'I love you' can also help mend relationships and bring families back together.

### When you can't talk about dying

Sometimes people feel like they cannot talk about death when someone close to them is dying. They may avoid the issue entirely, and talk about everything and anything else except dying. Sometimes it is difficult to know what to say and so they say nothing.

You might find it easier to talk to a counsellor, who is removed from the situation and is outside of the group you normally socialise with.

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## Professional counselling

Talking to a counsellor about dying can help you open up and express your feelings and fears, enabling you to deal with the situation in a calmer and more open manner. It can also give you ideas and strategies you can use to start talking about dying with the people you love.

As a first step, you could ask your doctor or palliative care team about your counselling options. They might be able to recommend a particular counsellor or counselling organisation you could see.

GriefLine is an Australia-wide grief helpline that offers free telephone, online and face-to-face counselling services, including counselling for people and their families living with a terminal illness. Call (03) 9935 7400 or 1300 845 745 to access anonymous and confidential telephone support.

As a carer for a family member who is dying, you may need counselling to provide you with skills to help you through this time.

The **National Carer Counselling Program** provides short-term counselling services for carers to help you cope with your caring role. Call 1800 242 636 for more information.

## Organ donation

An important issue to discuss with your family when you are dying is organ and tissue donation.

By donating your body organs and tissues, you may be able to help the lives of 10 or more people.

Almost everyone can donate organs and tissues. There is no age limit on the donation of some organs and tissues, however where and how you die, and the condition of your organs and tissues will determine what you are able to donate.

If you want to donate your organs, it is important that you discuss this with your family. Even if you have decided to donate your organs when you die, your family can still override your decision, so it's a good idea to make sure they understand and respect your decision.

The Australian Organ Donor Register is the official national register for people who are at least 16 years old who want to donate their organs when they die.

Organ donor families receive support through the National Donor Family Support Service and in the following month after the donation receive information regarding the recipients of the organs and how the donation has changed their lives.

If organ donation is something you want to consider, find more information at **DonateLife**. If you want to sign up to the Register, find more information at the **Australian Organ Donor Register** or call 1800 777 203.

## Where to get help

- Relationships Victoria, call 1300 364 277
- Palliative Care Victoria, call (03) 9662 9644
- Australian Organ Donor Register, call 1800 777 203
- National Carer Counselling Program, call 1800 242 636

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