



# Starting the “End of Life” Conversation

After her mother passed, Ellen came into the funeral home to make arrangements, only to find that they were already completed. “I was so grateful when I saw that she had planned for all the details. It was such a relief not to have to guess what her wishes were.”

Ellen was one of the lucky ones. Ask any funeral director. Without plans in place, families scramble to organize an appropriate ceremony. Siblings often disagree, argue and can become estranged. Everything is much harder when a parent has left no instructions. Even though most people acknowledge the importance of talking about end of life issues with their loved ones, a relatively small number do it. But it doesn't have to be that difficult. Sometimes the hardest part is just getting started.

## Choosing the right time

- Make an appointment with your family well in advance to discuss this important topic. While holidays are a time when families come together, talking about your funeral wishes as you're carving the turkey may not be the best idea. Doing this face to face, undistracted, is always best. But you can have the conversation on the phone, Skype or email.
- Do this before you are ill or infirm. When illness strikes, you may be exhausted, confused or medicated making this conversation more difficult and less reliable.

**82% of people say it's important to put their final wishes in writing**

**23% have actually done it**

**90% say talking with their loved ones about end of life issues is important**

**27% have actually done so**

Statistics by:  
*The Conversation Project*  
[www.conversationproject.org](http://www.conversationproject.org)

- People who are ill sometimes want to concentrate their energies on the “positive” and avoid talking about it altogether. Remember it is always easier sooner than later.
- Prepare first. Make plans with a funeral home, with the option to make changes after talking together. Funeral homes have planning resources available to assist you. Have copies of your wishes clearly on paper for your executor and your children.

## Starting the conversation

- Start with a story of someone else's experience. “Do you remember what happened when so-and-so died and what his family went through? I don't want you to have to go through that. So that's why I want to talk about this now, while we can.” You may find that they are relieved to hear it.
- Blame it on your lawyer, accountant or funeral director. “Mr. Smyth advised me to talk over my funeral plans with you instead of just putting them in my will. You know that a will is often not read until well after the funeral takes place.”

Be brave enough to have the conversation that matters so much. It is one of the kindest things you can do for your family.

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