

Meaningful Conversations with Loved Ones in their Final Moments

Knowing what to say to someone who is dying and when to say it can be difficult. Phases such as “please forgive me”, “I forgive you”, “thank you”, “I love you” and “goodbye” facilitates a guided approach for caregivers to adopt by expressing these sentiments in their own meaningful ways. Nevertheless, the sequence or flow of the phases may vary according to the context or nature of the relationship. Essentially, choose what fits you most.

The purpose of this practice is to empower caregivers to:

- mitigate regret
- resolve guilt or negative emotions from past conflicts
- find reconciliation and peace
- reassure their loved ones they are appreciated and cherished



This practice will provide a sense of closure for the caregiver as they embark with their loved ones on their final journey. Hence, when we are given the gift of being present in a loved one’s final moments, we must take advantage of this time by saying these essential things:

Resolve all regrets

You may be bothered by guilt or regrets in ways you have hurt the person by words or actions in the past, or even ways you may have disappointed them. Deal with those regrets by saying “I am sorry about something that happened between us and I would like to apologise for it.” After describing the issue or incident, say, “please forgive me.”

Whatever the response is, you will know that you have done what you could have done to address a painful part of your relationship.

Let go of past grudges

By saying, “I forgive you”, it paves the way to a deeper sharing and conversation between the caregiver and the loved one and this is especially important with the limited time left between them to resolve any past conflicts there is. This also helps to bring reconciliation to the relationship as well as acceptance to the wrong deeds they might have done in the past.



However, due to defensiveness or a lack of understanding, the person may not be ready to acknowledge the hurt you have experienced in the relationship. You can still, however, forgive him/her in your mind and heart. This involves letting go of your perceived judgements and anger you might have had against the person in the past. Doing so will allow forgiveness and help resolve personal resentments.

Appreciate the person's legacy by saying, "Thank you"

Express gratitude for the positive ways the person had touched your life is a way of letting someone know of his or her lasting significance. It contributes to the person's sense of dignity and life's completion towards the end of life.

You can support your loved one's dignity with a sincere and specific "thank you." It will let your loved one know that her or his living mattered.

Remind them of their significance by saying, "I love you"

Remind the person that they are deeply loved and treasured. It is never too late to say, "I love you" in a relationship. Spark the conversation and ease into saying these phrases by reminding the person again of what he or she means to you.

If you are not in the habit of declaring your love for the person, try alternatives like physical therapeutic touch such as gestures like hand holding or hugging to convey the message.

"Goodbye"

Do not wait until the last minute to say goodbye. Saying goodbye in a meaningful way helps to bring a closure that can prevent regrets after the person is gone.

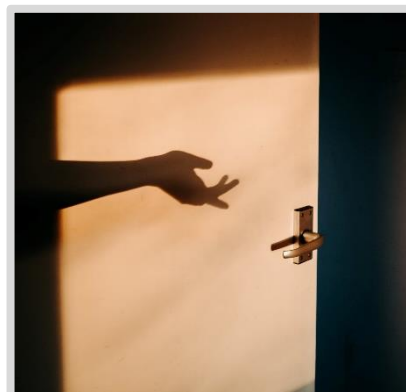


Say in a way that affirms the relationship and connection you have with each other. You can do so by acknowledging openly that you don't know whether you'll be with each other again. Say what is on your heart and what needs to be said. Do so in a way that the person knows that he or she will always be important to you.

Power of Touch

When you have a conversation with a person who is dying, you touch each other with your words. However, when words are no longer necessary or possible, you can still connect through therapeutic touch. Do so gently by placing your hand on the person's hand, shoulder or head can be a tender way of saying, "I am here. You are not alone."

If your loved one is not able to communicate anymore due to changes in consciousness by the disease process, I still encourage you to speak to them. There is a power in hearing those words yourself. You can continue to provide support to the person and take part in conversation, even without being recognised.



Final Moments

In the hours or days before death, the person may no longer be conscious or responsive. Family and friends are encouraged to speak to the dying person. The act of speaking provides comfort to the family and friends who wish to bid their loved ones good bye. In a study done by the University of British Columbia (2020) shows that a dying person's brain is able to respond to sound, even up to the last hours of life although in an unconscious state. Therefore, do continue to talk to the person even when she or he is no longer able to respond to you. The dying person will sense your presence and still hear your voice.



“It is better said, even repeated, rather than left unsaid” - Dr Ira Byock (2014)

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