

# Book Chat Host's Guide

## Talking About Death Won't Kill You!

by Dr. Kathy Kortés-Miller



*As a group we reflected on  
what was important to us at  
the end of life.*

*Jack*



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# Tips for Hosting

Thank you for your interest in hosting a book chat based on the book *Talking About Death Won't Kill You*. Your role as host is to organize the book chat, and then initiate and facilitate the group discussion during the chat. The next few pages offer some tips for you, the host.

These tips are based on lessons learned during three pilot book chats completed in 2020-2021 by Compassionate Ottawa. Participants in the pilot tests overwhelmingly rated the book chat as useful, the topics as important and the discussions engaging. Your participants are going to enjoy this experience!

## Where do you get the book?

The book *Talking About Death Won't Kill You* is available at many local bookstores, at Indigo/Chapters, Amazon.ca, and ECW Press ([info@ewcwpress.com](mailto:info@ewcwpress.com)). The cost is about \$20.00. Check with your neighbourhood library as well.

In our pilots, participants had a month to read the book (177 pages) prior to the book chat. Most considered this time to be sufficient.

## Will the chat be face-to-face or virtual?

Both face-to-face and virtual chats can work well. For a virtual chat, participants need to be comfortable with and have access to the technology needed (computer, tablet, Ipad etc). Commonly used virtual platforms are Zoom, Messenger, and Skype.

## How many people shall I invite?

For a virtual chat, we recommend 4-8 participants, including the host. It is important that each person is visible on the screen to encourage everyone to participate and to promote deeper conversations.

For a face-to-face chat, more participants would be feasible. We suggest 12 as the maximum. Having fewer people allows greater participation. Also remember that the larger the group, the longer it takes to discuss each question.

## Where should I host the Chat?

If the chat is virtual, everyone will be at home. In a virtual chat it is important that each participant's setting is quiet, private and free from distractions.

In a face-to-face chat, it is important that the group setting is comfortable and that people can all see one another. This allows for eye contact and easier interaction.

## How long should the chat session be?

Our virtual chat sessions were 90 minutes and that length worked well. It allowed for good conversation and kept everyone engaged. Generally, 5 questions were discussed in the chat including the ice breaker.

An in-person chat session could easily keep people engaged for 2 hours.

You can also consider having a series of chats in order to cover more (or all) of the questions. Three chat sessions should allow all of the questions to be discussed. This was tried during the pilot and it worked very well.

## Who should I invite?

This chat was enjoyed by adults between 30 and 75 years of age during the pilot sessions.

The discussion can get quite personal, and people who know one another may be more comfortable dealing with the topics. They also may be more supportive of one another during difficult conversations. At the same time, there will be less privacy when people know one another. This is something you can discuss with potential participants.

In our pilot sessions, participants liked knowing some of the others and having a common bond. The pilot groups were composed of volunteers at the same organization, members of the same church congregation, a social club, or they lived in the same condominium building. Your group could also be an existing book club.



Generally, participants in the pilot groups were similar in age. Groups of men, women and mixed groups of men and women all worked well.

### **Do I need to facilitate the discussion?**

In each of the pilot sessions there was a facilitator who guided the discussion. The facilitator can be the host or someone else in the group. The host should make sure, however, that someone will play the facilitator role.

The main function of the facilitator is to

- 1) determine which questions the group wishes to discuss (3-5 recommended)
- 2) ask the ice breaker question to start the conversation
- 3) watch the time, and move the discussion from one question to the next appropriately
- 4) try to make sure that everyone has a chance to participate (prevent any person dominating the discussion)
- 5) offer support if someone becomes very emotional.

In preparation for the book chat, the author developed questions linked to each chapter of the book. These questions are in the book chat discussion guide. The questions are intended to provoke thought as people read the book. These questions can also guide the group discussion during the book chat.

Given the number of questions, we do not expect all questions will be discussed in one book chat. We suggest each participant come with three preferred questions for discussion. The host/facilitator can help the group make their final choices based on their interests and the time you have available for the book chat.

We recommend that the host/facilitator begin the discussion with the following ice breaker question: *Can you share with the group how and when you first learned about death and dying?* This is a good question since everybody can comment and get involved right from the start.

As the discussion progresses, your role is also to make the book chat experience as comfortable as possible for people. We hope participants will be open and share their thoughts and life experiences with one another. This type of sharing is a great way for people to learn from others. Sharing the experiences of others offers new ideas and provides practical examples that help people deal with aging, dying, grieving and caregiving in their own lives.

Sometimes the book chat participants in the pilots cried as they talked about a difficult experience. Be prepared for emotional reactions. Don't put any pressure on people to talk. Have a box of Kleenex handy. Be ready to offer people the opportunity for a time out to leave the group briefly if they wish. In our pilot chats, participants were very kind and supportive of one another and participants reported feeling safe to share their personal stories. There was also laughter in the chats!

### **What is the follow-up?**

Compassionate Ottawa would appreciate getting feedback from you and your participants' on their book chat experience. Please ask everyone to 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. Participants 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](http://www.compassionateottawa.ca)

If you have more questions about hosting a book chat, please email Compassionate Ottawa at the address below:

[bookchats@compassionateottawa.ca](mailto:bookchats@compassionateottawa.ca)

