

# CARESEARCH<sup>®</sup>

palliative care knowledge network



## Dying2Learn

Find answers  
to questions about  
death and dying

[caresearch.com.au](https://www.caresearch.com.au)

CareSearch is funded by the Australian Government  
Department of Health and Aged Care



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## Continuing a conversation about death and dying

So how do you have a national conversation about death and dying? Well, you design a massive open online course where participants are able to learn about and talk about euphemisms and language, legacy, art and music, medicine's role, funeral practices, cultural differences, online mourning. And after 5,000 people have participated you realise you need to be able to continue the conversation. Welcome to Dying2Learn in CareSearch.



### What will I find on Dying2Learn?

Dying2Learn allows you to explore different aspects of living and dying.

1. You'll discover it's ok to be curious and that people and societies differ in how they view death and dying.
2. You can share what books and movies influenced your views about death and dying.
3. You can add to our database of euphemisms. There are a lot of words we use when we don't want to say that someone has died.
4. You can learn what is meant by "palliative care" and "advance care planning."
5. We asked over 500 Australians what they think about death and dying using three words. Now you have a chance to add your three words.

6. You could also take the time to plan your funeral or perhaps figure out what's on your bucket list.
7. And finally, you can visit the death library.

### We are all part of the conversation

Birth and death are both part of our life. But when it comes to the latter, we can be reluctant to think about, talk about, and plan for it. Now that you know about Dying2Learn, feel free to share some resources and a conversation with your family or with a friend or neighbour.

Dying2Learn is just one way we can build death literacy and feel more comfortable talking about this important life matter.

If being a kid is about learning how to live, then being a grown up is about learning how to die. *Stephen King*



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### Top 10 Books

- 1 Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom
- 2 The Book Thief by Markus Zusak
- 3 The Lovely Bones by Alice Sebold
- 4 Dying to Know: Bringing Death to Life by Andrew Anastasios
- 5 Being Mortal by Atul Gawande
- 6 The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran
- 7 When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi
- 8 Top Five Regrets of the Dying by Bronnie Ware
- 9 Smoke Gets in Your Eyes by Caitlin Doughty
- 10 Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul by Stephen Jenkinson

### Top 10 Movies

- 1 The Notebook
- 2 The Bucket List
- 3 Ghost
- 4 Beaches
- 5 Death at a Funeral
- 6 Up
- 7 Me Before You
- 8 My Sister's Keeper
- 9 The Fault in Our Stars
- 10 Love Story



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Providing evidence-based information about palliative care for everyone because death and dying will affect all of us.

The books in this list have all either won award(s) or been nominated or shortlisted for award(s). You can use them as starting point when talking to children about death and dying, how to cope with grief, and the importance of remembering loved ones who have died.

## Babies and Toddlers (0 - 4 years)

### **A Leaf Called Greaf (2024). Kelly Canby**

A lonely bear forms a strong connection with a special leaf named Greaf. As Greaf changes through the seasons and eventually drifts away, Bear feels the pain of loss but ultimately finds hope and comfort in the cherished memories that they shared.



### **Grace and Mr Milligan (2024). Caz Goodwin**

Grace, a young girl, shares happy moments with her neighbour Mr Milligan and his goat Charlie until Charlie passes away from old age, causing Mr Milligan to retreat in sorrow. Concerned, Grace plans a picnic where they share memories, helping Mr Milligan to heal and find joy again through the power of love and friendship.

### **Harry & Hopper (2024). Margaret Wild**

One day, when Harry comes home from school, his beloved dog Hopper is not there to greet him. This story explores the deep bond and the sadness Harry feels after losing Hopper, and helps children make sense of grief and understand the enduring power of love and memories.



### **Tough Boris (2019). Mem Fox**

Tough guys need to cry, even tough guy pirates! Tough Boris tells of the importance of acknowledging emotions, acceptance of death and experiencing grief. All of these big emotions are experienced by Boris when his beloved parrot dies, while a boy who stows away on Boris' pirate ship helps Boris through this tough period.

## Little kids (5 - 7 years)

### **Jenny Angel (2002). Margaret Wild and Anne Spudvilas**

Jenny sees herself as her younger brother's guardian angel, determined to keep him safe from his life-threatening illness. Through her nightly vigil and steadfast hope, Jenny comes to accept the reality of loss and discovers the importance of love and memory in the face of grief.

### **Old Pig (2017). Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks**

An elderly pig and her granddaughter share a peaceful, tender farewell as the older pig prepares for her passing. In their final moments together, they cherish simple joys, gently reflecting on love, loss, and the beauty of life's fleeting moments.



**The Important Things (2025). Peter Carnavas**

The story follows young Christopher and his mother as they try to move on after his father has disappeared from their lives. When they begin giving away Christopher's father's belongings, the items mysteriously reappear, revealing Christopher's silently holding onto his memories, while his mother learns to honour his need to remember.

**The Tiny Star (2021). Mem Fox**

A tiny star falls to the earth and becomes a baby, living a loving fulfilling life as years go by, under the loving care of the community. As the star begins to shrink over time and then disappears completely one day, the community feels the loss but later realises that the star has simply returned to its home in the heavens where it continues watching over and loving them.



**The Very Best of Friends (2004). Margaret Wild**

Jessie and her husband James live happily on a farm with their beloved cat until James suddenly dies. Overcome with grief, Jessie distances herself from the cat—but as time passes, their quiet companionship helps her heal and rediscover comfort in love and friendship.

**Big Kids (8 – 12 years)**

**Bailey Finch Takes a Stand (2021). Ingrid Laguna**

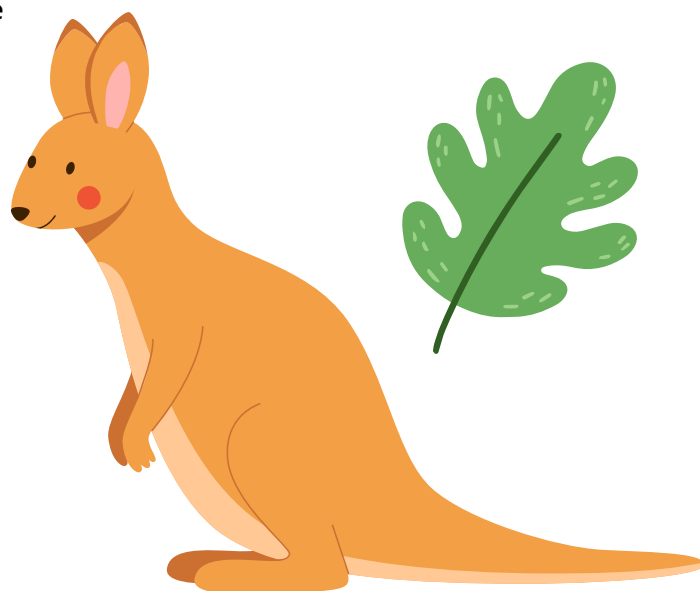
Bailey is mourning her mother's passing and finds comfort in spending time by the creek with her dog, Sheba. When Sheba becomes seriously ill from swallowing glass in the polluted water, Bailey forms an unexpected friendship with Israel, a quiet boy knowledgeable about endangered species, as they clean up the creek together and learn about courage and environmental responsibility along the way.

**Leave Taking (2018). Lorraine Marwood**

Toby and his parents prepare to leave their family farm following the death of his younger sister, Leah. Over the course of a week, Toby revisits meaningful places around the property, guided by memories of Leah and his faithful dog, Trigger, learning to say goodbye and find healing through their shared history.

**Lucy's Bay (2003). Gary Crew and Gregory Rogers**

A teenage boy returns to his grandfather's beach house after many years, confronting the painful memory of his younger sister Lucy's drowning, an event which he blames himself for. As he revisits the bay where the tragedy occurred, he confronts his guilt and sorrow, ultimately finding a path toward healing and reconciliation.



**Pie in the Sky (2020). Remy Lai**

Jingwen relocates from China to Australia with his mother and younger brother, Yanghao, following his father's sudden death. Struggling with loneliness and a language barrier, Jingwen finds comfort in baking cakes inspired by his father's dream of owning a bakery, all while keeping this secret from his mother.

**The Elephant (2021). Peter Carnavas**

A girl named Olive imagines her father's depression following the death of Olive's mother as an elephant that follows him everywhere. With help from her cheery grandfather and her best friend, Arthur, Olive sets out to chase the elephant away.



**The Naming of Tishkin Silk (2013). Glenda Millard**

Griffin Silk is an uncommon boy from an uncommon family, and live with his father, grandmother, and five sisters in a warm, loving home. Troubled by the absence of his mother and baby sister, Griffin's world shifts when he befriends Layla, a spirited classmate who helps him confront his feelings and understand the changes in his family.

**Teenagers (13 – 16 years)**

**Bridge of Clay (2018). Marc Zusak**

This story explores the impact of parental death on family bonds and the importance of brotherhood in maintaining a sense of normality in relation to the real, adult world, especially when faced with a sense of abandonment and heartbreak.

**How It Feels to Float (2023). Helena Fox**

16-year-old Biz struggles with a profound sense of detachment and isolation following her father's passing. When she starts seeing her father's spirit, it challenges her sense of reality and leads her to confront her inner turmoil, where she begins to discover the importance of connection, self-acceptance, and healing.

**Painted love letters (2015). Catherine Bateson**

A heartfelt novel about Chrissie, a teenage girl coping with her father's terminal illness and the emotional challenges it creates within her family. Through art, poetry, and reflection, Chrissie begins to navigate grief, love, and growing up.



**The Grief Book (2010). Elizabeth Vercoe with Kerry Abramowski**

A compassionate resource to help young individuals navigate the complex emotions associated with grief. Featuring 52 practical strategies, the book offers coping mechanisms, personal stories, and insights to support readers in comprehending and coping with their grief, whether from the loss of a loved one, family changes, or other significant life events.

**The Messenger Bird (2014). Rosanne Hawke**

Tamar is mourning the loss of her older brother, and the emotional distance between her and her father grows as they both struggle with their grief. Her path toward healing begins when she discovers an old piece of music and reconnects with her piano, which leads her to meet Nathaniel, a gifted violinist who helps her find a path forward.



**The Protected (2018). Claire Zorn**

Hannah struggles to rebuild her life following the sudden death of her older sister in a car accident. As she copes with grief, strained family relationships, and the aftermath of past bullying, Hannah finds unexpected support from a new student named Josh, helping her confront her pain and heal.



**The Simple Gift (2019). Steven Herrick**

Billy runs away from his difficult home life and finds refuge in an abandoned train carriage in the quiet Australian town of Bendarat. There, he forms unexpected friendships with Old Bill, a reclusive homeless man, and Caitlin, a wealthy girl seeking meaning, where together they discover the transformative power of kindness and human connection.

**This Is Not a Sad Book (But It's OK to Feel Sad) (2024). Liz Vercoe**

A practical, compassionate guide filled with stories and ideas to support children through their grief and loss. It reassures us that even in our darkest moments, there is a path forward.



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October 2025

The books in this list have all won awards and received positive reader ratings on Amazon and/or Goodreads. You can use them as starting point when talking to children about death and dying, how to cope with grief, and the importance of remembering loved ones who have died.

## Babies and Toddlers (0 - 4 years)

### **City Dog, Country Frog (2010). Mo Willems**

An energetic city dog visits the countryside and makes friends with a gentle frog, sharing fun-filled adventures through the seasons. As time passes, the frog grows older, and the dog learns to cherish their memories, discovering that friendship lasts even as life changes.



### **Ida, Always (2016). Caron Levis**

This is a touching story of death and the importance of remembering as told through the eyes of Gus and Ida, two polar bears living in a city zoo.

### **If All The World Were (2019). Joseph Coelho**

A moving, lyrical picture book about the love between a grandfather and child. The uplifting text is a good way to introduce the concept of death and dying to kids, particularly for those who have lost a grandparent.



### [Sesame Street in Communities - Helping Kids Grieve](#)

This website is full of interactive activities and videos specifically designed for children aged 2-6 to help explore and express their emotions after someone has died. Resources include a Grief Toolkit providing tips, stories and guides to help families to move forward through stages of grief.

## Little kids (5 - 7 years)

### **Badger's Parting Gifts (2013). Susan Varley**

A wise old Badger who senses his time coming to an end, shares his knowledge and gifts with his friends to gently prepare them for his death. When Badger dies, his friends share their memories of the special things he taught them and learn that he lives on through them.

### **Bird is Dead (2024). Tiny Fisscher**

In a community of birds, when a loved one dies, the others process their emotions honestly and openly. With honest and compassionate storytelling, and gentle humour, this book shows children that it is natural to feel sad, cry, and share memories, as a part of coping with loss.



**Charlotte's Web (2025). E.B. White**

A classic tale of friendship, love, death and the connections that make us human. Charlotte's Web tells of the firm friendship between a girl, rescued pig and a spider. This timeless story highlights the importance of friendship and the acceptance of death as part of living.

**Cry, Heart, But Never Break (2016). Glenn Ringtved & Charlotte Pardi**

A tender story about four siblings who try to stop death from taking away their beloved grandmother, who was gravely ill. Death gently helps them understand that grief and joy, life and death, are all part of a natural balance, and that while we must cry, we must also allow life to go on.



**Michael Rosen's Sad Book (2008). Michael Rosen**

A moving and honest account of the author's grief and sadness following the loss of his son. Through simple, heartfelt language and illustrations, the book helps readers understand that feeling sad is natural and a part of coping with loss.

**Rabbityness (2021). Jo Empson**

Joyful and creative Rabbit fills his world with music and art. When he unexpectedly vanishes, his friends grieve but later discover that he has left them materials to make music and paint themselves, and eventually celebrate his legacy by embracing the "rabbityness" he left behind.

**The Boy and the Gorilla (2020). Jackie Azua Kramer**

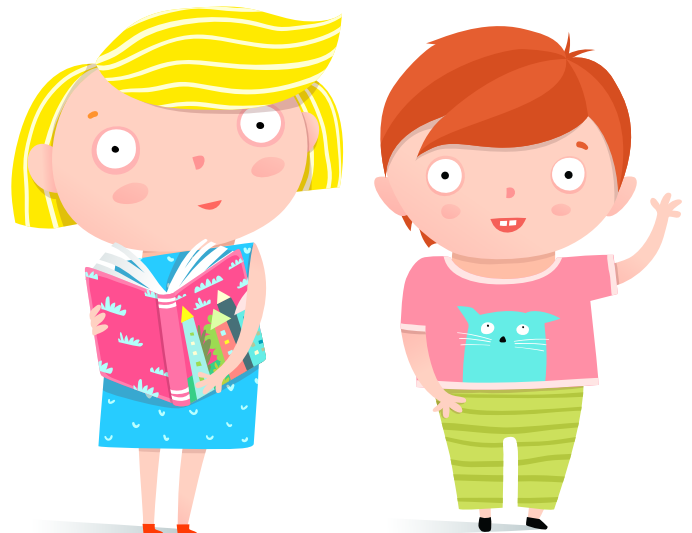
A young boy coping with the loss of his mother conjures a gentle and wise gorilla on the day of her funeral, who stays by his side and answers his heart-heavy questions and guiding him through his grief. Through their quiet companionship, the boy learns that feeling sad is natural and that sharing his feelings with others who care can help him heal.

**The Heart and The Bottle (2020). Oliver Jeffers**

A curious girl, while grieving the loss of a loved one, hides her heart in a bottle to shield herself from sadness. As she grows older and her sense of wonder fades, she begins to understand that to truly live and feel joy again, she needs to free her heart.

**The Tenth Good Thing About Barney (2009). Judith Viorst**

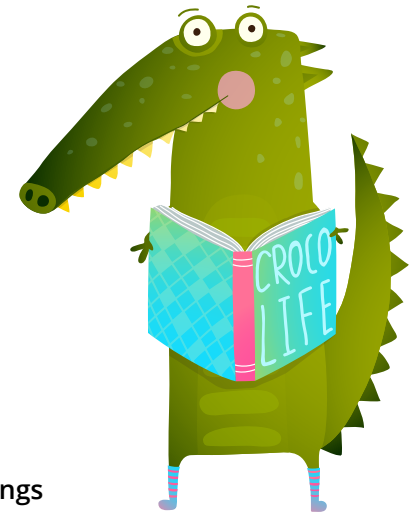
As a young boy mourns the death of his cat, Barney, he tries to think of ten good things to say at Barney's funeral but can only think of nine. Later, while speaking with his father, he discovers the tenth, and gradually comes to understand loss, love, and the importance of remembering those we have lost.



## Big Kids (8 – 12 years)

### **A Monster Calls (2021). Patrick Ness**

A dark but amusing fantasy tale of Connor and his ancient, wild backyard truth-seeking monster who has materialised from his subconscious as a result of dealing with the fear and anticipated grief of losing his mother to cancer. This story describes the impact that overwhelming feelings can have and the importance of taking these seriously.



### **Bridge to Terabithia (2006). Katherine Paterson**

Terabithia is a magical kingdom ruled by two close friends, Leslie and Jess, but when Leslie unexpectedly dies by accident, Jess is faced with dealing with feelings of guilt, sadness and loss. This story presents first-hand narratives of coping with death and experiencing grief from a child's point of view.



### **Milo: Sticky Notes and Brain Freeze (2010). Alan Silberberg**

A novel about Milo, a witty and creative 13-year-old boy, as he navigates life after the loss of his mother. Between a crush on the girl he sneezed on, a neighbour who just would not leave him alone, and the challenge of being the new kid again, Milo faces a school year filled with reminders of how his world used to be.

### **[Apart of Me \[App - Game\]](#)**

This interactive game has been designed by grief experts in collaboration with young people experiencing grief. Children move through magical worlds guiding them through dark periods after death of a loved one. By working through real-world 'quests', kids can validate feelings or emotions whilst building to help to move on. The Apart of Me app is available for download in both the Apple App Store and Google Play stores.

### **[Winston's Wish Childhood Bereavement Podcast Series](#)**

A UK based not-for-profit organisation, Winston's Wish, supports children and young people after the death of a parent or sibling. They have produced a series of podcasts discussing practical after death support for children, including returning to school and the importance of talking about their feelings. These are all freely available on Soundcloud (website that provides free audio downloads to listen to and share).



## Teenagers (13 – 16 years)

### **Cures for Heartbreak (2016). Margo Rabb**

Sixteen-year-old Mia, along with her sister and father, find themselves facing life without Mia's mother after she passes on from cancer. Facing this loss, Mia struggles to process her own grief, but eventually finds a way through the tough times by remembering her mother and rediscovering enjoyment and excitement in her own life.

### **Still Here With Me: Teenagers and Children on Losing a Parent (2006). Suzanne Sjoqvist**

A compilation of heartfelt stories from children and teenagers who have lost a parent, offering honest insights into their grief and healing journeys. This book provides solace and understanding for young readers going through similar challenges, while also serving as a valuable guide for adults supporting grieving children.



### **The Boy in the Black Suit (2019). Jason Reynolds**

Matt wears a black suit, partly because his mother died but mostly because he works part-time at a funeral home. Matt's story explores the importance of finding someone who can support you, showing you a way through the sad times and understand what you are going through.

### **The Fault in Our Stars (2012). John Green**

Hazel Grace, a sixteen-year-old girl with cancer falls in love with Augustus Waters, a charismatic and witty cancer survivor. Together, they navigate the challenges of illness, mortality, and young love, and find hope and meaning amidst their uncertain futures.

### **The Year Of The Rat (2017). Clare Furniss**

Fifteen-year-old Pearl is overwhelmed with grief after her mother dies following childbirth, and feels isolated and bitter towards her new born sister, whom she nicknames "the Rat". As Pearl navigates the complexities of loss, family tension, and teenage life, she gradually confronts her emotions and discovers a way to move forward.



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**Providing evidence-based information about palliative care for everyone because death and dying will affect all of us.**

## What is palliative care?

Palliative care is person-centred care and support for people with a life-limiting illness. This includes support for their family and carers. The aim is to help people live their life comfortably and as fully as possible by supporting their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs.

Examples of the care required might include:

- Relief from distressing symptoms including:
  - > Pain
  - > Depression
  - > Fatigue (tiredness)
  - > Nausea
  - > Breathlessness (dyspnoea)
  - > Anxiety
- Psychological and spiritual support
- A support system to help patients and family live as actively as possible until death
- Support to help the family cope during the person's illness and in their own bereavement.



Palliative care enhances quality of life. It intends neither to hasten or postpone death.

### Who is palliative care for?

Palliative care is for people of any age with a life-limiting illness and their families. A life-limiting illness is one likely to cause death in the foreseeable future. This includes:

- Cancer
- Neurological disease
- Dementia
- Advanced kidney, heart, liver, and lung disease

Family can include partners, relatives, friends, or anyone who is considered so by the patient (including pets).

### When is it provided?

Palliative care can be provided at any time depending on a person's needs. It is now accepted that combining palliative care with active treatment improves symptom control, quality of life, and family satisfaction.

When you receive palliative care is a decision for you and your family.

### Who provides palliative care?

Palliative care can be provided by many different health and care professionals.

In a hospital setting care it is provided by doctors, palliative specialists, nurses, and allied health professionals.

In the community the palliative care team might include the person's GP, community and aged care nurses, visiting allied health professionals, careworkers, and support workers. Family, friends, neighbours, and acquaintances will also provide important support.

### Where is it provided?

Palliative care may be provided in hospitals or the community setting. This includes:

- Private homes
- Residential aged care
- Accommodation for people experiencing mental illness
- Accommodation for people living with a disability
- Correctional facilities
- General practices
- Community palliative care clinics and day centres
- Hospitals

Not all people with a life limiting illness need specialist palliative care. Many people can be cared for at home and see specialist palliative care staff only when there is a need.

Being able to stay at home with a serious illness usually requires the help of family members or friends. Older people may be receiving palliative care alongside a homecare package or within a residential aged care facility.

Some may have more complex needs and symptoms that need careful management. In this case there may be the continuing involvement of a specialist team and short or longer stays in a hospice or palliative care ward.

### What is advance care planning?

Advance care planning is about documenting your wishes to speak for you when you no longer can. This will help your family and friends to make decisions about your care if you cannot. Advance care planning generally covers three things:

- Thinking and talking about your healthcare values and preferences.
- Appointing a substitute decision-maker.
- Completing a document such as an Advance Care Directive.

How many of us have taken the time to stop and think about what we would want to happen if we became seriously ill or if someone close to us was seriously ill what they would want?



## Why do we need a plan?

We all make plans in our life for today and the future. We will all die one day so we should plan for that too. Having a plan can help us, our family and the health professionals who care for us to know what we want. You can start having a conversation at any age about what you want if something unexpected was to happen.

Making a plan becomes more important as you are getting older or if you learn that you have a serious illness. Being informed about what will happen can help in making preparations and can make decisions easier. When making plans and decisions you need to let people know what you have decided. This includes your family and friends. You should also tell your health professionals.

Remember health professionals will not know what you want if you don't tell them what is important to you. You may have particular beliefs or traditions that need to be taken into account in providing care.

## Finding the right information

Each state and territory has different laws covering advance care directives. You can find out about relevant state or territory information via links below:

- [Australian Capital Territory](#)
- [New South Wales](#)
- [Northern Territory](#)
- [Queensland](#)
- [South Australia](#)
- [Tasmania](#)
- [Victoria](#)
- [Western Australia](#)

## Helpful resources

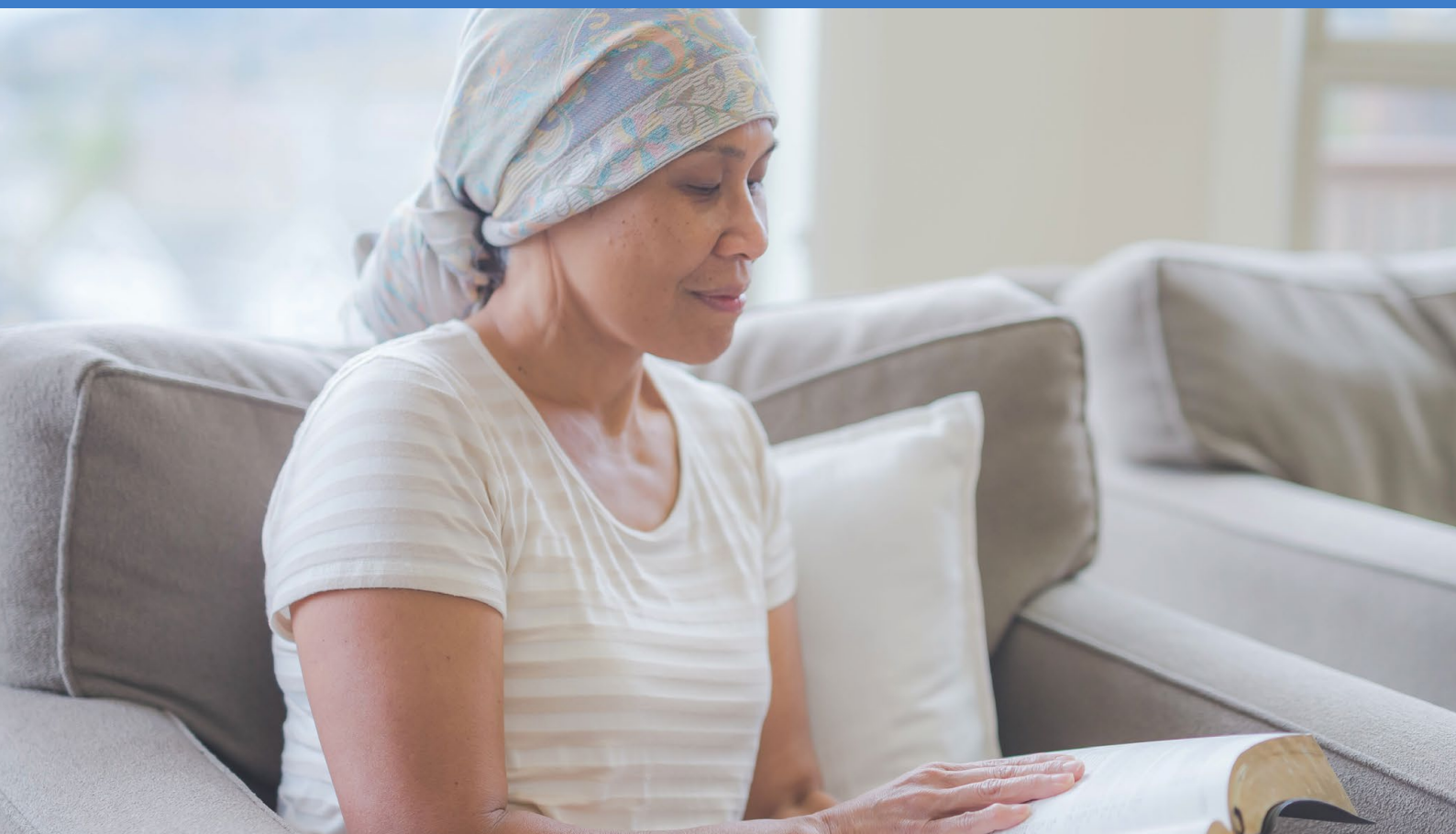
[Advance Care Planning Australia](#) has a range of resources including learning modules and factsheets.

Palliative Care Australia's [Starting to Talk Discussion Starter](#) can help you talk about your wishes and preferences for your care at the end of life.



This resource has been produced under our **Part of Life** project which aims to help people understand what palliative care is and why it matters. Visit [caresearch.com.au](https://www.caresearch.com.au) for more information.

# Planning your funeral - what do you want?



Funerals are usually planned during times of great stress.  
But it doesn't have to be. We can all think about what  
we want at our funeral.

Here are some of the things you might like to think about when thinking about or planning your own funeral. You can print it and fill it in.

This could be a good discussion starter, or you can leave it for your family to help them when they need it.

Remember, the only legal function of a funeral is to legally dispose of your body – as a burial or cremation.

How you choose to structure and personalise your funeral is up to you!





# Planning your funeral - what do you want?

## Remembering me

There are lots of ways that people can remember you. You might like to share your thoughts.

### I would like a Headstone or marker:

- Flat marker set on the grave
- Flat tablet on concrete slab
- Headstone or statue

### What I want to wear:

- Favourite dress or suit
  - Casual wear
  - My choice is:
- 

### I would like some digital options:

- Online memory book
- Digital tombstones (shows your life story)
- Legacy messages for my family after my death
- Digital avatar
- AI digital afterlife

## Coffins and caskets – Choosing what you are buried or cremated in

It can get confusing with so much choice. There are traditional coffins and caskets, seagrass, and even mushroom composting options. Don't be afraid to explore what is now available, you may like to choose an option that reflects your personality or beliefs.

- Traditional casket or coffin
- A personalised casket or coffin that is handmade to my specifications

### Environmentally friendly options

- Chipboard
- Cardboard
- Woven
- Wicker
- Seagrass
- No casket or coffin, I would like to be buried or cremated in just a shroud

# Planning your funeral - what do you want?



## Need some more information?

Here are some resources with more information about funerals, planning checklists and alternative funerals that you may like to explore.

[Funerals Australia](#) provides information on finding providers and planning funerals in Australia.

[CANSTAR website](#) provides information on how to plan funerals or memorial services.

[Gatheredhere website](#) has resources that can assist in planning and finding end of life services across Australia, this site also has the checklist on How to Prepare for the Death of a Loved One.

[Garments for the Grave](#) is a website by Dr Pia Interlandi who designs and creates burial garments including funeral shrouds.

[Gippsland Unwrapped](#) presents a blog written by Tammy Logan who is passionate about planning well for the end of our life and reducing on impact of death on the environment - Planning a Sustainable Funeral.

[Funeral Planner website](#) has information on the process of donating your body to science - How do you donate a body to science in Australia.

[Natural Death Advocacy Network website](#) has information, factsheets and checklists that can help you to plan funerals, including family-led services.

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