

Conversations surrounding death are difficult and, at times, awkward, but these conversations are important in making sure your family member's wishes are honored.

Before having these conversations, always remember:

- Explain the importance of these conversations
- Acknowledge that it may be uncomfortable and work through it
- Don't push or pressure him or her to answer if unready
- Don't be judgmental
- Be empathetic and kind

1. “What are your medical requests?”

Being able to direct your own healthcare is incredibly important, at any stage in life. Speaking with a family member about their preferences and wishes when it comes to end of life healthcare is important, especially if they're unable to speak for themselves.

Medical treatments & knowledge:

- Do you want us to pursue any medical treatment available, experimental and otherwise?
- Who should speak on your behalf if you're unable to advocate for your own health needs? (This is known as a healthcare proxy.)
- How much information should your medical team share about your condition?
- If there's an emergency situation, should we make every effort to resuscitate you?
- Are these wishes recorded in an advance care directive or living will? If not, would you like to create one?
- Who is your primary care physician and who should we contact in an emergency?

2. “Where are your important documents?”

It's extremely helpful to know which formal documents your loved one has and where to find them when they're needed.

Important documents you (or a trusted member of the family) should be aware of include:

- Advance directives (or a living will)
- Any will or last testament
- Life insurance policies
- Contact information for emergency contacts
- DNR (do-not-resuscitate) order, if necessary
- Prepaid funeral contracts

Make sure you know where these documents are. If your loved one doesn't have a will or advance directive, encourage him or her to create one. You may even want to put together instructions for how to do it. If you're unsure yourself, a quick Google search should give you the information you need.

3. “What are your final wishes?”

Speaking with your family member about their final wishes will eliminate stress down the line and help you ensure you're honoring what they want. Ideally, ask about their preferences for the following:

- Method of disposition (burial, cremation, etc.)
- Type and style of service, if any
- Private services vs. public services
- Any specific service details that are important
- Burial location, if applicable
- What they want done with their ashes, if applicable
- Whether they've prepaid for anything (funeral costs, cemetery plot, etc.)

4. “What are your goals?”

What's on your family member's bucket list? Is there anything he or she absolutely wants to get done while they still have time? Having a discussion about goals can help you identify how your family can be most supportive. Some of these goals may not be achievable, but it's still good to discuss them. Keep in mind that goals are not always experiences or accomplishments, some goals might be relational (like 'reconnecting with family', for example).

5. “What's your life story?”

Sharing a life story can be extremely healing for terminally ill individuals and those nearing their end of life. Not only is it helpful to talk about a family member's life alongside them, but it can be healing for them to see it written down or recorded in some way. Others have accomplished this through scrapbooking, writing or recording. When talking through his or her life, it's helpful to identify their strengths throughout their narrative to help them recognize a life well lived.

About Ever Loved

Ever Loved offers free tools to help families navigate the funeral planning process so they can focus on what matters at the end of life. We're here to make things easier for you.