

10 Tips for Vigiling and Establishing Sacred Presence



www.SacredDying.org

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Reclaim Grace and Dignity for Your Dying Loved One

Thoughts at bedside: 10 ideas to engage family and friends in “Spiritual Presence” for your loved-one.

1) ***De-clutter the bedside area.***

Set the space apart using candles, music, etc., to create a calm, peaceful atmosphere. This will be the “sacred space” around your dying loved-one.

2) ***Within this physical sacred space, keep the focus of any conversation on the dying person.***

Allow intentional conversation with or about the person, but no idle chatter among visitors: keep that outside.

3) ***Take cues from your loved-one regarding practical matters.***

If there is no indication that s/he would like to discuss or handle practical things, keep these things well away from the sacred space. If you know the person’s wishes regarding privacy, make sure they are respected.

4) ***Take turns or assign someone as “door keeper” to shepherd the transition from the outside hubbub to the sacred space.***

It can often be helpful to establish a daily or weekly schedule with family members.

5) ***Take cues from your loved-one regarding not only physical needs, but emotional and spiritual as well.***

Don’t take center stage with your own emotions. While your own needs are certainly valid, if all eyes are on you and the comfort you need, consider stepping outside the sacred space to allow the focus to re-shift to the loved-one.

6) ***When s/he begins actively dying, the most important element of vigiling is your calm presence. It is a solemn gift.***

To hold this quiet space so your loved-one can transition as easily as possible, use tools that you have already gathered in a “vigiling toolkit”. Items to include: special objects to hold that have personal or religious meaning (a prayer shawl, a favorite scarf, a rosary), reflective readings or



books or prayers, music, candles (flame or battery). Traditional prayers are often used, but other favorite readings can be appropriate, too. The idea is to personalize these items for your loved-one.

- 7) ***If you are at home, don't be surprised if family pets want to participate.***

If possible, let them behave naturally: on the bed or on your lap, etc.

- 8) ***Friends/family who can't physically be there during this time can still be involved from afar.***

For example, someone long-distance could be in charge of mass communications, informational emails, etc. There are many online choices such as candle-lighting websites, creating a Facebook page with updates, and other internet options.

- 9) ***Ask absent friends/family to vigil with you at a designated time once or twice daily.***

They could do this from anywhere in the world, simply taking a few minutes in shared thought/prayer, listening to music, lighting a candle, etc.

- 10) ***Don't worry about making practical calls immediately after s/he passes.***

Spending some time in silence can be profound and meaningful. Then, consider designating one person to go do practical things while one continues to sit quietly for as long as possible.



Sacred Dying

Creating Spiritual Presence at the End of Life

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RITUALS at the END OF LIFE

*"Rituals carry us from one state of being to another.
They transform."*

Letting go

Help the dying person detach and move into death.

- * Assist with good-byes both physical & emotional.
- * Assure them that life concerns and loved ones will be cared for.



Confession

Release whatever difficulties the dying person wishes to unburden.

- * Let them talk.
- * Do not judge.
- * Tell them "it's gone."

Anger

Diffuse issues in a physical way.

- * Rip paper/tear fabric to release angry thoughts.
- * Burn photos.



Fear

- * Recall happy memories & experiences of love.
- * Help the dying person find an internal place of love and safety.



Possibilities for Ritual at the Time of Death



Strength for the Journey

- * Use an item that has meaning & symbolic power to give strength.



Family support

- * Focus energy on the dying loved-one.
- * Leave family dynamics outside.



Reconciliation

- * This is something the dying person initiates, not you.
- * A time for loved-ones to show that all is forgiven.

Purification/Cleansing

Prepare the dying person's body for this transition.

- * Feeling clean can help prepare for whatever's next.
- * This is an opportunity for reassuring & loving touch.

- * Oils can be used for ritual anointing or massage.





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Stillness and silence are the cornerstones of sitting vigil.



Hold the space in prayer and meditation.

Sitting Vigil: Spiritual Presence with the Dying

"The journey into death is such an important one that I believe each person deserves as much support as possible. Our role is to help make the transition a spiritual one, deserving of careful and prayerful preparation. Our work is sitting, talking, praying, helping with those things the dying feel badly about, and creating rituals to help them let go. And then we vigil until they die."



Vigiling is fundamentally about being present to create and support a sacred dying experience. Sitting vigil is far more about being than it is about doing. . . Quiet presence is more than an absence of movement and noise; it is truly an active state. Even when you are still, you can meditate and pray. Continue to hold an image of what the dying person wants and needs. In other words, your spiritual presence brings peace and receptivity.



Focus and listen to the dying person. If he or she wants to talk, and can: be available. If not, be silent.



No TV or other distractions. Use reading, music, & discussion with intention (not as a way to "fill time").



Invite the dying person to join you in prayer and meditation.



Sounds:

- * Soothing Music
- * Personally Meaningful Music
- * Fountains
- * Nature Sounds



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CREATING A SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT

Things to consider for Sacred Space:

Religious Symbols: Altars, Icons, Statues, Beads, Prayer Items & Sacred Texts



Scents:

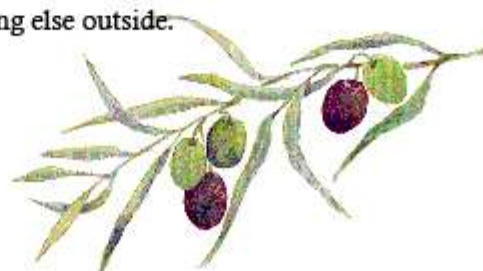
Flowers
 Aromatherapy
 items

Prepare Yourself Spiritually:

- * Wash your hands before entering.
- * Recite purification prayer.
- * Pray or meditate. Have a few moments of silence.
- * Leave everything else outside.

Soft Light:

Candles
 or
 Scented Candles



Be Totally Present



Memorabilia:

- * Family Photos
- * Personal Items of Remembrance
- * Cards & Drawings

