

## **Leaflet # 2: One Last Thing**

Information to help those close to someone who is dying or ill

### **No one wants to talk about dying:**

**But if someone close to you is old or ill, it's a subject you may feel you have to raise soon. There may be practical matters – care arrangements, wills - as well as emotional matters. It's such a hard subject to raise, because the last thing we want to do is hurt the feelings of someone close to us, or make them feel unwanted. But if you find ways to break the silence, it can take a great weight off everyone's minds.**

*"She said that it was such a relief that I'd brought it up – she said she'd wanted to raise the subject herself for a long time!"*

- *Liz Manchester, who raised the subject of what happened after another stroke with her mum*

# Why we need to talk more about death and dying

We need to face the facts: many people don't die as they might have wished. They may be kept alive longer than they'd have wanted, or die somewhere they don't want to be. They may not have left a will, or expressed wishes about their funeral, care arrangements for dependents, or donating organs. Or simply not have said what they wanted to say.

It's in everyone's interests to deal with these subjects, to talk about the practicalities and emotions surrounding dying, before it's too late. So if you're close to someone who may die within the next few years, you're right to want to raise the subject. The irony is that the other person probably wants to raise it too.

If the subject isn't raised, it's more likely that you'll feel isolated. Dealing with practicalities, and sharing feelings and anxieties, can bring you closer.

## 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

## How to get the conversation started

- Look for little invitations to talk from the other person. If you're talking about future holiday plans and they say "Who knows where I'll be then" it may indicate that they're ready to address the subject.
- Encourage them to say more with open ended questions, for example "Do you really think so" or "How do you mean?"
- Provide them with obvious opportunities to talk about what's worrying them: turning the conversation to the future, or the stories of friends who have been ill or died might help. Or simply ask how they feel.
- Choose the right place, the right time. No one finds it easy to talk when they're rushed or in a stressful situation.

## Taking the head-on approach

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- For some people, raising the subject directly and honestly is a good approach – particularly if opportunities to talk rarely seem to appear.
- Try and be sure that it doesn't make the other person feel uncomfortable. If it does, don't pursue it. They may decide they want to talk at a later date.
- It can help 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..."
- It can also help to start the conversation with something personal, from your own experience, rather than telling the other person what they should do: for example "I'm beginning to think whether I should start making plans for when I die."

## Keeping the conversation going

Once you've got started on talking about the future, try and make sure you don't close the conversation down straight away.

- Listen to what the other person is saying, rather than always steering the conversation yourself.
- It's good to be reassuring, but you can overdo it – for example, if you say "Don't worry Dad, you'll be fine", it might stop the other person from talking and being open about anxieties
- Keep encouraging the other person to say more. You can do this by saying the same thing yourself in a different way, or by asking a question.

### Do:

Remember that we are all dying. Conversations can be held on an equal footing, with both participants talking about plans, fears and hopes for their own death and after.

### Don't:

Fill silences: gaps in conversations can provide people with the opportunity to bring up subjects that are important to them.

### Remember:

If you're worried about getting it wrong with someone you love, you can always discuss it first with someone else you respect and trust – a nurse, friend or a work colleague, for example.

*"I want a Viking funeral with trumpets and fireworks, blazing boat floating away across the sea, champagne for everyone and NO hymns."*

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