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The Experience of Dying

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A- Acknowledge and Share Your Feelings

Whether you are the caregiver or the patient, it is important to acknowledge your own feelings and then to share them with your loved one as best you can. Trying to protect your loved one from the reality of the situation can create a wall separating you both from meaningful and precious conversations. This takes courage. If spoken feelings are difficult, start your conversation with *"I know this won't be easy for either of us..."* Sharing feelings will leave you with precious memories and fewer regrets. Trust me.

B- Be in the Moment

Cherish the time that is left and try to be fully present in it to the extent that you can. Fully present means listening, enjoying, and treasuring every moment.

C- Concentrate on the Patient's Wishes

It has been my experience that patients are often reluctant to express their wishes to their loved ones. Now is the time to encourage them *"to say what they want to say and to do what they want to do."* Nobody knows what tomorrow may bring. Sometimes today is as good as it is going to get.

D- Dwell on Good Memories

Every relationship has its good memories and its not-so-good memories. We all carry regrets. Dwell on the good times. Let go of those things you can't change but try to fix things that can be fixed. Ask for and give forgiveness.

E- Eliminate Unhealthy Behaviors

One of the unhealthiest behaviors for a caregiver is to try and do it alone. Being a caregiver can be physically, emotionally, and spiritually draining; it is a stressful undertaking. Having someone come in for a few hours can give you the time away you need to do chores or get some time for yourself. Be realistic: one day the time may come when you will be no longer be able to care for your loved one.

F- Final Plans

Either the patient or their caregiving loved one can start a conversation about final plans, but it is necessary. If the patient doesn't initiate this, the loved one can say *"I know this is a hard subject to talk about, but I want to honor your wishes . . ."* And then questions such as the following can help guide the conversation: *"Where do you want to spend your last days? Do you want to remain at home? Are our wills in order? Are there any financial affairs that need to be settled? What about funeral and burial plans?"*

G- Goodbye

It is important to say good-bye. Sometimes this is done with words and at other times it is expressed by our actions. Quiet times and simple gestures of affection can reflect the uniqueness of the moment and your love and concern. Once again, putting our feelings into words may be painful and tearful; but this can help caregivers and patients alike to say what needs to be said, providing closure and peace.