

A black and white photograph of a middle-aged man with a beard, smiling warmly. He is wearing a light-colored polo shirt with a logo on the chest and a lanyard with an ID badge. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with windows.

Top tips for having end of life conversations

with people living
with dementia

Talking about end of life can be hard, but it's important to make sure that a person's care matches what they want and value.

This is a guide to help support holding conversations about end of life that can bring comfort, clarity, and peace to a person, their family and their care team.

Visit skillsforcare.org.uk/dementia for more support.



Top tips for having end of life conversations



Focus on what matters: Ask easy ‘yes/no’ questions like “Is staying at home important to you?” to learn what they value.



Take it slow: Don’t expect to learn everything you need after one big talk. Instead, have short chats over time, adapting how you communicate as the person’s communication needs change.



Go at their pace: If they’re not ready to talk, don’t push. Let them know that you are there for them if they want to talk, and try again another time.



Write down their wishes: Share what they say with their care team, including any family carers, and include it in their care plan.



Communicate clearly and kindly: Speak slowly and clearly. Use comfortable eye contact, a calm tone, and gentle touch to help them feel safe.



Start early and gently: Dementia is progressive and so communication can become more difficult. If possible, begin conversations about end of life care before it becomes more challenging for the person to communicate. Use kind, simple phrases like “Can you help me with something?” or “What makes a good day for you?”

End of life conversations aren’t just about making plans – they’re about understanding what really matters to the person and respecting their wishes through every stage of dementia.

Gentle conversation starters

The following two pages can be printed and cut out to keep your conversation starters close. Sections are provided to allow you to note preferred conversation starters.

Visit skillsforcare.org.uk/dementia

to download more dementia resources and find support on dementia



Start with values and quality of life

- “What does a good day look like for you?”
- “Tell me, what are the most important things in your life?”
- “What are the things you really enjoy and would like to keep doing for as long as you can?”

Talking about preferences for care

- “If you were ill, where would you want to be?”
- “Have you ever thought about the kind of support you’d want if you weren’t able to make your voice heard or make decisions for yourself?”
- “Would you prefer that we focus on keeping you comfortable, or doing everything possible to prolong your life?”

Simple ways to talk about planning and support

- “I want to understand what matters to you, so others can care for you the way you’d like.”
- “We don’t have to decide anything today, but it would help to know what you’d want if things ever changed.”

Using everyday moments to start the conversation

- “That programme we watched got me thinking – what would you want if something like that happened to you? “
- “I think I’d want [example] for myself. Have you thought about what you’d want?”
- “Remember when [friend/family member] was ill? What did you think about how they were cared for?”



If they’re nearer the end of life

- “Is there something important you’d like to share or do while you’re able to?”
- “Are there people you’d like to see or talk to?”
- “What would bring you peace or comfort right now? Is there a particular song, your favourite people, any special blankets or clothing?”

Name:

Notes:

Name:

Notes: