

## Ways to be there in the last few days

Whether the person you are caring for is at home, in an aged care facility, or in a hospital or palliative care unit (hospice), there are many ways you can be there for them during the last few days.

### Connecting with the person

The person you are caring for may be mostly unresponsive, or be slipping in and out of consciousness, or may still be having some very alert periods of time. It can be difficult for family and friends to know how to connect with the person who is dying and how to offer them comfort. We have put together some suggestions.

- Touch – Gently holding the person’s hand, stroking their arms or heads, or gently hugging them. Using a wet towel to moisten their lips or mouth or providing a gentle wash to their face.
  - Sound – Playing their favourite music. Talking or singing quietly to them. Telling them you love them and telling them some of your favourite memories of them.
  - Proximity – Sitting with them. Being close by, carrying on your day to day activities but in the same room so they know you are there.
  - Smell – Burning some nice scented oil or a scented candle. Cooking their favourite foods so they can smell their favourite foods (even if you know they won’t eat it). Freshly cut flowers from the garden. Open the window and let the smell of the garden or breeze come in.
- Sight – Having friends and family visit (even for brief periods of time) so the person gets to see them one last time. Offer the person photos that are meaningful to them. The family pet may sit on the bed. Plants, candles, soft lighting, a sunset can all be very meaningful and special to the person who is dying.

It can also be helpful to ask the person you are caring for if there is anything that they specifically would like to happen when it becomes clear they are in the last few days of life. They may have their own suggestions about how they would like you to connect with them during that time.



## Being there when death occurs

When the person you are caring for appears to be nearing death you may like to sit and talk with them. You may like to say some things to the person when you feel death is near, this way you will not feel you have left things unsaid should they die when you are out of the room. Some people like to say goodbye, or even tell the person that it is okay for them to go now. It is also a good time to contact close relatives and friends or you may ask someone else to do this for you.

Often family members want to be there when the person dies. Realistically, you can't be with the person you are caring for all the time and it may be that the person you are caring for will die when you leave the room. This is quite a common experience. People often have negative feelings about not being there when the moment of death actually occurred. If this happens, it is important to understand that things just happen this way sometimes. While it is okay to feel sad about this, try not to dwell on it. It is not a failing in any way. It is just how things happened.

Some people would prefer not to be there at the moment of death or feel overwhelmed by the dying process and need to take time out.

Sometimes the health professionals have told you that the death is very near and then it may not happen. They may rally for a day or two before dying. This also is part of the dying process for some people. The reasons for this are unknown.

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