

# Preparing for a Difficult Conversation

When faced with the final weeks or days of life, certain conversations may need to take place in order to find meaning and purpose in the caregiving experience and to assist your loved one in finding peaceful life closure. Some conversations may be more difficult than others. On this page you will find some helpful information for starting difficult conversations and some important topics you may want to cover with your loved one.

## Preparing for Difficult Conversations

### **Focus on Your Feelings**

Regardless of the issue, your feelings may affect your ability to say what you want to say. If you enjoy writing, take a few minutes to write in a journal or a piece of paper how you feel in relation to the issue. If talking about your feelings is more helpful to you, then discuss your feelings with a friend, spiritual/religious advisor, counselor, or someone with whom you feel comfortable and with whom you can confide. Praying, meditating, or exercising can also help you sort through your feelings. Difficult conversations may not be so difficult if you can identify your feelings and work through them before having the conversation.

### **Review the Facts**

Gather facts and information about the issue. Talk to other caregivers who have had similar experiences, read books and tap resources to get the information you need to determine exactly what you want to ask or discuss with your loved one. Make sure you have enough information to feel comfortable talking about the issue.

### **Identify What You Want to Say**

Gather your feelings, thoughts, and facts together and practice what you want to say. It might be helpful to write down what you want to say or practice saying it to a neutral person or in front of a mirror.

### **Relax**

Before having the conversation, try to relax by taking a few deep breaths and by relaxing your muscles. Focus on your inner strength. Establish eye contact with your loved one. Focus on the moment, giving the conversation and your loved one your full attention.

## **Present Your Question**

Speak from your heart. Note your loved one's reactions and provide support as needed. Listen to what he/she has to say and also note what he/she is not saying in response. In many situations, loved ones may also have wanted to discuss something with you but do not know how to say it, what to say, or how to initiate the conversation. Especially at the end of life, it is often better to say things than to leave them unspoken.

At the end of life, your loved one may feel a need to pass on to you or others things such as wisdom, advice, a family heirloom or treasure, a family story, a ritual or tradition, expectations of you or others in the future, life's lessons learned, a family secret, or other things he or she considers important. Passing these things on is a part of the closure process for life completion.

To assist in this completion and closure, ask if there is anything he/she would like to pass on to you, family member, friends and/or others. List these things on paper if it will help you remember. Make an effort to spend quiet time with your loved one in order to have the opportunity to collect these intrinsic gifts.