



Last Days Matter

A programme to help people plan for the end of life – whether for themselves, someone important to them, or those they care for.

Preparing for the end of life

At Ashgate Hospice, we know how important it is to have open and honest conversations about death and dying. We support people with life-limiting or incurable illnesses and those important to them.

Many people feel unprepared when it comes to the end of life. They worry that without professional knowledge, they won't know what to do or how to handle difficult situations.

That's why we offer **Last Days Matter** – to provide practical advice, emotional support, and a safe space to talk about a subject that affects us all.

In this booklet, we'll cover:

- 1. Planning for the future** – Looking at both practical and emotional aspects, including wills and advance care planning.
- 2. Finding your '3am friend'** – Helping those who want to die at home identify someone they can call on at any time, whether that's a family member, friend, or neighbour.
- 3. How to say goodbye** – It's never easy, but this section offers guidance on having those important conversations.
- 4. Recognising the signs of dying** – Understanding the physical changes that happen in the final days and weeks.
- 5. Navigating the 'new normal'** – Grief can feel uncertain, and many people wonder what is 'normal' after someone has died. This part offers reassurance and support.

We believe that everyone should have the information, guidance, and confidence to talk about and prepare for death, both for themselves and for those important to them. We hope this booklet helps you feel more informed, supported, and prepared for the realities of the end of life.

Wills

A will ensures your wishes are followed and can make things easier for those you leave behind. You can write one yourself using an online service or ask a solicitor to help.

When choosing executors, pick people you trust to carry out your wishes. If you have children under 18, you'll need to name legal guardians for them. You can decide how to divide your estate – whether as fixed percentages or specific gifts. After providing for those important to you, you might also choose to leave a gift to charity.

Make sure your executors and the people important to you know where your will is stored so they can find it when needed.

At Ashgate, we hold regular Wills Months where professional solicitors waive their fees in return for a donation to the hospice. But you don't have to wait until then – writing or updating your Will is one of the most important things you can do, so why not start the process today?

- **For advice on writing a will, search:**

Citizens Advice – Death and wills



- **For advice on legal issues search:**

Age UK – Legal issues



- **For advice on probate, search:**

GOV.UK – Death and bereavement



Lasting power of attorney (LPA)

An LPA lets you choose someone to make decisions on your behalf if you become unable to do so. This could be a family member, friend, or trusted person over 18.

There are two types of LPA:

- 1. Property and Financial Affairs LPA** – Covers things like paying bills, managing bank accounts, and handling property.
- 2. Health and Welfare LPA** – Covers medical treatment, care and living arrangements but only takes effect if you lose the ability to decide for yourself.

You can complete an LPA online yourself and submit it to the Office of the Public Guardian or use a solicitor if you'd prefer but this may incur extra costs.

Taking these steps helps make sure your wishes are followed and that the people you trust can act on your behalf when needed.

- **For advice on Last Power of attorney, search:**
GOV.UK – Make, register or end a lasting power of attorney

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Advance care planning

Advance care planning gives you the chance to make decisions about your future care, including medical treatment. Let people know these plans exist and where they are kept.

Advance decision to refuse treatment (living will)

This lets you specify treatments you don't want in the future, ensuring your wishes are respected if you become unable to make decisions yourself.

Advance statement

This is a broader conversation where you can express your wishes, values, and preferences – such as where you'd like to be cared for or any religious or spiritual beliefs that are important to you. It is helpful to those involved in your care if these wishes and preferences are written down in advance.

- **For Guidance on Advance Care Planning, search:**

NHS end of life care, planning ahead

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Funeral planning

Legally, there are very few rules about funerals – the only requirement is that the body must be disposed of hygienically. Planning ahead can ease the burden on those you leave behind.

- **For support in recording your funeral wishes, search:**

Hospice UK my funeral wishes

- **For information on funerals, search:**

National Association of Funeral Directors

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Organ and tissue donation

If this is important to you, let those caring for you know. If you're supporting someone else, try to understand their wishes so they can be followed.

- **For more information, search:**
NHS Organ Donation

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To care and accompany

Being there for someone at the end of their life can mean different things. Ask yourself:

- Are you willing to answer the phone at 3am if they need you?
- Who would you want by your side in your final moments?
- Who can you turn to when you need comfort and support?



**Sometimes,
just sitting with
someone, holding
their hand, or
listening can mean
more than words
ever could.**

Saying goodbye

The organisation, Dying Matters, reminds us:

“In the long run, you hurt people more by the conversations you don’t have than the ones you do.”

Dr Ira Byock, a palliative care physician, identified four things dying people often want to hear:

- 1. I love you** – We all want to feel loved.
- 2. Forgive me** – While honesty is important, avoid bringing up something that could cause unnecessary hurt.
- 3. I forgive you** – If there’s nothing to forgive, it’s okay to skip this step.
- 4. Thank you** – Let them know their life and relationship with you has made a positive impact.

If you’re with someone in their final days, there’s no need for a dramatic goodbye each time you leave the room. A gentle “Sleep well” or “I love you” can be just as meaningful.

If there’s a chance you won’t see them again, acknowledge it gently. Let them know what they mean to you – because, in the end, what matters most is love and gratitude.



Understanding and recognising when someone is dying

It's hard to truly prepare for death – whether it's our own or that of someone we love. There's still so much we don't know about what dying feels like or what, if anything, comes after.

Recognising when death is near can be difficult, and there's no exact timeline. But when someone is approaching the end of their life, certain physical changes may happen, such as:

- eating and drinking less or losing the ability to swallow
- reduced need to go to the toilet, or incontinence
- changes in breathing – it may become shallow, or you may hear a rattling sound (which is normal)
- skin tone changes – pallor or mottling
- periods of confusion or agitation
- sleeping more or becoming unconscious.

There is no checklist for dying, just as there isn't one for living. What matters most is being present, patient, and compassionate.

What to do after a death

If someone dies at home, you'll need to call a health professional to verify their death. Your GP, district nurse, or hospice nurse can advise you on who to contact, including out-of-hours.

Once the death is verified:

- you can contact your chosen funeral director
- the GP will then complete a Medical Certificate and send it to the Medical Examiner

- the Medical Examiner will review the details and may contact you to answer any questions
- the paperwork is then sent to the Registration Office, who will call the next of kin to arrange an appointment to register the death.

In England, this must be done **within five days**.

- **For local guidance, search:**

Derbyshire City Council – Registering a Death



- **For a step-by-step guide, search:**

GOV.UK What to do when someone dies: step by step



- **For support with benefits, search:**

GOV.UK Bereavement Support Payment



- **For support with benefits, search:**

Citizens Advice – Death and wills



The 'new normal'

Grief is deeply personal—there's no right or wrong way to feel. Some people cry, some feel numb, and others go into 'autopilot.' However it looks for you, it's okay. Grief is a natural response to losing someone important, and there's no set timetable for healing. People experience grief differently. Some may cry or feel deep sadness, while others might feel shocked, numb, or detached, especially in the early days or weeks. This doesn't mean they don't care – everyone processes loss in their own way.

Grief isn't something to be 'fixed' or make disappear. It's important to acknowledge the significant change in a bereaved person's life. Rather than expecting them to 'move on', offer patience and understanding as they adjust.

Since no one can truly know how another person feels, try to avoid phrases like "I know just how you feel." Instead, listen and take their lead. They may want to talk about their loss in detail, or they may not.

If you knew the person who has died, sharing kind words or memories can mean a lot to those grieving.

Support can take many forms, such as:

- Helping with household tasks or shopping
- Sharing a coffee or a quiet moment together
- Sending a thoughtful message or making a call to check in.



The best way to support someone in grief is simply to be there. As beautifully described:

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion,
who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement,
who can tolerate not knowing, not healing, not curing...
that is a friend who cares.

Henri Nouwen

Other useful resources:

- **Ashgate Hospice**
www.ashgatehospice.org.uk

- **Ashgate Hospice's Supportive Care**
supportivecarereferrals@ashgatehospice.org.uk
Tel: 01246 568 801
Monday to Friday 9am–5pm

- **CRUSE Bereavement Support**
www.cruse.org.uk
Tel: 0808 808 1677
Check website for opening hours

- **Samaritans**
116 123
Call FREE any time of day or night

Contact

Ashgate Hospice, Ashgate Road,
Old Brampton, Chesterfield,
Derbyshire S42 7JD

01246 568 801

info@ashgatehospice.org.uk

www.ashgatehospice.org.uk



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