

HOW TO BE WITH A DYING PERSON

~ by Frank Ostaseski~

Dying is much more than a medical event. It is a time for exchanging love, for reconciliation and transformation for all involved. It is a chance for a dying person's loved ones to become compassionate companions on a journey of continuous discovery.

Fear is only natural. Doubt is to be expected. Whether we are making the bed or confined to it, we will come into contact with the precarious nature of this life and also come to appreciate its preciousness.

Each person's death is as unique as his birth. No one technique can fit every situation, but the following tips can serve as a rough guide during a loved one's final days.

Be Yourself

Relate to the person, not the illness. Bring both your strength and vulnerability to the bedside. It's OK to cry. People who are dying continue to need intimate, natural and honest relationships. Don't use your role in a person's death to downplay or avoid that person's suffering.

Empathize

The greatest gift we can offer one another is our undivided attention. Listen without judgement or an agenda. Be aware of feelings and non-verbal cues. Respect the personal truths the dying person may be discovering. Be mindful of your own inner experience and talk about your discoveries.

Show Human Kindness

Details do matter. A cool cloth on a perspiring brow, holding the hand of a frightened patient, listening to a lifetime of stories. When offered with attention and love, these ordinary activities convey caring and acceptance, build trust and enhance self-esteem. Trust your innate compassion and capacity to embrace the suffering of another as your own.

Keep It Simple

Have confidence in the healing power of human presence. Particularly in the final days, slow down and leave room for silence. Reduce distractions. Create a calm and receptive environment. Honor the spiritual dimensions of dying. Let go of control and be willing to acknowledge ignorance in the face of this extraordinary mystery.

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