

# How do I start the conversation?

At Macmillan we believe talking about death can be life changing. Because it frees you to get on with living, knowing that you've shared your wishes and that vital paperwork is sorted and easy to find. Planning ahead can be difficult, especially as you may already be struggling to cope with fears and uncertainties about the future.

If you can talk openly about how you feel, your family and friends will learn how they can help you. They'll know what really matters to you and it can help you and your family prepare emotionally, practically and financially so you can get on with living life as fully as you can.

## How to approach a conversation about planning for your death

There are many reasons why people may not be having early and helpful conversations about death and dying. Recent research we conducted revealed that over 40 per cent of people feel that death is not something they need to worry about yet. It can make people feel uncomfortable and stir up emotions. Most people don't talk about their death until it touches them in some way but having conversations now can alleviate anxiety and make it less of a taboo subject with your loved ones.

The right moment for the conversation could come unexpectedly, during a meal or on a walk. For some, it might feel better to plan it in advance and schedule a time to cover off everything in one go. You could talk one on one with the people closest to you, or get together as a group and encourage everyone to share their thoughts openly. If there is a moment that it feels right to approach it, then do what you feel comfortable with.

It's good to have a plan about what you want to get out of the conversation and to think ahead about how your loved ones might feel talking about death. Perhaps consider where they'd feel the most comfortable and relaxed.

Some conversation starters could include:

- Reflect on what happened when someone close to you died – “If it was me, I would have wanted this to happen...”
- Look ahead to the future – “I'd like to talk about the future and our plans if I die, will you help me?”
- Use your results from Macmillan's questionnaire – “I took a questionnaire on preparing for death and it's helped me to think about some important stuff I want to talk to you about.”

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)

Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604). Also operating in Northern Ireland. A company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales company number 2400969. Isle of Man company number 4694F. Registered office: 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ. VAT no: 668265007

**MACMILLAN**  
**CANCER SUPPORT**  
**RIGHT THERE WITH YOU**

- Share what's important to you – “I'm okay now, but I'd like you to know what's important to me at the end of my life.”

## Things you could discuss:

- How you would like to be cared for and where
- Funeral plans
- Who you would want involved and contacted
- How you would like to be remembered
- Where they can find important documents such as your will and details of your plans

## Listening is just as important

If someone wants to talk to you about their death, then there are ways you can make them feel comfortable and have an engaging conversation about something they may feel anxious and upset discussing.

- Actively listen – repeat back what they have said so they know you have fully understood
- Be honest and open with them – you don't have to find the 'right' thing to say
- Respect their decisions – they might not be the things that you would choose for yourself, but remember it is their choice
- Be prepared for tears and emotions – talking about death can understandably stir up many emotions
- Don't interrupt – let the conversation flow and hold any questions you have for when there is a natural pause

## Keep in mind

Not everyone will be open and ready to talk about death, so it's important not to push anyone into talking if they don't want to. They may be open to listening, but not ready to talk about it themselves.

This is just the start, you can have further conversations to make death less of a taboo.

**For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)**

Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604). Also operating in Northern Ireland. A company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales company number 2400969. Isle of Man company number 4694F. Registered office: 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ. VAT no: 668265007

Nothing is set in stone, you can change your plans as circumstances change.

Each and every conversation will empower you and your loved ones. You're taking control of your future so you can carry on living life as fully as you can.

## Further support



Dying Matters is a group of people and organisations working to improve awareness of death, dying and bereavement. Its aim is to help people talk more openly about these important issues, and to encourage people to make plans for the end of life. Find out more about [the work of Dying Matters](#).

You can search on our website to [find other useful organisations](#) to contact for support.

We have more information about [talking about cancer](#), which you may find useful. You can also find information about having difficult conversations on the [Marie Curie website](#).

You can also speak to our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00**.

**For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604). Also operating in Northern Ireland. A company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales company number 2400969. Isle of Man company number 4694F. Registered office: 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ. VAT no: 668265007

**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT  
RIGHT THERE WITH YOU**