

5 Myths About Dying That Too Many People Believe

Knowing what to expect when someone is dying

For many people, what is known about death and dying comes from television and movies. However, what is portrayed is typically not accurate. One of the greatest fears that we as humans have is the fear of dying. Most of us do not want to think, read, or talk about it. As a result, people are often misguided in their beliefs about what goes on when someone is dying. Not having the correct information can intensify our fears and even lead to more suffering for the dying and the soon-to-be bereaved. Dispelling the myths and finding out the facts about dying can make this most difficult of times less of a mystery.

Myth #1: If I am not there when my loved one dies, it means that I am terrible, callous, a failure, bad, or an unloving person.

I once worked with a woman who had been unable to be with her mother when she died and felt terribly guilty for years. When her father was dying, she was determined to have things be different. She moved him into her home. She and her family took turns sitting with him so he would not be alone. She was with him the most. One day she was alone in the house with her father. The doorbell rang. She initially thought she would not answer the door, but remembered that they were expecting a package. She thought that she would only be two minutes and figured it would be safe to leave him for such a short time. When she returned, her father had died. Trying to determine when someone will die is one of the mysteries of the universe. Some people appear to wait until they are alone, while there are also accounts of those who are expected to die but will hang on until they have seen everyone. Our presence or absence cannot control when our loved one dies.

Myth #2: As death is near, I have to do everything possible to keep my loved one alive.

No one really wants their loved one to die, but it is ultimately something that we cannot control. People worry that their loved one is sleeping too much or not eating or drinking and that they need to address that. At the end of life, people do sleep a lot as their energy decreases. Not eating or drinking is also a normal and natural response to the body's preparation for death. The body has less need for these things. Not eating or drinking is not what causes death, but the disease process itself. There can be unintended consequences, however, if food and drink are forced on the dying, as it can cause choking.

Myth #3: We should not burden the dying with our tears.

Death is an emotional situation. It does make us sad, and crying is a normal, natural thing to do. It is an honest expression of our feelings. Not everyone cries when they are sad, but if you are someone who does, being with someone who is dying is certainly the time to do so. After all, it is an indication of your caring.

Myth #4: I should always be positive around my dying loved one, so they can stay positive and live longer.

It is good to be positive, but dying is a biological process, and no amount of positive thinking can deter it. Only focusing on the positive can also be a way of avoiding and denying the fact that death is coming. It is fine to talk about happy, pleasant memories, but the dying may also want to talk about what is happening to them and their feelings. If they are able to communicate, just listen and let them talk. They may have something important that they want to say. Being with the dying can also be simply sitting quietly with them, laying your hand on theirs, or gently kissing them.

Myth #5: Pain medicine is used to kill the dying.

Many firmly believe that drugs like morphine cause or hasten death. Appropriate use of medication does not accelerate the dying process, it just makes the dying more comfortable. Not to use pain medication when our loved one is suffering would certainly be unacceptable for any of us. The concern is that excessive sleep is a result of the medication. As mentioned before, the reality is that even those at the end of life who are not on pain medication also sleep most of the time.

For some, the fear of death is more focused on the act of dying than death itself. We are fortunate to live in a time where people are becoming more open to talking about death and their concerns. The more we can address the truth about death and dying, the less emotional suffering we may experience.

Adapted from: https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/understanding-grief/201905/5-myths-about-dying-too-many-people-believe?fbclid=IwAR2WxQhS8a44IHqFivs2lun_FcTkBm7OJsHEDu62kIzUOBMHdqTH7FVPlc

