



FACT SHEET

What can I say

What can I do

When someone I know is living with a terminal condition

(A summary of the Palliative Care Australia pamphlet)

Finding out that someone that you know is going to die comes as a shock. Reactions such as anxiety, sadness and even anger at the news are all quite common.

The person living with a life-limiting illness will be receiving care that helps them live as well as possible and to stay in control. Support for all their needs with physical, emotional, social, cultural and the spiritual aspects of life are considered. Importantly, this involves caring for the person's family and carers at this time.

You can play an important role at this time.

Understanding emotions and feelings

Grief is a process and people need time to work through the pain that comes with loss. There is however, no formula for what should happen.

Whatever comes along, it will be helpful to the person and their family to know you'll be there to support them. Be prepared to listen and recognise their feelings, such as sadness, anger, disbelief, fear and loneliness as they learn to live with and express their feelings. This helps them feel accepted for who they are and gives them dignity. It is a sad time but it can also be fulfilling.

Treat the person who is ill as you always have. Just be yourself.

Understanding the experience of living with a terminal condition

Generally, people with a life-limiting illness make gradual adjustments to the way they live – everyone's experience is different. They keep hope alive and may want to explore what it means to be dying. Listen to them and learn to accept their understanding of the new situation. You can help make this journey a little less lonely.

- **Managing Health.**
To help the person to live each day as well as they can to fulfil their wishes, a range of care is provided by health professionals. This can help to manage the person's symptoms and side effects they may experience such as exhaustion, nausea and weight loss, including their emotional wellbeing and that of the family and carers.
- **Social Activities**
Help the person avoid isolation by adapting social activities to suit them and how they are feeling.
- **Working**
The person living with a life-limiting illness may want to keep working, go part-time or leave work. Continue the friendship, use the phone or e-mail to keep in touch.

What can you say?

Continue to speak to the person as an equal and don't worry that you may say the wrong thing or get emotional. Encourage memories and value the exploration of friendship. These may be ways for the person to say goodbye – just be there to talk and listen.

What can you say to the family?

Let the family know how much you value their loved one and let them know that you support them and feel for them. Offer to help in whatever way you can.

What can you do?

Just your willingness to be there helps to prevent isolation. Your emotional support as a friend and acknowledgement that your friendship hasn't changed is important.

“Know that you can make a difference by:

- offering your support
- showing your respect
- following their lead
- asking how you can help.

Accepting practical help can be hard at first. Allow the person and their family to make the decisions, and fall in with them.”

Practical ways of helping to alleviate the family's stress are by cooking, gardening, picking up the kids from school or assisting with visits for treatments.

It's not an easy time. Remember to give yourself some way of expressing your feelings and relaxing.

After death – what can you say to the family and carers?

“Even when a death is expected it comes as a shock. It's even harder if people stay away or don't say anything. Just be yourself – ‘I'm sorry this has happened’, ‘I'm really sad for you.’...There's no timeline for grief and no solution to fix it. The process of grief is actually part of healing.”

To show you care, ensure that your help meets the family's changing needs.

How will you care for yourself?

Take time to grieve and value the relationship you've had. Stay close to your friends and family.

“A good friend is one of the greatest benefits of being human. You have done all you could.”

If you require further help, please talk to us at **Tweed Palliative Support** or **Wedgetail Retreat**.

Ph: **(02) 6672 8459**

www.tweedpalliativesupport.com.au or www.wedgetailretreat.com.au

Or, call the **Carer Advisory and Counselling Service**
1800 242 636.