



Let's *talk* about death

We're all born; most of us marry or form permanent relationships; many have children; all of us will die.

While it seems natural to talk freely about the first three, there is still a taboo which can prevent us from talking about death. However, talking about it frankly can be very helpful, and even reassuring.

Here are a few tips about how to start a positive, proactive conversation about death.

1. Talk about it well in advance. The easiest way to have an end-of-life discussion is when you are fit and well.

Most of us have been to a number of funerals, which gradually helps us to form thoughts on what we would or wouldn't like to happen when our turn comes.

2. Let the subject arise naturally, and don't be afraid of it. All sorts of things provoke the subject of death;

going to a funeral; a TV programme, book or film; hearing about someone you know who has died. Don't be afraid to explore the subject with your loved ones when it comes up, listen to each other's hopes and preferences and let your own views be known.

3. Create a bucket list. Life is precious, and you may have some things you would like to achieve while you can. This can be a great way of introducing the subject of limited time, so it leads into talking about death more naturally.

You might also wish to take out a Pre-paid Funeral Plan to pay for your funeral at today's prices, with your chosen funeral director. This also provides the opportunity to record your wishes, making it easier for your family and friends to carry them out when the sad time comes.

Talking about death needn't be a negative thing.

Knowing that you have a plan can provide great peace of mind and spark a new zest for life!

4. Allow those with a terminal diagnosis to talk about death. Most people want to know what the future will hold, especially when that future is finite. As friends and family, our tendency is to urge them not to dwell on death, but to concentrate on making the most of the remaining time. In reality, both are equally important. With a terminal diagnosis comes a very strong desire to put your house in order. Once that's done, it can be easier to emphasise the positive, and to enjoy life to the full. It is important, if your loved one wishes to talk about their death, to listen and to let them talk, even if it is painful to hear. The peace of mind that this gives is considerable.

5. Be brave enough to bring the subject up. If there's no easy opening, it may be beneficial to say "I know this isn't a nice thing to talk about, but have you given any thought..?" This gives the person permission to talk about something they may need to discuss, but didn't want to upset you with.

6. Write down your own wishes about your death.

Most people have a clear idea of whether they would rather die at home, or in a hospice or hospital setting. You may wish to have family and friends around you, or you may wish to keep them away. If your wishes have been recorded, your loved ones will have your own thoughts to guide them at a time of distress and confusion.

7. Chose some elements of your funeral. It can be difficult for loved ones to interpret what you would have liked. If you have favourite hymns, songs or readings, write them down. Say whether you prefer cremation or burial, a woodland burial or scattering of your ashes. You may want flowers or donations, neither or both. You might ask people not to wear black – an increasingly popular choice. One way to record all this is to fill in a 'funeral wishes' form, which you can download from our website. It may be easier to do this as a communal activity, everyone filling in their own copy.