

5 ways to start talking about the most uncomfortable topic

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News

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We have a valuable teaching tool here at the Centrica Care Navigators office: a stuffed elephant about a foot and a half long. Though many young people participate in our [Centrica Journeys](#) program, this stuffed elephant isn't for them to borrow if they need something to hold on to.

Instead, it's a sign — an indication that there's an "elephant in the room" when it comes to end-of-life care for many families. That thing they don't want to talk about is their plan for the future. Discussing what will happen to someone in the time leading up to their death, and how they can best help the people who will remain after they die, can be an awkward and uncomfortable conversation.

A starting point

But that conversation is one that people should have with their loved ones, if only to make sure they're celebrated the way they want to be after their death. It can also be starting point for further discussions, like talking about how children and grandchildren will be cared for, or making sure [advance directives](#) are in place in case a person is incapacitated and can no longer make their own medical decisions.

How do you start talking about the elephant in the room?

1. Look for a natural time to talk

One option is simply to wait until everyone is feeling relaxed and talkative, and simply bring up the subject. That's what I did when I asked my in-laws what kind of end-of-life [plan they had in place](#).

2. Use a real-life experience

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Another option is to use someone else's experience to get the conversation going. After a funeral, you can point out the preparations that person made (or didn't make) before their death, and check them against what you have done. Perhaps you could watch a movie with an end-of-life theme and get people talking in the moments after the movie is over. Try "The Bucket List" or "Terms of Endearment," to name just a few films.

3. Explain why it's important

Your parent, partner, or other person you're talking with might resist talking about dying by trying to change the subject or simply refusing to talk. That's when you can explain why it's so important to you that they take action, by saying something like: "I want to make sure I'm following your wishes for what happens to you when you are in need of care."

4. Help start the conversation

There are resources online to [help with the conversation](#). Many older people have thought about what they would like to see in their last days and months, and might be familiar with the general concept of hospice — they just didn't think anyone else wanted to talk about it. Getting someone to talk with you might be easier than you expected.

5. Answer (or promise to help find an answer) their questions

You can also ask your loved one if they have any questions. There's a lot to the hospice and palliative care process, and it can be confusing and complicated, especially if a patient's condition becomes serious quickly and you need to act right away. The care team you or your loved one will work with if you become a Centrica Care Navigators patient will be glad to answer your questions — they want people to know the value of hospice care, and take advantage of the resources and support that's available.

Talking about end-of-life care can be very uncomfortable for people. There's no best way to approach the elephant in the room, but there are a few simple techniques that might be the right option for you and the people you love.

You can learn more by exploring our website or calling Centrica Care Navigators at 269.345.0273.

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