

Ways to Provide Comfort at the End of Life

Being with a dying person can bring up all sorts of emotions, including sadness and even discomfort. It can also be a sacred time of honor, grace, and opportunity for healing. Below are some activities that can be comforting for the person who is dying, as well as to the people around them. These ideas may soothe feelings of helplessness and uselessness that can arise as the person grows weaker, less alert, and non-communicative. These ideas may help express what the dying person means to them.

- Speak in calm, soothing tones around the dying person.
- Sit with them 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.
- 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 soft cloth (warm or cool).
- Provide sips of liquids or tastes of foods that are pleasurable to your person (as they are able to tolerate). Stop at any signs of distress (such as coughing or turning their head away).
- Provide 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 ("everything is all right", "we're all right").
- Stop any intervention that makes the dying person uncomfortable (too much noise, food, or touching if the person is in pain).
- Sometimes all that is needed is for you to be present.

Remember to 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 to reflect on what you are experiencing. Write journal notes or talk with a confidant or therapist to express your feelings.
- Integrate any spiritual practices that are normally part of your life.
- Keep in contact with those concerned about you and your person.