

Spiritual RX for Family and Friends: In Palliative Care, Chaplains are Often Asked: “When Someone We Love is Dying . . . What Do We Do? How Might We Provide Comfort?”

GWENDOLYN J. MORGAN, MDiv, MFA

Spiritual practices are activities we do to deepen our relationship with the sacred. The same practices may be used to honor the life of our loved one and support them at the end of their lives. We remember to respect each person, listening deeply for their needs and desires at each moment. When someone is dying, there are ways to provide comfort.

- **Be a presence.** Sit bedside in silence. You do not have to say anything. On a spiritual level, your loved one knows of your love and care even if they are not conscious.
- **Breathe.** Breathe with your loved one. Take deep, slow, easy breaths. In many languages and faith traditions the word for *breath* = *wind* = *spirit*.
- **Share music.** Play music or sing to your loved one. CDs or tape players are often available, and many hospices and hospitals offer music therapy or music vigils, where guitarists, harpists and others provide music which is soothing for everyone.
- **Pray.** Prayer is being in the presence of the Divine, talking with your God, Higher Power, Spirit. Pray however you are comfortable—as if you were talking to a friend, holding an intention or simply sitting in silence. Ask someone to pray with you if that would be helpful.
- **Read.** Read comforting stories, poems, sacred scriptures that are soothing to you and your loved one.
- **Offer gratitude and release.** Offer your love and care, spoken and/or unspoken—“I love you,” “I forgive you,” “Please forgive me,” “Thank you.” Tell your loved one the things you are thankful for in your lives together, and allow time for saying “Good bye” (which literally means *God be with ye*).
- **Offer loving touch.** Hold your loved one’s hand, stroke their hair, massage their feet, if it is comfortable for you and them, offer a gentle touch.
- **Ask for support.** Ask for assistance from chaplains, counselors, friends, social workers, nurses, physicians, medical staff and faith leaders.
- **Care for yourself.** In the midst of a loved one dying and after their death, it is ok to eat and sleep, go for a walk. Taking care of yourself may be part of the most important spiritual practice you may share, the most precious gift you may give.

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