

Nearing the End of Life: A Guide for Relatives and Friends of the Dying (10)

By Sue Brayne and Dr Peter Fenwick

The Life Enlightenment Charity Foundation Limited hereby acknowledges the kind authorization, with a written permission, by the two authors to publish their following two publications in our English and Chinese bilingual magazine “Life Enlightenment” for a wider circulation to the general public, namely:

- (1) *Nearing the End of Life: A Guide for Relatives and Friends of the Dying*;
- (2) *End-of-Life Experiences: A Guide for Carers of the Dying*.

Short Introduction of Both Authors

Sue Brayne MA, Post Grad Dip Couns, PGCE



Sue Brayne originally qualified as a State Registered Nurse. She went onto train as a **Life, Death, and Transition Facilitator** with the Elizabeth Kubler-Ross Foundation. After completing an **MA in the Rhetoric and Rituals of Death** in 2001, Sue began working with Dr Peter Fenwick as a Honorary Researcher into end-of-life experiences. She has several academic papers published on end-of-life experiences and provides educational workshops for carers, relatives and friends on the dying experience and spiritual aspects of the end-of-life care. Sue is also a psychotherapist, specializing in **trauma and bereavement work**, and is a trained **Further Education** teacher.

Dr Peter Fenwick BA (Cantab), MBBChir (Cantab), FRCPsych



Dr Peter Fenwick is a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and has worked mainly in the field of **neuropsychiatry and epilepsy**. He has held Consultant posts at St Thomas's Hospital, the Westminster Hospital and for many years at the Maudsley Hospital and Kings College Institute of Psychiatry, the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, and now at the Department of Neuropsychiatry at Southampton University. Currently, he is the Honorary Clinical Consultant neurophysiologist at Broadmoor Hospital, and Honorary Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Psychiatry, University of Southampton, UK. He has a long standing interest in End-of-Life Experiences (ELEs), as well as in Near-Death Experiences (NDEs), and featured in the first UK documentary film shown on NDEs in 1987. He is now leading a multi-disciplinary project, researching End-of-Life Experiences and their importance for the dying and the bereaved.

Suggestion For Friends

It is important for you to be able to say your goodbyes to your dying friend. Even so, for some families it can be difficult to accept friends being present during the dying process. Other families will be delighted and relieved to have you there. You may need to feel your way through this.

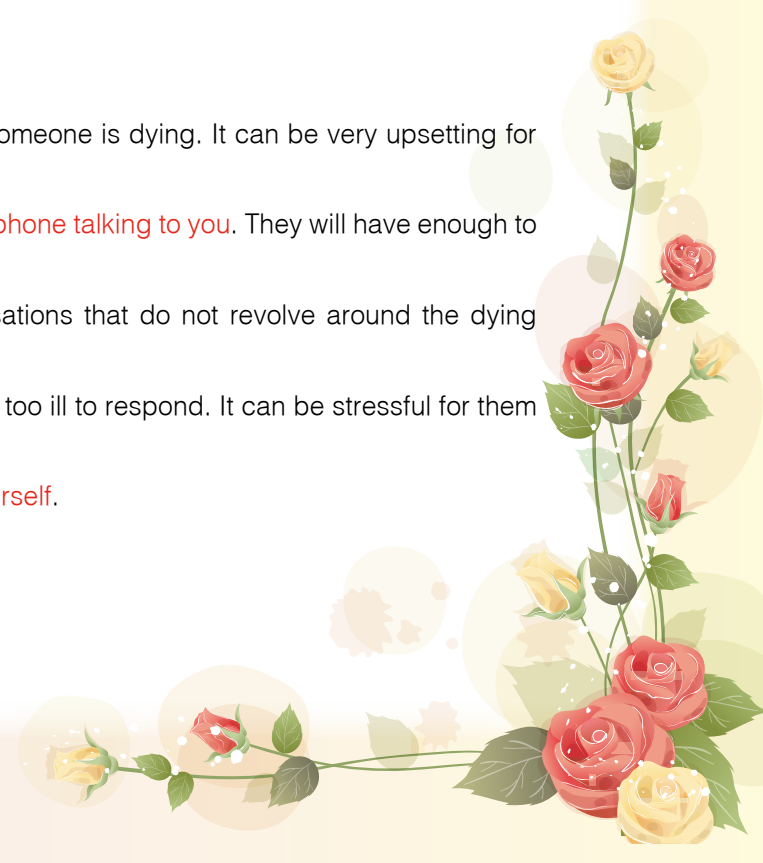
Providing the right kind of support to relatives of the dying is important, as well as being non-judgmental about how relatives and other friends may be emotionally affected by what is happening. **It's little acts of kindness that count, and will be remembered.**



What to do:

- Check with family if it's okay to say your goodbyes in person. You may want to do this on your own, or while family members are present. Just let them know what you would prefer.
- If you are able to, offer to sit with your dying friend. This can be very comforting for families. **Be sure you feel able to provide this support**, as being with someone who is dying can be hard emotional work.
- Send regular short texts or emails to relatives, without expectation of an answer. It is comforting for the family to know you are thinking of them.
- Offer to baby-sit, cook meals for the family, or to fetch and carry youngsters to and from school. You may be needed to take other relatives to seeing the dying person.
- Don't take offence if you are not wanted! The offer of unconditional help is often enough.

What not to do:

- **Don't send Get Well cards** when you know someone is dying. It can be very upsetting for relatives to read them.
 - **Don't expect relatives to spend hours on the phone talking to you.** They will have enough to do caring for their dying relative.
 - **Don't expect** relatives to engage in conversations that do not revolve around the dying person, or the care they are getting.
 - **Don't ask** questions of a dying person who is too ill to respond. It can be stressful for them to try to communicate with you.
 - Don't be falsely jolly. Be sensitive and **be yourself**.
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SUMMARY

It's okay to be afraid of facing the death of your relative or friend. But **the gift of being prepared to face it with them is priceless.**

- **Remember that hearing often continues to the end.**
- Remember just how awkward many people, and even medical professionals, still are with death.
- You may be involved in difficult decisions about life-prolonging treatments.
- Try as far as possible to make sure that the dying person is cared for in a quiet and loving environment.
- Be aware that death can bring up unresolved family issues that may have lain dormant for a long time.
- Be willing to be open and receptive to your relative or friend wanting to talk about their dying process. If you feel you cannot do this, do talk to carers who can support you.
- Listen to what your friend or relative wants or needs, and try to ensure that those needs are met.
- Listen to what the dying person is describing during the last weeks and days of life, and be supportive to whatever is happening for them. It is their dying process.
- Help to create a sacred space as they enter their dying process – perhaps with gentle massage, or lighting candles, or playing beautiful music.
- If appropriate, be open to being there at the end, knowing this can be one of life's most enriching experiences.
- You may – or may not – experience strange phenomena around the time of death.
- After being with someone who has died, be aware that you may feel strangely disconnected from reality for a period of time, and that you may find yourself asking questions about your own life.
- If at any time, and especially after several months, you feel caught up with grief and unable to move forward, do seek help from a professional counsellor.

And Finally ...

We hope this Guide may help you to face the challenges of being with relatives or friends as they journey from life into death.

It is never an easy time, and there is always much to reflect upon. But, **being present at the time of death can be a profoundly rich and moving experience, on many levels.**

We wish you well whatever you are dealing with, and hope you find **peaceful acceptance** within this extraordinary adventure.

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Death, Dying and Bereavement.* The Open University and Sage Publishing. 1993.
- Death-Bed Visions: the Psychological Experience of the Dying.* WF Barratt. London. Bantam. 1926.
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- The Natural Death Handbook.* Josephine Speyer and Stephanie Wienrich. Random Books. 2003
- What Happens When We Die.* Sam Parnia. Hay Publishing. 2007



WHERE TO FIND HELP AND ADVICE

Age Concern Head Office

Tel: 0800 00 99 66 – open 7 days a week

URL: www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/contactus.asp

Citizen's Advice

Contact your local branch

Clinical Nurse Specialists – palliative care

Contact your local hospice for details

Cruse Bereavement Head Office

0208 9404818

Macmillan Nurses

Contact your local hospice or GP for details

Palliative Care Teams

Contact your local hospital or Health Care Authority for details

The Natural Death Centre

Helpline: 0871 288 2098

URL: www.naturaldeath.org.uk

The Samaritans

Contact your local branch

Sue Brayne

Workshops for carers, relatives and friends of the dying experience and the spiritual aspects of end-of-life care.

Email: sue@braynetwork.com

www.d-word.co.uk

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