



# Caring Conversations

## for Young Adults

At age 16 you can get your driver's license. When you receive your license, you are asked, "Do you want to be a donor?" Most teens and parents have had little discussion about this decision, let alone talked about how we die.

The Terri Schiavo situation taught us the importance of talking about these hard issues with our families. Ideally, we would all write out an advance directive as well. Caring Conversations for Young Adults provides a starting point for young adults and their families to talk about topics like organ donation, do-not-resuscitate orders, and serious illness. The goal is the discussion – there are no right or wrong answers. We encourage you to consider your family's beliefs, traditions and customs as you review this document and have the discussion.

We encourage you to talk with your parents/guardians about your future health care. By talking with your parents and by actively participating in planning for your future care, you will help to ensure that the care you may receive in the future reflects your dignity and is in keeping with your desires and values. You are being treated as a person who is capable of and has the right to make your own health care decisions.

However, you should be aware that in certain circumstances, your ability to act on these rights may be limited by law, regulations or policies. If acting on any of these rights conflicts with the desires of your parents/guardians, you and your parents/guardians will need to work with medical and/or legal personnel to resolve the conflict.

If it ever becomes necessary to refer to this document, it can provide guidance during a challenging time.

This workbook belongs to:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Please remember: there are no right or wrong answers.  
It's the conversation that counts!*

1. Considering your and your family's beliefs, customs and traditions, explain the ethical, religious, or spiritual beliefs you hold that influence your thoughts about life and your thinking about dying (if any).

2. Describe any fears you hold regarding the end of your life.

3. How important are the following in regards to your physical/mental well-being?  
(1 - very unimportant, 2 - somewhat unimportant, 3 - indifferent,  
4 - somewhat important, 5 - very important)

Spending time outdoors

Reading/writing

Exercising/playing sports

Listening to music/playing an instrument

Socializing with friends and/or family

Are there additional activities that you value?

4. Rank the importance of your five senses, 1 being the sense you value most,  
5 being the one you value less than the others:

1

2

3

4

5

5. What are three things that give your life its purpose and/or meaning?
  
6. Is there anything about your spiritual/religious life that you want others to be aware of that might influence your decisions at the end of life?
  
7. Take a few moments to think about your ideal final day of life.  
What activities would you do?

Where would you go?

What would you eat?

Who would you spend time with?

What would your final words and last acts be?

8. How would the following conditions affect your wishes about continuing treatment?

Could no longer communicate with others, but could think?

Could no longer think for yourself?

Were permanently unconscious?

Had lost the ability to form new memories?

Had severe brain damage but could still live at home with extensive assistance?

9. Can you think of any situations in which you would refuse or discontinue treatment that is intended to prolong your life? If so, describe such scenarios.

10. Imagine that the only way you can survive for the rest of your life is with the assistance of a machine to breathe for you (respirator) and tubes inserted into your body to provide nutrition. You cannot move or communicate with others. What do you wish to be done?

Continue indefinitely with the treatment.

Let my family make the call — they can evaluate my current situation and decide what is best for me to minimize my suffering.

Take me off the respirator and let me die a painless, peaceful death.

Other:

11. Check anything that you would like to do/experience near or at the time of your death:

write a letter or tape a message for a person or a group

have a private goodbye visit with the people most special to you

make a final trip to visit family, friends, or a special place

hold a prayer service

pray with a clergy member

read from spiritual or religious texts

listen to poetry or music

have a gathering to share memories

be held and comforted

be alone

review photos, stories, and traditions

other:

12. Where would you prefer to be when you die?  
in a hospital  
at home  
in a special place:
13. What are your thoughts about donating your organs and tissue?
14. What are your thoughts about donating your body for medical science?
15. What are your thoughts concerning burial or cremation?
16. Take a few moments to think about how you want to be remembered. Do you have wishes for a memorial service or other celebration of life event? If so, what are those wishes? For example, do you want special music? A balloon release? Do you want a donation made to a charity?
17. What is your bottom line? What would be the deciding factor of when your life reaches the point that you no longer want to live?

18. Who do you want to share this information with and have this conversation with?
  
19. Is there anything else you want someone to know that hasn't yet been addressed?

*Please remember: there are no right or wrong answers.  
It's the conversation that counts!*

**Conclusion:**

Having caring conversations can provide confidence and peace of mind to those faced with making decisions for loved ones at the end of life. As you talk with your family, you may wish to explore the Durable Power of Attorney (DPOA) Healthcare Decisions form at [www.practicalbioethics.org](http://www.practicalbioethics.org). This document allows you to name a person to make healthcare decisions for you in the event you cannot do so yourself.

We also encourage you to continue having caring conversations. Your preferences and values may change over time, but making your desires known will give you and your loved ones peace of mind as you live your life.

If you have questions, please call Cindy Leyland at the Center for Practical Bioethics at 816.221.1100, extension 209, or email Cindy at [cleyland@practicalbioethics.org](mailto:cleyland@practicalbioethics.org)

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