

# What You Can Do To Help Your Loved One

## *Training for Caregivers*

### **Changes in the Body**

Dying is a natural process during which the body is shutting down and preparing to let go. As a result, your loved one will experience changes in his or her body, mind and spirit.

### **Pain and discomfort**

Emotional, psychological and spiritual pain can make physical pain worse. Physical pain can also worsen suffering that is caused by other sources. Your hospice care team can help your loved one feel more comfortable through music therapy, massage therapy, aromatherapy, supportive presence and medicine.

Talk with your hospice team if you have question about pain medicines.

#### **What you can do:**

- Offer supportive touch such as hand-holding if your loved one is OK with it.
- Sit in silence, as this may provide comfort.

### **Breathing**

You may begin to notice a change in breathing. A long pause between breaths (apnea) is normal.

A gurgling noise from the throat is common and caused by saliva collecting at the back of the throat. Being weak makes it hard to swallow. It is likely more disturbing for you to hear than it is uncomfortable for your loved one.

#### **What you can do:**

- Change your loved one's position.
- Turn your loved one on his or her side to keep the saliva from building up in the throat.
- Clean your loved one's mouth with a swab.
- Use a fan or open a window to move air around the room.
- Respect your loved one's need to rest.

## Restlessness or agitation

Restlessness comes and goes. Some days are peaceful, others less calm. It is all part of the normal process as the body makes the transition between the work of living and the process of dying.

Agitation is a symptom with many causes. It is common during the last few days of life.

Talk with the hospice team if restlessness seems extreme. You can also talk with a chaplain, social worker or friend to share thoughts and address anxieties.

### What you can do:

- Keep voices calm and the room quiet.
- Dim the lighting.
- Allow your loved one to tell you about his or her dreams and visions. Reassure your loved one that this is common.
- Try playing music with a gentle tone and soft volume in the background.