



A child's guide to understanding voluntary assisted dying

This information sheet is for children aged 5-12 years who want to know more about voluntary assisted dying and what to expect after the death.

Key points include

- Information about voluntary assisted dying and what this means
- How you might feel before, during and after the death, and what to do
- Ideas for activities you could do with your important person, and with one of your safe and trusted adults before and after your important person has died.

What is everyone talking about?

You probably already know that your important person is very sick, and you've probably noticed a lot of adult conversations happening.

You may have noticed everyone acting differently. Maybe they're sad, angry, looking worried, or even behaving in confusing ways.

You may be hearing lots of talk about how sick your important person is, and that the doctors can't make them better.

You might have heard people say words like, 'terminal illness', 'fatal', 'chronic', 'palliative care' or 'end-of-life'.

Sometimes with conversations around end-of-life people don't always agree. This can be worrying.

You have not done anything to cause this.

When someone is very sick, there can be tricky things to talk about. It is common for people to disagree and having these conversations can be hard as everyone is feeling big feelings.

What is voluntary assisted dying?

If you are reading this, an important person in your life is dying and they have chosen something called *voluntary assisted dying*.

This means they have talked to doctors, nurses, and other health professionals, and will be using some medicine to help them to die at a time and place that they will choose. Most people choose to die at home, but some choose to die in the hospital or hospice (a special kind of hospital for people who are dying).

Voluntary means that your important person has chosen this; no one is making them.

Assisted means that your important person has spoken to special doctors who will give them medicine to take to help them to die peacefully and without any pain.

For them to be allowed to do this, they have an illness that will cause their body to die no matter what, they are not going to get better.



Can I make them change their mind?

Deciding to use voluntary assisted dying is a very hard decision for your important person.

Some other adults in your family might show their love and care for your important person by getting angry or frustrated or loud.

Some other adults might show they care by becoming sad, crying, or being very quiet.

You might have lots of feelings about this too. You might even want to try and change your important person's mind.

Your important person will have thought about this a lot, often for a long time when they know that the doctors can't make them feel better. For any person who has chosen voluntary assisted dying, they can change their mind at any stage of the process.

This doesn't mean you can change your important person's mind. It's best to talk to your trusted, safe adults about how you're feeling.

You could also talk to an adult you trust about spending some time with your important person before they die.

With your important person

- Make some memories together
- Ask them questions about their life and things that are important to them
- Tell them about what is important to you and your hopes for when you are older
- Do something that is special for just the two of you

What will happen when they die?

One of your safe adults might talk to you about being there when your important person dies. And what they think about you being there or not being there when your important person dies.

There is no right or wrong answer to this.

You might have also had conversations with your important person, or one of your safe adults, about what will happen when your important person dies.


How long it takes for a person to die after they have the medication is different for everyone. This doesn't hurt the person and will look like they are going to sleep.

Once their body has died, it might seem like they are sleeping because they are so still, but death means that their body stops working.

Their heart will stop beating, their breathing will stop, and they will stop moving. They may feel and look different too. Their skin colour might change, and they may start to feel cold to touch.

It means they won't physically be here to see, touch or talk to anymore.

This can be scary to think about. Talking to your safe adults about this can be helpful.



Need some ideas
for talking to your
safe adult?

Check out the
next page.

How will I feel?

Before, during and after your important person has died, you might have lots of feelings swirling around inside you. It can be confusing and everyone around you might be having lots of emotions as well.

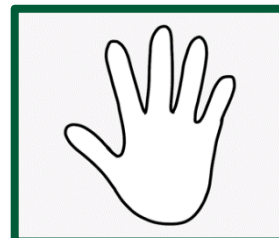
Most people feel sad when someone they love dies, or when they lose something close to them. This is called grief. You might feel sad too, but you might also feel unsure, angry, confused, relieved, heartbroken and many other things all at once – this is all part of grieving.

However you feel is okay. It's also okay to show these feelings in different ways. There is no right or wrong way to feel. If you have big feelings, there are some ideas on the next page for you.

I have BIG feelings, what can I do?

Talking to a safe adult you trust can be helpful. You might have done the *safe hands* or *helpful hands* activity in school, where you have identified five adults you know and trust.

You could pick one of those adults and talk to them about any questions you have. Its ok if they don't have all the answers. It's still helpful to ask. You might like to share with them your feelings, thoughts, and what you understand about what is happening.



Sometimes it can help to do something with your big feelings.

Here are some things that might help:

- moving your body by dancing, stretching or playing
- using your brain to focus on something like a puzzle or a book
- making an art project like a drawing, painting, or sandcastle
- listening to your favourite music or playing an instrument

What if I don't know what to say to my safe adult?

Sometimes it can be hard to start a conversation or know to say, especially about big feelings, death and dying. If you get stuck, try this.

Use these *sentence-starters* to help you when you talk to your safe, trusted adult. You can try saying them out loud or write down your sentences, ready to share.

Sentence starters for before your important person has died:

1. I'm worried about what might happen when...
2. I want to ask my important person...
3. Before my important person dies, I want to...
4. I wish I could understand...
5. When I found out my important person was going to die, I...

Sentence-starters for after your important person had died:

1. The thing that makes me the saddest is...
2. What worries me most is...
3. If I could talk to my important person, I would ask...
4. Since the death, my family doesn't...
5. If I could change things, I would...

6. One thing I liked to do with the person who died was...
7. When the person died, I....
8. Since the death, my friends...
9. After the death, school....
10. When I am alone...



After they die, what do I do?

Once your important has died, it can feel very overwhelming.

Here are some things that can help:



This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

© Department of Health 2022

Copyright to this material is vested in the State of Western Australia unless otherwise indicated. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced or re-used for any purposes whatsoever without written permission of the State of Western Australia.