

# elevate your RELATIONSHIP

## Honey, Do You Want Lilies or Daisies? Discussing End-of-life with Your Partner

Talking about death and other end of life topics can be very difficult, but it is extremely important. If you do not make decisions in advance, a health care system that has neither the time nor inclination to find out your personal preferences for care will make them for you. Avoid this by making plans and decisions before a crisis occurs. You will be placing your loved ones in a position of power and knowledge. Instead of wondering what you want, your family can be sure that your wishes are respected.

**Getting started.** Here are some ideas to help you begin to talk about end of life decisions:

- There is no perfect time to have these conversations, but it is wise to wait for a time when you are both in a good mood and have the time to talk.
- Consider having these conversations in an environment where you have the other person's undivided attention, such as in a car or on a walk.
- Bring up the topic indirectly by focusing on yourself and your own end of life decisions. For example, "I've made some important decisions should I become ill or have an accident. I am doing this to make things easier for the ones I care about. I realized I don't know what your thoughts are about this topic. Maybe we could talk?" It is much easier to talk about the importance of end of life decisions if you have made these decisions yourself. Use your own wishes as a way to approach specific topics or questions.
- Use an example of another family member or friend who is ill or has passed away. Ask your loved one how they would want things handled if they were in that situation. Emphasize the importance of writing these wishes down to increase the chances they are followed.
- Be prepared to delay the discussion to another time. Your loved one may need time to consider this issue and not be ready for a discussion right away. But be sure to follow up. Sometimes providing an article about end of life planning or an advanced directive document is a helpful conversation starter.

**Questions to consider.** During your discussion, consider the following questions:

- If you become ill and can't make decisions for yourself, what would you like to happen? Is there someone you would like to these decisions for you?

- Are there any treatments, such as life support or intravenous tube feeding, that you want or do not want? Do you have any fears or concerns about the treatments you might receive? What are they?
- What does "dying with dignity" mean to you?

**After your talk.** You and your partner may need to have several conversations about this before you finalize your end of life plans. Once you have reached an agreement with your loved one:

- Discuss your wishes with family members. Talking openly about your wishes now will reduce potential misunderstandings in the future.
- Put your wishes on paper by filling out an advance directive or other legally recognized document. Unless your wishes are written down, health care professionals may not act upon them.
- Give copies of your advance directive to all family members who may be involved in your care. Be sure a copy is stored in a safe place that is known about and can be easily accessed by others.

Having conversations about end of life planning issues is never easy. These discussions force us to face our own mortality and the mortality of those we love. An important point to remember, however, is that having these conversations today can make the lives of those you love less difficult in the future.

## Activity

**Talking about death** can be a difficult topic of conversation, but doing so is important to ensure that you and your partner's wishes are fulfilled, should something happen. Take time to sit down with your partner and discuss the above questions while taking notes. Discuss putting each of your wishes in a legalized document and decide together who you both trust to give the information to and to fulfill each of your wishes. Consider looking at resources from organizations like the American Association of Retired Persons ([www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)) to help you discuss and make these decisions.

For more resources, visit [healthyrelationships.uga.edu](http://healthyrelationships.uga.edu) and [ElevateCouplesGeorgia.com](http://ElevateCouplesGeorgia.com).

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