

Ways to Provide Comfort at End of Life

Being with a dying person can bring up all sorts of different emotions including sadness and even discomfort. This is also a sacred place of honor, grace, and opportunity for healing. Below are ideas of activities that can not only be comforting for the person who is dying, but also for people around them. These ideas may help calm feelings of helplessness and uselessness that may arise as the person grows weaker, less alert, and non-communicative. These ideas may provide avenues for you and those visiting to express what the person means to you.

- Speak in calm, soothing tones around the dying person.
- Sit with and play gentle music in the background.
- Quietly hum or sing a favorite song.
- Read a favorite story, scripture, or poem.
- Pray together.
- Have conversations about comfort, faith, and/or peace.
- Read cards or notes sent by friends, colleagues, or neighbors.
- Talk about happy and significant life events of and with the person.
- Listen when they speak.
- Hold or stroke the person's hand or arm. Gently apply lotion.
- Brush the person's hair or wipe the person's face with a warm or cool, soft cloth.
- Provide sips of liquids or tastes of foods that are pleasurable to your person as they tolerate. Stop at any signs of distress such as coughing or turning their head away.
- Give mouth care with glycerin swabs or give small sips of water or ice chips.
- Gently massage and rub the person's feet and/or legs.
- Reposition and elevate the head and upper body for better breathing.
- Remind the person that they are loved and will be remembered.
- Thank the person for the ways they have touched your life.
- Express admiration and respect.
- Say reassuring things to the dying person, especially when unresponsive (e.g., "everything is alright", "we're alright").
- Stop any intervention that makes the dying person uncomfortable (e.g., too much noise, food or touching someone who is in pain).
- Sometimes, all that is needed is for you to be present.

Remember, to also include rituals of self-care and wellness during this time of intense concern and caregiving. For example:

- Take breaks to exercise, relax, sleep, and eat.
- Make time for reflecting on what you are experiencing. Write journal notes or talk with a confidant or therapist to express your feelings.
- Remember and integrate any spiritual practices that are normally part of your life.
- Keep in contact with those concerned for your person and you.