



The Care Initiatives Hospice Team is here to support you and your loved ones as you move along this journey. The journey for each of us is individual and unique, but we often find some common characteristics. Here are a few characteristics that may help you better understand the journey ahead.

### **Talking About Dying and Death**

Talking about dying and death doesn't make it happen, yet many people are hesitant to openly talk about their feelings or desires. We invite you to ask as many questions as you wish. What do your loved ones want during the final days? What things need to be in place in preparation for death? If you need assistance in any matters, please let anyone on the Care Initiatives Hospice Team know.

### **Feelings**

You are likely to feel a variety of feelings such as anger, sadness, relief, or a desire to deny or withdraw, as just a few examples. These feelings may come and go, intensify and diminish, and change on a dime. Sometimes this process is referred to as an "emotional rollercoaster". You may also be asking or hearing questions such as "why did this happen to me?" or "why can't they fix this?". You may experience a withdrawal from friends, neighbors or visitors. You may find yourself engaged in life review in which choices and regrets are examined. Your involvement in activities of the world around you may become less important. Your focus and energy may become directed to the immediate needs and tasks at hand. All of these feelings and experiences are normal.

Sorrow and sadness are common during this journey and continues for the survivors after death. Living without your loved one may include redefining and recreating yourself and your "routine" over time. Be gentle and patient with your individual and unique process. And remember not to hesitate to let us know that you would like assistance with your process and questions.

### **Visions or Confusion**

It is common to experience more time spent sleeping, difficulty determining the time of day, and less clarity in day to day happenings. Tactful sharing of the information may be helpful, but not necessary.

Many individuals will share a vision or experience the presence of a loved one who is dead yet they see or talk with them. It may seem nonsensical to even the dying

individual who may refrain from sharing these occurrences. Often these episodes are comforting and may or may not have meaning. Allow yourselves to share these experiences and explore the source of meaning. Some may refer to these experiences as a dream in which they are preparing for a trip. Others believe these visions help prepare the spirit for the journey. Many discuss wanting to “go home”.

### **Relationships and Review**

At this time, it is common to begin a process of inventorying life. The dying process is as emotional and spiritual, as it is physical. Time to reconnect or finalize thoughts either in person or on paper may help this process. Phrases that help some individuals along in the completion of relationships at this time include: “forgive me,” “I forgive you,” “thank you,” “I love you,” and “good bye.”



Death comes in its own time on its own schedule. No clear timeline applies to everyone, but some indications may appear as signposts along the journey. Just as each person is unique, so can be the signs and symptoms along the way. The following general guidelines may apply:

***Months to Weeks Prior to Death***

It is common for appetite to lessen. Tastes of even favorite foods may change. Food, which has so much meaning for celebrations and as part of daily enjoyment, slowly diminishes in importance. Maintaining some caloric intake and liquids may be a reasonable focus. Letting go of *proper* nutrition (fiber, sugar, etc.) and eating smaller, more frequent meals may be helpful and even enjoyable. As sleep plays a more prominent role in activities of the day, less interest may be expressed in activities once enjoyed. The body may no longer have a need or use for all of the energy that food once provided.

Adapting to these changes in interest and intake is not “giving up,” but simply a way of changing to the current situation and individual needs. The body is not suffering from hunger or thirst, but is building a natural process of comfort and beginning to prepare for the dying process.

***Days to Hours Prior to Death***

Differences in individuals and diseases follow different courses of events. Consult your Care Initiatives Hospice Team for more specific information on the expected course of a particular disease. The Team will support you with information and education as the dying process proceeds. Common indicators that death is coming near include:

- even more sleep and less interaction; perhaps even an inability to speak
- picking at linens or removing clothes; pronounced confusion or visions
- inability to swallow; minimal or no appetite for even soft foods or liquids
- less urine and bowel movement since less food and liquid intake; likely less or no control of bladder and bowels
- blotchy purple/blue coloring of feet, hands, knees or legs
- breathing pattern changes and irregularities; perhaps even long periods of time without a breath followed by several quick, deep breaths
- moaning sounds without any symptoms of discomfort or pain
- wet gurgling/rattling sounds when breathing
- weak and rapid heart rate

As breathing comes to a stop, there is a reflex of the mouth and neck as the body makes an effort to breathe final breaths. The heart stops beating. Death has occurred when both breathing and the heart stop.

Allow your feelings to emerge and surface. Allow yourself time as a family.

Please contact your Care Initiatives Hospice Team as you have been instructed if a team member is not already present. A team member will arrive to help you walk through further steps.