

Understanding the Needs of the Dying and Their Loved Ones

Caring for a terminally ill loved one can be a full-time job. Because caregivers are needed to help with bathing, medications, housework, bill-paying and other daily chores, many feel that time — and their life — is racing by.

They have little time for self-care, they're disconnected from friends, and they can lose their sense of identity or self-worth. Caregivers also may feel guilt or resentment at having to put their lives “on hold” toward the end of the illness.

At the same time, the dying person may experience some of the same feelings — guilt, resentment, anger, frustration, shame — due to their illness and the resulting physical limitations that caused them to lose their freedom and independence.

Needs of the dying

A loved one who is dying will experience a wide range of emotions, uncertainties and needs. Those who know they are dying often express similar needs, including:

- To be loved
- To be respected
- To be accepted
- To be free to express feelings
- To forgive and be forgiven

Meeting the needs of a dying person can be difficult. For instance, their needs will continually change depending on their physical pain, family support, overall mood and cognitive ability. And because some patients experience short-term memory loss, dealing with repetitive behavior can become a challenge for the caregiver.

A simple guideline for caregivers is to begin each day helping their loved one with their needs in that moment, on that day. No matter how their needs change, the dying person will always need the support of compassionate family members and hospice staff.

Needs of the caregiver

Individuals placed into the role of caregiver for a dying person are often overwhelmed to find themselves with the responsibility of being “on call” for a loved one who is dying.

They may need time off for self-care, or need someone to talk to or just listen, or need an extra pair of hands from time to time:

- Faith leaders can support caregivers by providing a listening ear or helping hand.
- Members of the community can get involved to help the caregiver stay “connected.”
- “Respite” workers can step in to give the caregiver time away from his or her responsibility.

Those who care for dying loved ones often feel resentment, anger or frustration. The important thing to remember is that help is available in the community and from their hospice agency.

Touching the Lives of Others

At AseraCare, our approach to hospice care ensures that the needs and wishes of the entire family are being met. In addition to providing medical care and services, our hospice team helps patients and families in other ways such as:

- Offering assistance with daily needs (shopping, cleaning, transportation)
- Offering assistance with seasonal needs (cutting grass, shoveling snow)
- Arranging for visitation times
- Being willing to touch and hold when needed
- Being patient with changing moods and needs
- Providing for familiar rituals and rites for the patient and family
- Honoring commitments to call or visit
- Sending an uplifting card

For more information, please visit
www.aseracare.com

AseraCare offers services and programs to patients without discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, status as a Vietnam era veteran, qualified special disabled veteran, recently separated veteran, or other protected veteran, or source of payment.