



Coping with end-of-life and death in the Corona crisis - for families

Saying goodbye to a loved one due to a serious illness brings up deep sorrow and pain. When this loss happens unexpectedly, the event is even more disorienting, and includes feelings of regret and helplessness. These days, the essential and natural components of support - the physical closeness - are impossible. This situation can be frustrating and angering. With that said, we must remember that saying goodbye involves other components besides physical closeness and touch. The following pages are meant to assist you in directing the end-of-life process with your loved ones, while they are in isolation and unable to physically meet, touch, and hug.

Medical decisions to consider:

- Consider/consult with the medical staff about preliminary medical guidelines.
- Would you like for the medical staff to consult with you regarding your treatment? Would you like to end your lives in peace with minimal medical intervention, or with the support of palliative medicine?
- If your condition worsens, would you like to be attached to a ventilator (intubation) or not?
- Who is aware of your decisions or opinions? It is time to decide who will be assigned with power-of-attorney, in case you will not be able to speak for yourselves/lose consciousness. A power-of-attorney is assigned to a person whom you trust, and who would be willing to discuss these matters with you and take upon themselves the task of communicating your wishes to the doctors.
- Make sure to update the medical staff about all your decisions.

Thoughts about the best possible way, under the circumstances, to say goodbye:

- Do not wait. It is better to say the sweet and important things now, rather than regret what was not and could never be said later.
- Keep constant communication, as much as possible, with the medical staff in order to stay updated about the current condition of your loved one.
- Check with the medical staff whether it is possible to meet your loved one through a closed-circuit screen, microphone, telephone, tablet, or other media. Preference for video-based technology.
- Prepare a letter, recording or video clip that can be given to the medical staff to read to, or play, for your loved one.

- Secure for yourselves a warm and loving support system: additional family members, relatives, and friends. Don't be alone.
- Ask for the staff to photograph or video record your loved one during their illness and end-of-life (so you may have documentation of their last moments). People tend to regret not having done so.

Things to include in the last conversation:

1. Expression of positive feelings towards the patient: love, appreciation
2. Gratitude and recognition, and for what exactly. Describe what you received from your loved one, which gifts you are left with.
3. Expression of the importance of the dying person: beliefs and values, life philosophy, worldview, and personal meanings imparted on others.
4. Expression of apology, regret and forgiveness from the patient to his close ones and vice versa.

Identifying spiritual needs:

1. Are you or your loved one connected to a religious/spiritual community?
2. Is there a religious leader (rabbi, imam, priest) who should be present in the goodbye process?
3. Is there a spiritual leader/meditation teacher who should be present in the goodbye process?
4. Does your loved one have connection to the transcendental/divine/holy/sanctified?
5. Are there prayers/rituals that are important for you to say, or for your loved one to hear at this moment?
6. Are there rituals that can be performed in honor of your loved one?
7. Would you like to play them any music/song/hymn/meditation?
8. Is it important to have by their hospital bedside any meaningful object, such as: prayer book, book of psalms, flower, photo?

Important things for people during the end-of-life:

Towards the end of life, it is important for many people to be surrounded by meaningful and beloved others, and not be alone. In the current situation with the need for isolation, family members are unable to physically meet this need for their loved ones. With that, it is important to remember that there are other ways to offer a sense of connection, and there are other end-of-life needs that can be met for the patient: through writing, a phone call, video chat, and through the medical staff.

- Being prepared for death
- Maintaining dignity and self-respect
- Not suffering from pains and physical discomfort
- Planning the funeral and burial

- Achieving inner peace
- Closing out unfinished business
- Not being a burden on others
- Expressing and releasing fears and concerns
- Knowing they will be remembered
- Practicing religious rituals/prayers
- Being cared for with compassion and respect
- Being free of anxiety
- Saying goodbye to important people
- Having someone there to listen
- Listening to their favorite music
- Making decisions about end-of-life
- Dealing with the meaning of their life and death
- Being connected to the spiritual world
- Doing introspection
- Meditating on life-after-death - each by their belief

Suggestion for the time of Shiva or initial grief period:

The Shiva, which creates a supportive familial, social and communal system, in which those grieving are surrounded by friend and family coming to console and bring food, makes it possible to recharge. However, in the times of the Corona pandemic, where the daily routine is interrupted and social distancing is the standard, basic human actions such as consoling the grieving becomes a serious threat to public health. It is important to try and give and receive the familial and social support in other ways. When it is not possible to visit the grieving and share the sorrow, it is still important to acknowledge the loss. Here are a few possible ways:

- Broadcasting the funeral and participating in it via social medias, like Facebook or Zoom
- Performing ceremonies and saying Kadish with a virtual minyan (may consult with a rabbi).
- Visiting the grieving via Zoom (can be done in groups).
- Prayer and study (determine who is willing and able to participate).
- Holding a virtual ceremony commemorating and acknowledging the death/passing, and inviting all people who knew the deceased and want to share their sorrow with the family. During the ceremony, it is possible to light a candle or place a picture; share, express the sorrow and ache. A religious or spiritual leader may help, as needed. Holding space for everything you wish you could do: being together, speaking, hugging. Offering consolation, holding space for thoughts, feelings, voices. What would you like to say? Any meaningful memories with the person? What gift have they given you? The family? The world? What will you miss? Perhaps play a song or music that the person loved.

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