

Exploring mortality

Spiritual health can be particularly important in helping us to explore our mortality. We recognise that it is an incredibly sensitive subject that raises strong emotions.

You may want to focus all your attention on living well and getting better and feel angry or upset that we've even mentioned mortality. Or you may feel that exploring mortality is the most empowering thing for you right now, and feel disappointed or let down that there aren't more opportunities to talk about death, dying and bereavement. Or you may be somewhere in between, feeling confused or afraid and not sure where to go with the whole issue.

Why is it important to talk about dying?

Talking about death or dying can bring up many uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, so wanting to avoid it is a common reaction. It's completely your choice. Talking about death can be very helpful for you at any stage in your illness. It can help you to express your concerns and fears – sharing these with another person can help to reduce distress and anxiety. It can help you to understand more about your illness and what's going to happen if things progress – this might reduce anxiety and help you to make decisions about your treatment and care. It can help you make decisions about practical things such as writing up a Will and making sure the people you care about are looked after. This can help you feel more in control and helps your loved ones too.

How to start the conversation

This can be a difficult conversation to start. It can help to start slowly, dipping in and out, just raising the idea and seeing how your loved ones react. You might find that both you and your loved ones are avoiding the conversation in order to protect each other. Everyone is worrying on their own and not available to support each other. One of the most difficult things to navigate is uncertainty. It can help to think it through and make a plan for different possible outcomes. You could do this using the questions below:

1. In my situation, what is the best that could happen?
2. What can I do to make the best outcome more likely?
3. What is the worst that could happen?
4. What can I do to prepare myself for this outcome?
5. What can I do to make this outcome less likely?
6. What is the most likely thing to happen?
7. How can I support myself in this circumstance?

This might be a way to structure a conversation with your loved ones around what you want to happen if things don't turn out as hoped.

Many of us are unfamiliar with death and uncomfortable talking about it. This can leave us with a lot of unanswered questions about what might be going to happen and how we should prepare for it.

Here are some resources and websites that you may find useful

- [Compassion in Dying](#) – information and support on making an Advance Directive.
- [Death Café](#) – Opportunities to chat about death and dying over tea and cake.

- [Grief Encounter](#) and [Winston's Wish](#) – two organisations which support children facing bereavement.
- [Dying Matters](#).

Books to look out for in our library and shop

With the end in mind – Katherine Mannix

Being Mortal – Atul Gawande

Grief Works – Julie Samuel