



A teenager's guide to understanding voluntary assisted dying

This information sheet is for teenagers who want to know more about voluntary assisted dying and what to expect after the death.

Key points include

- When someone chooses voluntary assisted dying, it means that they have gone through a specific process, talked with specially trained doctors, and if they choose, have been prescribed a medication called the voluntary assisted dying substance that will bring about their death at a time and place they choose.
- Only people who are already dying and not able to be cured can have this.
- Knowing that your important person is going to die can bring up many different feelings for you. It's okay to feel these.
- Consider spending some time with your important person before they die, if they are well enough.
- Grief can bring up a whirlwind of emotions and can be difficult to navigate. Seek out help and support; you don't have to journey alone.

What is voluntary assisted dying?

You may have known for some time now about your important person's illness, diagnosis, and prognosis (this is the likely course or outcome of their medical condition). If you are reading this, your important person has chosen something called voluntary assisted dying.

Voluntary assisted dying is the legal process that allows someone who meets the requirements to have access to certain types of medication/s to bring about their death at a day and time they choose. One of these medications is called the voluntary assisted dying substance.

Voluntary assisted dying is a difficult topic, with people having mixed views about it. You may have heard some adults around you discussing their own opinions, and some may be hurtful and hard to understand. You might have your own thoughts about voluntary assisted dying, and this may bring up some intense emotions for you as well.

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

Assisted means that specially trained doctors have cared for them and that the medication/s that your important person will take will assist them to die.

Why are they choosing to die?

Your important person has gone through a careful and considered process, supported by specially trained doctors and nurses. They were only given this option because their illness or disease is not curable, and they are already dying. This option allows them to relieve their suffering in a way that is tolerable to them, and to choose where they are, who is with them and when they die.

Deciding to do this would not have been an easy decision for your important person to make. Their decision is not a reflection of their connection and care for you. It might help you to know more about the process and what to expect. Ask questions if you don't understand something and seek clarification where it's needed. If it's possible, consider talking with your important person to hear their thoughts and how they came to their decision.

What will happen to them?

Your important person will have been prescribed medication/s called the voluntary assisted dying substance. This will bring about their death at a time and place they choose. Most people choose to die at home, but some may die in hospital or a hospice (a special type of hospital for people who are dying).

You may have had previous experiences of death and dying (such as a pet dying), and you might have already had conversations about what will happen when your important person dies.

Your important person will have decided if they want to take the voluntary assisting dying substance themselves, or if they want a medical professional to administer it. The length of time it takes for a person to die once they have had the medication will vary, but it won't hurt them in any way.

Once your important person has taken this substance, their body will start to shut down; their breathing will slow and eventually stop, and their heart will stop beating. Death means that your important person won't be here to see, touch or talk to anymore.

Can I be there when they die?

It's important for you and a safe, trusted adult to talk together about whether or not you want to be present at the death of your important person. You may want to talk to your important person. There is no right or wrong decision, and it's ok to change your mind – including at the time. During your conversation with your safe adult, consider talking about:

If you would like to see their body after they have died.

Your thoughts about a funeral (if they are having one).

Your important person's thoughts about being buried or cremated.

Things you may want to say or do with your important person before they die.

How do I say goodbye?

Once someone has died, it's very normal to wish you had just one more day or one more conversation with them. Perhaps consider spending some time with your important person before their death if they are well enough.

You could:

- Do something special just the two of you
- Share with them the things that are important to you; let them know your hopes and dreams for life
- Ask them some questions; ask about their life wisdom, favourite memories, and experiences, what their opinions are about certain things
- Write them a letter or card.

So many feelings... how am I supposed to feel?

There is no right or wrong way to feel.

Knowing that your important person will die can start the process of anticipatory grief, where you know that a change (death) is coming, and you might experience grief in anticipation of that change. This can take a toll on you physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. You might feel a bit hazy, and it might impact your sleep and concentration.

Everyone processes their important person's death differently, depending on who they are and their previous experiences around death, dying and grief. There can be a mix of emotions during this time, with some being more intense than others.

There is no right or wrong way to feel. It's okay to be sad and cry and it is ok not to. Be gentle on yourself after the death, check in with yourself and listen to what you need throughout this time. If you need time alone, take it. If you need time with family or your friends, be with them. If you need help, ask for it.

What happens after they die?

You might like to ask your safe adult what will happen once your important person dies. Ask if there will be a viewing, funeral, burial or cremation, a wake, or any other important events. If you haven't already, try talking to your safe adult about whether you would like to be involved.

Grief can be exhausting, overwhelming, and painful. Grief can also be beautiful, connective, and life changing. Seek out help and support with your grief; you don't have to journey through it alone.

Grief is a natural, healthy response to loss.

Where can I get help?

Talking to your safe adult is a great starting point. You can also ask your Student Services Team at school for support or find help online at kidshelpine.com.au, lionheartcampforkids.com.au, youthfocus.com.au or headspace.org.au.

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

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