



Talking About Hospice

When faced with a life-limiting illness, you or your loved ones may be thinking about hospice care but may find it hard to bring the topic up with each other or with doctors. Here are some approaches that can be helpful when talking with loved ones.

Choose the Right Time and Place

Plan for the conversation. Find a time that is free of interruptions. Let the conversation unfold naturally. Maybe you will bring the topic up initially and revisit it again later.

Be Sensitive

People cope with end-of-life issues in many ways. People who are seriously ill need to feel they have choices. As you mention hospice as an option, remember to let your loved one know that they can change their mind at any time. Starting with hospice is not a commitment, but a way to get more support and have new choices.

Be a Good Listener

Be willing to listen with an open mind and heart. Listen for the wants and needs your loved one expresses. These moments, although sometimes difficult, are important to both of you.

Situations Other Families Have Faced

“Mom doesn’t want to talk about hospice, but the rest of us need help. What can we do?”

Most patients don’t want their loved ones to be burdened by their illness. Help your loved one understand that the greatest gift they can give their family is the ability to spend quality time with each other. Hospice supports the entire family so everyone can be physically and emotionally able to focus on what matters most to them at this very important time.

“I don’t want my husband to feel that I’m giving up on him. Won’t talking about hospice give that impression?”

This is a common concern. It’s important to remember that when patients choose hospice care, they’re not giving up – they’re gaining support and choices. We can meet with your loved one in person to talk about their health needs, learn their personal feelings and desires, and introduce the concept of hospice care.

These conversations usually go more smoothly than families imagined possible and are often welcomed by the patient.

“The doctor hasn’t said anything to us about hospice care. Should we bring it up?”

Yes. Many doctors do not bring up hospice care because they don’t want to discourage a patient’s hope. They may actually be relieved if you bring up the topic. If you feel hospice may be a good option – now or in the future – let the doctor know your thoughts. If you are hesitant to talk to the doctor directly, a hospice can help with that communication.

“My grandmother is in the hospital and we’re wondering if hospice could help. How do we find out more?”

Hospital social workers and discharge planners should be knowledgeable about the many services provided by hospice. They can help with a referral to a hospice program. If you haven’t already had direct contact with a social worker, ask your doctor, a nurse or chaplain to put you in touch with one.

These guidelines are provided by the Hospice of Santa Cruz. Please visit their website at <http://hospicesantacruz.org/> for more information.