

MaineHealth

Talking to Your Loved Ones about Your Advance Directive

One of the most important steps of advance care planning is talking to your loved ones about your wishes for how you would like to be cared for near the end of life.

Why should I talk to my loved ones about my end of life wishes?

If your loved ones know your wishes ahead of time, your wishes are more likely to be honored. Sharing your wishes means your loved ones will not be burdened by having to make tough decisions on their own.

Who should know about my end of life wishes?

It is important to talk with those who may be involved with your care if you become very sick or injured and can no longer make decisions for yourself. This will help them know what you want for the end of your life.

You may want to talk with the following people:

- Healthcare agent or power of attorney
- Partner or spouse
- Children
- Parents
- Brothers or sisters
- Close friends
- Spiritual leaders
- Community leaders
- Doctor or other medical care providers
- Caregivers

What should I talk about with my loved ones?

It is impossible to cover every situation, but here are some topics that should be covered that can help explain how you wish to live near the end of life:

- **Who will make choices for you?**
 - Who is your healthcare agent and back up agent?
 - Which family and/or friends do you want involved in your care?
 - Are there people you do not want making choices for you?
- **What gives your life meaning?**
 - If you were unable to know who you are or those around you, and there was little hope of recovery, would you want to be kept alive?
 - What outcomes would you consider worse than death?
- **What types of care would you want?**
 - Would you want treatment that prolongs your life even if a doctor believes you will not recover?
 - How would you like to be kept comfortable? Would you like pain medicine to keep you comfortable?
 - Under what situation, if any, would you want:
 - Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
 - Help with breathing from a breathing machine (also known as a breathing tube or respirator)
 - Tube feeding
- **Where you would like to receive care?**
 - Where would you like to live your last days?
 - Would you want to receive care in the hospital, a nursing home, or at home?

What if my loved ones don't agree with my wishes?

- It's ok for your loved ones to disagree with you. You don't need to share the same values and beliefs.
- Talking about it now gives you time to talk about why you disagree.

When should I talk to my loved ones?

- You can create a special time to talk with loved ones or you could do it when you normally get together.
- You might set a goal to talk with your loved ones before a certain date, such as before your next birthday, after your next doctor's appointment, or before your next vacation.

How often should I have the conversation?

- You should talk to your loved ones again any time you make a change to your advance directive.
- You might want to review your advance directive and talk to your loved ones again after every:
 - Decade-When you start a new decade of life or every 10 years.
 - Death-If a close friend or loved one dies.
 - Divorce-If you go through a divorce or other major family change.
 - Diagnosis-If you are diagnosed with a new or serious health condition.
 - Decline-If your health is in decline due to an existing illness.

Talking to your friends and family about your wishes at the end of your life can be hard. But it is important so that your loved ones can honor your wishes.

We are here to help.

For more information, visit MaineHealthLearningCenter.org/topics/advanced-care-directive/