

WISDOM FOR THE CAREGIVER

When Caring for the Very Ill and Dying

***Don't feel you must talk.** A really ill person may not be able or willing to talk, but he or she will still take comfort in just knowing you are there.

***"Be yourself.** Relate to the person just as you would relate to anyone. People who are ill appreciate being treated normally, and in this way, are reassured that their illness has not set them apart in obvious ways. Relate to the patient, not the illness."(Hospice)

***Be honest in sharing your feelings.** Don't bounce into the room with false cheerfulness, but admit your helplessness and concern. "I would like to help you, but I don't know how," is a straightforward expression of concern. Don't play games and be evasive. Even children can cope better when people talk to them honestly.

***Do touch.** It's more difficult than you would imagine to touch someone hooked up to ten intravenous lines and a respirator, but human contact is what sick people need most. Hold your friend's hand and touch his face. Some people find foot massage relaxing. Others want their arms and legs exercised gently. (Check with a nurse if you are unsure whether this will be okay for your friend.) Also remember that some individuals do not like to be touched. Follow the clues from the patient.

***If your friend can't speak,** ask him to squeeze your hand to answer questions—one squeeze is no, two is yes. But even with this kind of conversation, take care not to overdo it. Also consider holding the person's hand and calmly, softly and reverently share some wonderful "I Remember Memories," hum a favorite hymn,

***Take a small object** for your friend to hold. Maybe a small glass heart or a cross (to remind the person that he or she is loved by you and by God)

*Consider giving your friend a CD player and some quiet **soul-soothing music** to drown out the sounds of the technology used in modern medicine

***Bring small appropriate gifts.** Flowers may not be allowed, but scented lotions and creams or a good lip balm can provide a different kind of relief. A small potpourri to scent the sickroom is wonderful- provided your friend is not suffering from a respiratory ailment.

***Help to take care of the family members** who are standing by. As a friend you will probably come and go, but family members may be maintaining a round-the-clock vigil. Take newspapers, magazines, cookies or muffins, anything that will help them get through the long hours of waiting.

***Donate your frequent flyer miles** or give an airline gift certificate to a family member of a sick friend who lives far away.

***Keep in touch** through regular emails, texting, or CarePages website postings. Say something. Say anything. Let him or her know they are not alone.

***Be a good listener.** People will tell you what they are ready to talk about. Sickness can be a very lonely journey. *(Some comments which may encourage the suffering person to share his or her feelings are: "I know that you are hurting, and I really care about that. If you want to talk about it, I'll listen." or "I can't even imagine how much you must hurt or how lonely you must feel or how devastated you must be?" or "What do you feel like talking about today?")*

Treat a dying person as a human being. Sometimes we treat a dying person in such a way that we make it harder on that person emotionally. We shut the people up in hospitals, whisper behind their backs, and deprive them of all the things that had made their lives rich. Familiar things *are* important.

Ask if the person would like you to say a **prayer** for them. Also inquire if they would like to pray.

"Meet the person where they are: Regardless of how much you may disagree with the families/caregivers way of dealing with their situation, it is not appropriate to judge or give unsolicited advice." Hospice