

End of Life Issues #2 – Family Conversations

“It’s too soon.” But it’s always too soon ... until it’s too late. A survey by The Conversation Project found that 90% Americans want to discuss end-of-life care with their loved ones, but only 27% have done so. “This isn’t about filling out Advance Directives or other medical forms. It’s about talking to your loved ones about what you or they want for end-of-life care.” The Conversation Project

GOALS FOR THE CONVERSATIONS

To keep peace in the family
Connecting ... sharing

Find out what everyone wants
Death is natural and an opportunity for growth

ALL family members need to know each other’s wishes and expectations about a variety of end of life issues, including children and grandchildren. Having and memorializing the conversation eliminates misunderstandings and arguments over prolonged care or unwanted efforts in emergency situations. Not having the conversation can result in conflicts that may never heal, legal battles and financial burdens because just one family member claims to know what the patient wants.

Having an honest conversation is an act of love. It provides all your family members with a shared understanding of what matters most to all of you. It guides them in making decisions for themselves. It is a teachable moment. Just as you don’t get into reproduction discussions when the family celebrates the birth of a baby, you don’t have to describe grisly medical situations. Talk about celebrating life. Gift your children an estate planning session with an attorney.

BEFORE THE CONVERSATION Consider what your own end of life wishes are. Consider how you want to memorialize the conversation. “Five Wishes” can guide and document the conversation.

WHEN AND WHERE DO YOU HAVE THE CONVERSATION? Have the conversation BEFORE you or a loved one gets sick or has a tragic accident. Holidays, family get-togethers, before the baby arrives, before the next trip, before surgery or next time you visit the kids. Determine a comfortable location such as a family member’s home or in a restaurant over a nice meal.

WHO IS INCLUDED IN THE CONVERSATION? Include **ALL** ages, even young children - spouse, partner, parents, children, grandchildren, siblings, caregiver, and/or spiritual advisor. After a child’s 18th birthday, the parent’s ability to get information and make decisions ceases without approval.

“Why Young Adults Need Estate Plans,” Wall Street Journal (Quotes by Brad Wiewel, TX Atty)
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323981304579079473312130490>

Music – Teenager describes what she wishes - “If I Die Young,” The Band Perry (Top 40 Charts)
Lyrics: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bandperry/ifdieyoung.html>

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Certain conversation starters can be used, such as sharing a story of someone else’s experiences or using a letter or video as a starting point. Some additional ways you can break the ice:

“I need your help with planning for the future.”

“I was thinking about what happened to _____, and it made me realize...”

“I do not know how you feel about your medical decisions in case of an emergency.”

“When you die, do you want your organs donated?”

PHYSICAL AND MEDICAL ISSUES TO DISCUSS

Oral remembrance of a conversation carries weight with doctors in a trauma or emergency. Include folks who live locally and by your second home. Who will make health care decisions and why (local, medical experience)? What kinds of medical treatment are desired in various situations? How much are you willing to spend for medical care? Explain what palliative care is and how much you want versus cognitive ability. Explain hospice care and how soon you want it after a diagnosis that qualifies you. Which organs will you donate?

SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL ISSUES TO DISCUSS

Share and honor each other's spiritual/religious beliefs without judging or trying to force your beliefs. "Five Wishes" can help guide the conversation. How involved should the minister/pastor/rabbi be? Do you want family and friends to pray for you? Do you believe all extremes should be done to extend life? Do you see doctors as the hand of God? How important is the quality of life? How do you die with dignity? Do you support physician-assisted suicide? Do you want to be buried or cremated? How much do you want to spend on a funeral? What kind of celebration do you want? Do you want to be there? Do you believe in an afterlife? Take a field trip to a funeral home before there is a death.

Advanced Directives - If there is time, family members can complete "Five Wishes" which describes scenarios. It is recognized as legal document in 42 states, but not Texas due to witness regulations. It can be attached to legal TX documents. Explain why the different medical documents are important.

Medical Power of Attorney - Designation of Health Care Agent and powers

Authorization for Release of Health Care Information (HIPPA)

Living Will - Directive to Physicians and Family

DNR – Do Not Resuscitate

NOT NECESSARY TO DISCUSS IN THE FIRST CONVERSATION Save the follow-up conversation with your Health Care Agent(s) and those who need to know your health care conditions in greater depth and the location of useful health care documents.

Physicians - list of your doctors

Medications – dosages, costs of prescription drugs, pharmacy contact information

Identification cards – insurance, Medicare and/or Medicaid Number, Donate Life

Medical care - long term care at home or care facility, palliative care

Providers – short/long-term nursing care, hospice

Insurance policies - medical, long-term care insurance

Legal documents – location, attorney information

Funeral arrangements – pre-needs, funeral homes, disposition, cemetery documents

Memorial services – when, how much to spend, obituaries

RESOURCES

"Five Wishes" (18+) "My Wishes" (children)
www.agingwithdignity.org (888) 594-7437

The Conversation Project
<http://theconversationproject.org>

DocuBank – store your medical forms
www.docubank.com 866-362-8226

Online Living Will Completion for Texans
<http://texaslivingwill.org>

NHPCO – Hospice and Palliative Care
www.nhpc.org

Donate Life – organ donation registry
<https://www.donatelifetexas.org>