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DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

How to Approach Terminal Illness Questions with Your Funeral Clients

As funeral directors, it is our job as end-of-life shepherds to provide comfort to those left behind. Many people do not know what to do when they find out that their loved one has days, weeks, or months left to live. On today's [Arkansas Funeral Directors Association](#) blog, we'll take a look at things you might suggest to families facing a terminal illness.

Gather resources.

Verywell Health suggests that people with a terminal illness [learn all they can](#) about their condition as soon as they are diagnosed. Families that have come to you to make end-of-life arrangements will likely have questions that you can't answer. Although you are not an expert in terminal illnesses, your clients may look to you for guidance. Point them in the direction of resources, such as [support groups, educational workshops](#), and counseling.

Make tough decisions early.

One of the first things many people want to know when they are facing the death of a loved one is what to do with the things that get left behind. For many people, this means preparing a home for sale. This is a tricky situation when someone is still sick and living, but their family understands they cannot afford to maintain the property upon their loved one's death. You might suggest they have this conversation with their loved one before they pass on. Something else they might want to keep in mind here is that [some states require](#) that any death inside of the residence is disclosed before signing the closing paperwork.

Collect personal documents.

The best time to gather a loved one's [personal documents](#), such as their will, health insurance, and divorce decrees, is before they pass. Arrange to have all of these types of paperwork stored in a central location where they are accessible by pertinent family members.

Decide on a caregiver.

Providing care for an individual with a terminal illness requires physical, emotional, and mental strength. Family caregivers should assess their ability to provide the level of care their loved one



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needs. This could be anything from helping with toileting to making sure they eat. Daily Caring points out that cancer, Alzheimer's, and other diseases can trigger a [lack of appetite](#). Families should also keep in mind that [those diagnosed](#) may suffer from depression, which can also lead to challenges when providing care. The decision to provide care as a family or to outsource to a home health provider or hospice should be made based on compassion and abilities.

Say goodbye.

Nobody likes to think about death. But, people with a terminal illness know that that is exactly what they face and likely in the near future. Hospice of Red River Valley suggests [offering hugs](#) and letting the tears flow. Arrangements for a special goodbye might be made to make the transition easier for everyone. An example might be a favorite family dinner or, depending on the patient's health, a weekend getaway before their condition turns worse. Remember, many people never get to say goodbye while their loved one is still alive, this is a precious opportunity.

Helping a family make arrangements for someone with a terminal illness is not easy. In addition to all of the practical aspects, such as choosing a coffin and understanding the expenses, your clients may have questions. Although this may be out of your area of expertise, you can offer support throughout the process. From providing resources to reminding your clients that they have a chance to say goodbye, you can be there when they need you the most.



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