How to be a good listener

"There's something I want talk about…"

It's hard to talk about death, dying and grief. Yet it's so important.

Discussing and sharing our wishes makes it easier for our family and friends when we are gone and if we can't talk about death, it's harder to support a grieving friend.

Here are some tips from the 2020 Dying Matters campaign:

How to be a good listener

- **Be patient** – it might take a while to get to the point
- **Pay attention** – you don't need to remember everything said, but you need to give it your full attention
- There will probably be a lot going on in the mind of the person speaking – it may be uncomfortable for them to hear themselves discussing these things. **Be affirming** – let them know you want to listen, and that it's OK for them to discuss these things
- You don't need to be the expert, or to be able to answer the questions raised. There's lots of good information on the Dying Matters website, with links to plenty of other sites
- Often people want to just unload all their thoughts, or just think out loud. The actual stuff they want to talk about, or the questions they want to ask, may come later
- This isn't an interview – you aren't trying to get information out of them. Let them work through things
- **Don't judge** – everyone responds to death and grief differently. But it is OK to steer people towards reliable sources of information or advice if you think they need it
- **Look after yourself** – some of this might be upsetting for you. Make sure you have some means to process all of this after. Moreover, it might prompt you to want to talk about your own end of life plans – who will your listener be?

Dying Matters have produced other helpful resources which we hope you find useful. Click on the links below to read or print off if needed:

Dying to be heard

Things to do before you die

Supporting bereavement

Let's talk about dying

Talking about dying with people affected by dementia

Talking about dying with children