

TALKING WITH A DYING FRIEND

Dear Jerry and Diane,

A high school friend whom I had not seen for several years recently phoned to tell me he is dying of cancer. He asked if I would visit him in the hospital. Since I have my own fears of dying, how do I talk to someone who is dying?

Pete M.

Chances are, he called you because you are someone he recalls feeling comfortable with, someone he can trust. See it as a compliment that he called you and not as a task or obligation. He wants a friend and you certainly don't need special training to be one.

LISTENING VS. DOING

One of the most important components of friendship is listening with an attitude of acceptance without conditions or judgments. If your friend asks questions, realize that you do not need to know the answers. Just be honest and remember that it's ok to say, "I don't know." Offer to bring in someone with whom you could both talk who is more experienced in this area. Accept his decision to do so or not.

Consider this...

Your own peace of mind is one of the best gifts you can give to others

HONEST COMMUNICATION

Honor his trust by being as honest as you can in all your communications with him. For example, if he would ask you what you are feeling about death or what you think happens after you die, keep your integrity by telling him that death is a difficult subject for you because you have your own fears about it. In this way, you communicate your willingness to be an honest and vulnerable friend.

If he happens to be depressed or in pain, don't see it as your job to fix him. If he is worse at the

time you leave, resist any temptation to think you caused it. Rather than looking and concentrating on the condition of his body, choose to look and see the light that is within him.

In our experiences with a great many dying people, we have found that those who are seriously ill don't want their visitors to create a "pity party." They don't want to be treated differently just because they are ill.

Steps to Uplifting Attitudes

- _ Remember to be fully present
- _ Accept your friend without judgment
- _ Know that listening is often more important than what you say
- _ Recognize the situation as a profound opportunity for growth

Being close to someone whose time is nearing its end can allow you to take a new, deeper look at your own life. It can be an invaluable wake up call and a great privilege. Be grateful for the experience he has brought to you. Choose to see your friend as a teacher to help you discover new ways of looking at your own life and death with renewed spiritual awareness and meaning. There must be something in you at this point that has a readiness to learn new lessons from these visits with your dying friend. If you begin to raise some of these questions with yourself, you might find your fear of death diminishing.

Where to Go...

Who Dies by Stephen Levine
Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom
On Death and Dying by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross
www.hospicenet.org
www.attitudinalhealing.org
www.growthhouse.org