

Let's Talk! About Death & Dying

Krysta Kavanaugh, February 2026, page 1

Quotes & "Truths"

Aging and dying are not problems to solve — they are experiences to be met.

Even as the body weakens, awareness and love do not disappear.

The work is not to get rid of what's happening, but to be present for it with as much love as possible.

We don't need to be positive about death. We need to be present with it.

We can plan responsibly and still meet death with openness.

Who we are is not limited to what we can do.

We don't have to improve death to meet it with love.

Aging doesn't hurt your body first — it hurts your illusions.

So... this is the beginning of the final stretch.

Kids bring joy — but they are not a shield against loneliness.

One day, the outings you once jumped into with enthusiasm feel like a marathon.

Bills grow, needs grow, prices grow... but support doesn't.

Your health is your real job.

Illness doesn't discriminate,

but it respects those who take responsibility for themselves.

So you learn to enjoy the small things —

a peaceful breakfast, a good book, music that warms the soul.

Clinging to the past steals the present.

Life today may look different, but it still holds moments worth living.

The day you stop learning is the day you start aging.

We don't talk about death to become morbid — we talk about it to live more honestly.

The physical process of dying doesn't look like it does in the movies.

Themes & Foci

avoidance

fear of suffering

fear of burdening others

family conflict/avoidance

meaning/spiritual, practical clarity

how to talk to loved ones

planning / forms

medical decisions

fear of suffering

caregiving / anticipatory grief

fear of being alone

unfinished conversations

family avoidance

control vs surrender

Questions & Desires

What's the part you don't say out loud?

What do you fear people will do if you bring this up?

What would support sound like?

How do I plan for a peaceful death?

How do I talk to a loved one about my end-of-life concerns?

How do I find someone to be my "medical power of attorney?"

What's hard about talking to family/friends about this?

What reaction do you not want?

What would a supportive response sound like?

What part of death/dying is hardest to talk about?

What would 'more ease' look like for you?

What's one thing you want to decide or clarify this year?

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Which of these relieves you to name? Which one do you resist?

What am I not ready to say out loud?

I want to be heard.

I want to be understood.

I want practical planning.

I want reassurance.

I want permission to talk.

I want to not be treated differently.

"If your health was to get worse, what are your most important goals?" "What are your biggest worries?"

"What gives you strength as you think about the future?"

"What activities bring joy and meaning to your life?"

"If your illness was to get worse, how much would you be willing to go through for the possibility of more time?"

"How much do the people closest to you know about your priorities and wishes for your care?"

"Having talked about all of this, what are your hopes for your health?"

"I'm hearing you say that is really important to you and that you are hoping for . Keeping that in mind, and what we know about your illness, I recommend that we . This will help us make sure that your care reflects what's important to you. How does

this plan seem to you?"

"I will do everything I can to support you through this and to make sure you get the best care possible."

Talking to Loved Ones about your Medical Condition — or Theirs

"I want to talk about something practical. I'm not being morbid — I'm being loving. If something happened, I'd want you to know what I want, and I'd want it to be easier on you."

"Please don't manage my feelings."

"I'm okay talking about this. I want to say it out loud. What I need most is for you to listen — not fix it, not change the subject, and hopefully not treat me differently."

"I notice you change the subject or get quiet. I understand it's uncomfortable. What would help me most is simple listening — not solutions."

"The goal isn't to get rid of death. It's to remove secrecy and confusion so we can live more fully."

Write one sentence you might use with someone in your life.

The Practical & Preparation Part of Death

Medical wishes: CPR / ventilator / feeding tube / comfort care

Decision-maker: who speaks for you if you can't

Documents: advance directive, health care proxy, POLST (if applicable), will/trust

After-death wishes: burial/cremation, service/memorial, obituary tone, who to notify

Digital life: passwords, accounts, photo archives

Legacy / meaning: messages, letters, mementos

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"I'm hearing you say that is really important to you and that you are hoping for. Keeping that in mind, and what we know about your illness, I recommend that we .. This will help us make sure that your care reflects what's important to you. How does this plan seem to you?"

"I will do everything I can to support you through this and to make sure you get the best care possible."

How much do the people closest to you know about your priorities and wishes for your care?

Having talked about all of this, what are your hopes for your health?

What activities bring joy and meaning to your life?

Values Statement: End-of-Life Orientation: Any of these true for you?

I value quality of life over length of life.

I want my body treated with dignity, not managed for institutional convenience.

I do not wish to be kept alive in ways that:

- sever me from myself
- remove choice and presence
- prioritize systems over humanity

I value return over preservation. When my life is complete, I want my body to re-enter the living world in a way that nourishes life rather than resists it.

I trust processes that:

- are humane
- minimize harm
- allow natural completion
- honor participation rather than control

I am not seeking to hasten death. I am seeking to live fully now, knowing that my ending aligns with my values.

Clarity about death allows me to live with greater freedom, peace, and vitality.

I want my death to reflect the same dignity, participation, and respect for life that I value while living.

I don't need my choices to be universal — only coherent with my life.

Top 5 Regrets of Those Dying

From *How to Get the Death You Want* by John Abraham

A hospice nurse interviewed thousands of people.

- * I wish I'd have the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me. (Most common)
- * I wish I had 't worked so hard. (Most men)
- * I wish I had had the courage to express my feelings.
- * I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
- * I wish that I had let myself be happier.

Questions for Medical Providers

We must learn to ask, when any test or treatment is proposed, how efficacious it is, how many people in my situation are cured by this treatment, how many have had their lives extended by this treatment. (Zero to 2 percent.) Extended by how much? (Well, by three to four weeks.) At what cost? What are the burdens of this treatment? How much time does it take? How will I feel afterward? Will I be able to do the things I enjoy? We make those decisions, we sign the consent form and say, "Yes, sign me up to do this treatment." But we don't realize that it may be futile and it may be robbing us of our quality of life and our precious time.

Barbara Coombs Lee

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RESOURCES

Non-Crisis Warm Lines

Here's a resource that I have used. It's a "warm" line vs a crisis line. Though sometimes when I called it seemed like a crisis to me! But wasn't by definition of a crisis line.

Staffed by social workers. Only 15 minutes for a call. Often that was enough. And you can call multiple times. They don't ask any personal information other than your first name. I used it to vent or to feel not crazy.

warm line 8 am-10pm, 7 days a week
can call 3x between 8-1
2x between 1-7
and 1 call between 7-10
520-770-9909 (Pima County)
602-347-1100 (Maricopa County)
1-888-404-5530 (Arizona Warm Line)

choiceanddignity.org

800 811 4112

schultz7900@gmail.com

Jim Schultz

Has OLLI classes & meet up ones

Spring 2026 Classes - Every Friday in May
How to Get The Death You Want Classroom Series -
In Person

This series of five 2-hour sessions will help you
prepare for death, yours, or a loved one.

There are **Five Primary topics**: Introduction to Death and the Right-to-Die Movement Advanced Directives - Your decisions about the types of care and life-sustaining measures you may or may not want. Medical Advocacy - How to ensure your wishes are honored. We'll cover both choosing your advocate as well as being a good advocate for someone else. Communication with Family, Loved Ones, and Medical Providers - How to start and have the necessary conversations. Deliberate Life Completion - We'll discuss the what, where, and how Medical Aid in Dying and other methods to reduce

suffering where MAID is not a viable alternative. In addition, we'll discuss neurodegenerative diseases and their impact on the Life Completion process as well as other "to-do's" for your list in preparation for death.

We will be offering the series beginning in May of 2026. Friday mornings from 10:30 until 12:30. May 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, & 29th.

Classes will be held at the Harmony Community Healthcare Education Center
310 S Williams Blvd., Suite 210 Tucson, AZ 85711
Send us an email to register at:
ChoiceandDignityInc@gmail.com

Death Doulas and Death Cafés

INELDA "Find a Doula" directory

NEDA "Find a Doula" directory

Tucson End of Life Doulas group/site
And for ongoing conversation spaces:

Tucson Friendly & Fearless Death Cafe listing

Harmony Community Healthcare: Hospice, palliative, bereavement, education, death doulas community outreach in Tucson and Green Valley, 520-284-9334
harmonytucson.org

Best Grief book

It's Ok That You're Not OK

Megan Devine, Sounds True

First section is how culture deals with death, last section talks about supporting others. Middle section is gold. She talks about grieving your way, on your time, and being with yourself in the process.

Last Rights: Taking Care with your Final Journey

Pat Cochran, Capitol Books

Great planning information: memorials, advance directives, hospice, estate planning, clergy, about 80 pages of forms and questionnaires.

Grief Share

A 12 week group that meets weekly. Their videos are excellent. Facilitators can vary by location. I would

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NOT go to Victory church as the facilitator while well-meaning, has NO experience as a facilitator and talked the whole time.

People who know how to listen and facilitate are at Grace Community Church. Contact is Carver is head of group for the church 520-825-9112.

It is Christian based, though it's not foreground.

9755 N La Cholla Blvd, Tucson, AZ 85742

<https://tlcforgrief.com/>

Transformational grief education

I took one workshop by them and was greatly impressed.

How to Get the Death You Want: a Practical and Moral Guide

John Abraham, Upper access Books

I haven't read I cover to cover but a wealth of info mostly on the practical and planning side, rather than emotional side.

For Caregivers: (Come to my class at OLLI 4/13)

Passages in Caregiving: turning Chaos into confidence
Gail Sheehy, Harper

I have not read this, but she was well known for her Passages book. The TOC has a lot of information and looks supremely helpful.

The Grieving Brain: The Surprising Science of How We Learn from Love and Loss

Mary-Frances O'Connor (AZ author)

<https://maryfrancesoconnor.org/books/the-grieving-brain>

A renowned grief expert and neuroscientist shares groundbreaking discoveries about what happens in our brain when we grieve, providing a new paradigm for understanding love, loss, and learning.

When I was grieving I didn't read the whole thing. But what I did read helped me understand why grief is not just an emotional issue, it also affects our brain.

When My Time Comes: Conversations About Whether Those Who Are Dying Should Have the Right to Determine When Life Should End Deckle Edge

I've just read about it (it has pros and cons for end of life options) but I haven't seen it. I imagine it will spark your imagination and help make it easier to talk to loved ones.

<https://compassionandchoices.org/>

<https://thedeathdeck.com>

Recommend by others; I haven't used them

Death/Dignity

States where death with dignity is legal:

<https://deathwithdignity.org/states/>

Helpful end of life journey resource:

<https://compassionandchoices.org/>

Tucson based org:

<https://www.choiceanddignity.org/about.html>

Author of Dementia with Dignity, Judy Cornish

<https://thedawnmethod.com/>

TMC for Seniors

<https://www.tmchealth.tmcaz.com/en/community/tmc-for-seniors>

Center for Neurosciences info on the brain + videos.

<https://www.eachbrainmatters.org/library>

Fabulous doctor, author, newsletter about aging:

<https://betterhealthwhileaging.net/>

Wonderful site/newsletter from former WSJ journalist:

<https://beingpatient.com/>

I am a Certified Senior Advisor building a network of "specialists in aging" professionals here in Tucson. Check our website for classes and resources.

<https://www.csa.us/leaders-network/tucson-az/>

