



## HELPING THOSE CARING FOR DYING LOVED ONES

Caregivers often have trouble knowing what to say or how to act around a loved one once the news of a terminal illness has been learned. It is important hospice professionals help caregivers deal with this unpleasant and awkward situation in the best way possible.

“This fear of not knowing what to say or do can prevent caregivers from giving the love and support the terminally ill need most,” explains Jack Gordon, president of Hospice Foundation of America.

Gordon offers several suggested responses gathered from various sources—including hospice patients—you can relay to caregivers to help them deal with terminally ill loved ones. From their experiences, patients suggest that caregivers:

- Be honest. Patients can tell when feelings or actions are insincere.
- Laugh or cry with the patient as appropriate. Allow them to express intense emotions.
- Don't feel sorry for the patient. The caregiver's understanding helps preserve dignity and pride.
- Touch the patient – he or she wants to be accepted despite the way they may look. Inside, he or she is the same person.
- Let them be silent if they want. Sometimes patients don't have much energy and may just want silent companionship. The caregiver's presence alone can be comforting.
- Let the patient talk about the illness if they so choose. Talking helps to work through feelings.
- Space out visits and calls. Consistent support is very helpful.
- Offer to baby-sit. Children will need a break from the illness, and private time between the patient and his or her spouse is treasured.
- Support the entire family. One person may be very sick, but the entire family is suffering. Let them express their grief as well.
- Offer to help with simple chores. Routine jobs are often difficult for sick patients to accomplish.
- Always continue to be a friend. Don't let illness overshadow all the good times that have passed.

*Information provided by Hospice Foundation of America [www.hospicefoundation.org](http://www.hospicefoundation.org)*

Hospice of Spokane offers bereavement resources at no charge to our community. Gathering with others who are journeying through grief is comforting and informative for many people. Our grief support groups focus on several types of grief and are available throughout the week. Special programs especially for bereaved children and parents are also offered at no cost. Individual counseling is available on a sliding fee basis.