



Tips for Careworkers: Distress at the End of Life

What it is: Distress at the end of life is when a person finds it hard to come to terms with dying.

It includes thoughts about:

- death
- the meaning of life
- loneliness
- loss of dignity
- achieving life's goals.

Distress at the end of life may also be called existential distress, death distress, or death anxiety.

Why it matters: People with life-limiting illnesses often suffer from distress at the end of life.

Older people with limited ability to connect with others can also have existential loneliness with strong feelings of emptiness, sadness, and longing. This can lead to anxiety and depression.

What I need to know: In people needing palliative care, distress at the end of life may lead to a wish for hastened death. Therapies such as life review or dignity therapy may help with quality of life and wellbeing in the short-term.

Do

Take note and report to nursing/ supervisory staff if the person shows signs of distress such as trouble breathing or appearing upset or annoyed.

Do

Take time with the person, giving them your full attention and allowing them to talk to you, with you.

Do

Ask questions like 'How are you feeling?' or 'Is there anything else troubling you?' or 'Is there anything you would like to talk about?'

Name:

My reflections:

How do I cope with a client or resident expressing distress at the end of life?

My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice
Tip Sheets:
Psychosocial Assessment
and Support
Anxiety
Spiritual Care

For references and the latest version of all Tip Sheets visit
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