

Book Chat Participants' DISCUSSION GUIDE

Talking About Death Won't Kill You!

by Dr. Kathy Kortés-Miller



*Hearing others' experience was
very useful, and to start thinking
about how to approach these
subjects with my family.*

Beverley



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How To Use This Discussion Guide

In preparation for the book chat, Dr. Kathy Kortés Miller (the author) has developed a series of discussion questions linked to each chapter of the book. These are intended to provoke thought as you read the book. You can look at the questions as you read each chapter. You can also think about whether this topic is one that you want to discuss in the group.

The discussion guide organizes the questions into 3 steps. This is because we know our behavior progresses from thinking, to planning, to action. For example, if you want to take a trip you must first think about where you are want to go, then you can make specific plans to prepare, and then finally you can take the action (the best part of course). We are applying these stages of change to the topics of aging, dying, grieving and caregiving.

As you prepare to participate in the book chat, also think about whether you feel ready to have personal conversations about issues such as aging, dying, grieving and caregiving. Discussing these issues can be very emotional at times, especially if you have recently lost a loved one. However, having these conversations in a safe and comfortable space like a book chat can also be very healing. We can all learn a lot from hearing the experiences of others.

Given the number of questions provided in this guide, we do not expect they all will be discussed in one book chat session. While you read the book and think about the issues, we suggest you choose 3 questions that you would like the group to discuss. At the beginning of the book chat, group members can choose which questions to discuss and how many.

Our experience has been that 4 or 5 questions can be discussed by a small group (6-8 people) that meets for 90 minutes. Larger groups will need more time to discuss each question. Alternatively, your group could choose to have more than one book chat session in order to cover all of the questions and have time for deeper conversations.

*I was looking for
communication strategies
and I found what I
needed to start some
serious discussions.*

Discussion Topics and Questions

Suggested opening question for the session: *Can you share with the group how and when you first learned about dying and death? (Everybody can answer this and it gets the ball rolling!)*

Step One: Thinking

1. Chapter 1 shares a quote from Dame Cicely Saunders: *“How we care for people at the end of their lives reflects our values and compassion as a society”*. Thinking about how Canadians are cared for at the end of our lives, what does that say about our society today? How has this changed?



2. Chapter 2 outlines some of the fears people have when facing death. Is something missing from this list? Is there a fear listed that especially resonates with you?

Step Two: Planning

3. Chapter 3 begins the discussion of talking with our families about dying and death. Have you had conversations with family members? How did they go? What helped to make the conversation work? Did you try any of the strategies Kathy offers on pages 58/59?
4. Chapter 4 is about talking with children. How are the children in your life learning about dying and death? What might be done to provide them with better support or knowledge?
5. Chapter 5 is about workplaces. Can you provide an example of how a workplace can be more compassionate to employees who are facing illness or grief or caregiving stressors? Do you have any stories of how a workplace did this well?

As a parent of young children, I found the discussion about talking to children about death most relevant.

Step Three: Doing

6. Chapter 6 focuses on conversations with your healthcare provider. Were you surprised to learn that healthcare providers are ill-equipped to have conversations about end of life? Whose responsibility do you think it is to begin the conversation – your healthcare provider or you? Why? How might you go about initiating a conversation about what you want at the end of your life with your healthcare provider?
7. Chapter 7 tells us most Canadians prefer to die at home, however, this requires caregiving by family and friends, not only professionals. Have you ever offered help to someone who is caregiving? How did you approach them? Did they accept help from you? How easy would it be for you to ask for help if you were a caregiver? Who would you ask for help and how?
8. Chapter 8 addresses end of life in the digital world. Social media presents us with new and innovative ways to share and engage others in our experiences of dying, death and grief. How are you seeing end of life discussions happening on social media? Do you engage in conversations on these platforms? Why or why not?

Death can be difficult to wrap one's mind around



9. Chapter 9 addresses medically hastened dying, also known as Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID), which was legalized in 2016 for eligible Canadians. How would you react if a loved one chose to have MAID? How do you think your family and friends would react if you were considering MAID for yourself? (Authors note: MAID legislation was updated in 2021 after publication of this book. For updated information visit justice.gc.ca)
10. Chapter 10 introduces the concept of a Compassionate Community where “everyone recognizes that we all have a role to play in supporting each other in times of crisis and loss” (Pg. 175). Do you think you live in a Compassionate Community? Share some examples of giving and getting help in your community. What could you do to encourage and build a compassionate community around you?
11. Kathy concludes the book with a call to action “Just maybe we will begin to see death is not such a conversation killer after all. Now go – get talking!”
 - Who do you think you should start talking with first?
 - When would be a good time to initiate a starting conversation?
 - Where might be a good location?
 - What do you want to be sure you will say?

I found the book thought provoking, very practical and compassionate.

Wrap Up Question:

12. What new things did you learn by participating in this book chat? Have any of your attitudes changed? What questions do you still have?

After my book chat: Next steps

Compassionate Ottawa would appreciate getting feedback from you on your book chat experience. Please go to the Compassionate Ottawa resources section and click on the Book Chat Evaluation link to complete a short electronic survey. The survey link can be found with the book chat documents in the resources section.

Compassionate Ottawa also has some excellent resources on having Advanced Care Planning conversations with your loved ones. If your group is interested they can download and discuss these resources. You may also like to join one of Compassionate Ottawa’s Advanced Care Planning or Grief and Bereavement workshops. There is more information on their website:

www.compassionateottawa.ca

This book is like a recipe book. You can dip into it to find out what you need to know.

