

want to see fewer people. Respect this period of withdrawal. It can be a sad time for family and friends, but can be a peaceful time for the person dying. Your presence is the most important gift you can offer.

VISUAL EXPERIENCES

A dying person may speak to someone you can't see or describe people and places not visible to you. This is common in the transition from life to death. Don't argue or explain away the experience. Most often, these visions are comforting and full of meaning.



Kansas City Hospice

PEOPLE YOU KNOW. CARE YOU TRUST.

816.363.2600

KCHospice.org

We do not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability or religious beliefs.

ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 816.363.2600.

注意：如果 使用繁體中文， 可以免費獲得語言援助服務。請致電 816.363.2600。

CHÚ Ý: Nếu bạn nói Tiếng Việt, có các dịch vụ hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ miễn phí dành cho bạn. Gọi số 816.363.2600.

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PERMISSION TO LET GO

When you give permission to let go, it may be an important final gift. Your loved one may try to hold on, despite discomfort, to be sure everyone will be okay. You might say goodbye, tell them it's okay to go, or say you will be alright. You don't need to hide your tears. They are a natural expression of your love.

SAYING GOODBYE

Call friends and family who want to say goodbye. It can be as simple as, "I love you, and I'll miss you" or sharing memories. You may need to say, "thank you" or make amends with, "I'm sorry." Share these messages, even if the dying person doesn't seem to respond. Remember, hearing is one of the last of the senses to fade.

FRIENDS WANT TO FEEL USEFUL

Friends may offer to help. If you need practical assistance, such as picking up a prescription, picking up a relative or running errands, let people feel useful. They will be grateful to be a part of the experience and you'll have more time.

CHOOSING THE SETTING

Even during the dying process, people continue to protect and nurture those they love. For many, death is a very

private act, so they wait for the few brief minutes they can be alone to slip away. Others wait to let go until they are alone with one or two special people. Still others leave amid a circle of loving faces around their bedsides. However death occurs, trust that it is likely the way your loved one chose it to be.

You may find it helpful to make notes about just what happened and how it took place so you can share it with others and think through the process in an accurate way later. Who was there? Were there final words? What do you want to remember?

It will help you tell the story both of life and of death, and telling the story is an important way to process grief.

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU

We are here to support the whole family as the end of life nears. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at any time.

KANSAS CITY HOSPICE®
SAFE PASSAGE SERIES

When Death Nears

Signs and Symptoms



Kansas City Hospice

& PALLIATIVE CARE

“
**No two people
experience the
end of life in the
same way.**”

The death of a loved one can be one of life's most painful experiences, but it also can be a rich time for expressing love and gratitude. What can you expect?

PHYSICAL CHANGES

SLEEPING

People nearing death may stop talking or responding and begin sleeping more. Always assume your loved one can hear, even if they seem unconscious. Keep talking and give a gentle touch.

LESS INTEREST IN FOOD AND DRINK

It becomes difficult to process food and fluids. There's a decrease in urination and the color darkens. Artificial food or fluids may cause discomfort. Ice chips or a popsicle may be welcome. Keep the mouth moist and clean.

TEMPERATURE CHANGE

As circulation decreases, extremities may feel cool to the touch. But it's common to feel hot. Don't use an electric blanket. Some people are not able to tell when it overheats.

CHANGES IN SKIN COLOR

Skin may look blotchy, especially hands and feet. Light complexions may look blue and dark complexions darker. This is called *mottling*. The underside of the body may darken. There might be a paleness or blue around the mouth.

RATTLING SOUNDS

Swallowing can be difficult and result in rattling. We don't recommend suctioning. It might be uncomfortable or damage tissues. Turning to one side might help.

BLADDER AND BOWEL CHANGES

It's common to lose control as muscles begin to relax. Check with your team to see if a catheter is needed. Disposable bed pads or disposable briefs may help.

DISORIENTATION OR RESTLESSNESS

People may seem confused or have difficulty recognizing faces. They may pull at bedding or clothing. Identify yourself by name and speak softly but clearly. Explain anything you're doing, such

as, "I'm going to turn you." Try holding hands, quiet music or reading out loud.

DISCOMFORT

It's important to give medications as scheduled to help ensure comfort. Your nurse will adjust dosages as needed. Don't worry that giving pain drugs may hasten death. When medications are used appropriately and adjusted to needs, they do not hasten death.

SURGE OF ENERGY

You may see a temporary increase in energy and alertness. They may be talkative, ask for a favorite food or want visitors. This time can be one of special closeness and a chance to express love.

BREATHING PATTERN CHANGES

Breathing often changes as the body continues to shut down. You may notice periods of rapid, shallow breathing. Or you may see shallow breathing with a pause between breaths.

EMOTIONAL NEEDS

WITHDRAWAL

People near death may withdraw, losing interest in surroundings and visitors. Energy may be limited, and they may

The Moment of Death

Even if you've been present during the dying process, the moment of death will be powerful. Each person will experience it differently. Here are indications that death has occurred:

- No breathing for a prolonged period of time
- No heartbeat
- Eyes are fixed and slightly open with large pupils
- Jaw is relaxed, with the mouth slightly open

Family and friends may want to sit with the body for a time. There is no need to rush things, and sitting with the body, praying or reminiscing may be comforting.

If death occurs in a health care facility, the nurses will help with procedures. If it occurs at home when one of our care team members is not present, please call us immediately, day or night.