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About this eBook

The purpose of this eBook is to make the overwhelming and challenging task of caring for the terminally ill less daunting by:

- explaining the feelings of grief that are experienced by the terminally ill, the caregiver and others involved
- giving practical suggestions on how to communicate with the terminally ill
- providing information to help address the feelings of grief and come to terms with the illness.

The information is gathered from extensive research by the author on this subject, from the author's personal experience of supporting the terminally ill, and from interactions with various organisations in the field of death, loss, grief and bereavement.

Included are comments and opinions based on the author's many years of involvement in the field of grief and bereavement support.



The importance of acknowledging death

Western Society has been reluctant to acknowledge and face death and to encourage people to validate the effects of grief experienced when someone dies. But fortunately in recent times this attitude is beginning to change. We are beginning to understand that being born, dying, and grieving are inseparable and each dependent on the other two for its meaning and purpose. In fact, although they are often treated as opposites, birth and death are two aspects of a single process. Some unfortunate consequences of not being able to accept and be comfortable with death are:

- Death is removed from the home and everyday living.
- Death is something considered to be alien – outside the bounds of life – something unnatural.
- It is unusual for young people to experience someone dying.
- Looking after the terminally ill has become the province of trained staff in hospitals, hospices or palliative care units.

We need to have more understanding and to acknowledge death more freely, especially with regard to the terminally ill. The benefit of doing this leads to no segregation between the terminally ill and the rest of society.

- The terminally ill will not be put outside the boundaries of our society before they have taken leave of life.
- The terminally ill will not be isolated and set apart from friends and family at the very time that their support is needed most.
- The unrealistic expectation of health and medical cures will be taken away from the medical staff, who are excellent for curing illness but not for looking after people who are dying.
- The terminally ill will be looked after by their loved ones with the help of specially trained palliative carers.

Caring for the terminally ill

Caring for the feelings of the terminally ill

When people are first diagnosed with a terminal illness one of the first reactions is shock, followed by many different physical and emotional upheavals. They need support at the practical, psychological and emotional levels. As the symptoms of the illness progress and the terminally ill lose more and more of their independence they can experience feelings such as:

- Inadequacy, loss of control of their lives and loss of usual daily routine activity.
- The weary, grinding effect that a long term illness causes.
- Uncertainty about the future.



IMPORTANT GUIDELINES

How to care for the feelings of the terminally ill

Situation	Caregiver awareness and response
Be informed about the person's condition but don't become an expert.	Become informed about the specific illness the person is suffering by asking the doctors, nurses, the local society for the specific illness, self help groups for that specific illness and local information centres.
Being aware of the person's needs.	It is extremely important to learn enough about the person's medical condition to help constructively.
Help the person make choices by discussing the pros and cons of each option available.	Never make the choice for the person. If you do, you risk being blamed for the outcome. Often the pressure for the person to persevere with treatment comes from the family and friends who do not themselves have to go through the side effects.
See where you fit in.	Do not take over – remember you are there as a support person.
Expect mood swings and differing reactions.	These can change from day to day.

