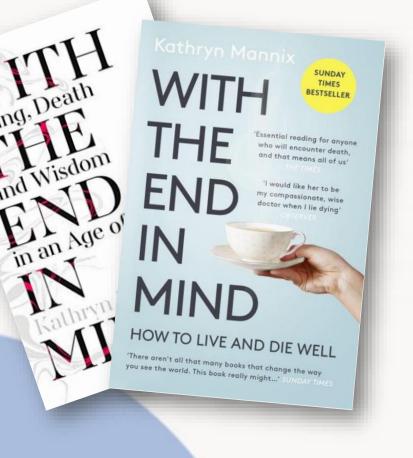


Listen: how to find the words for tender conversations

Kathryn Mannix

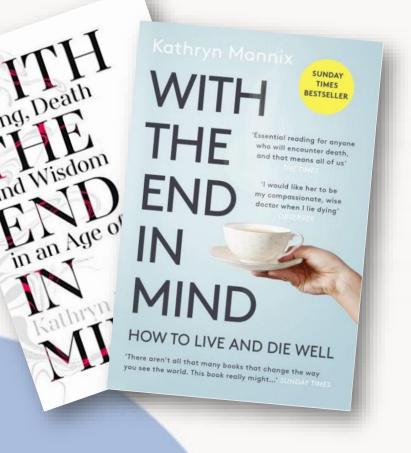
@drkathrynmannix

Feedback from the public



'I don't know what to say' 'They won't let me talk about it.' 'I'm afraid I'll upset them' 'My kids just won't listen when I try to talk about my end of life wishes' 'Won't it change everything forever?' 'My parents won't let me know their preferences, how do I ask?' 'How do you even start a conversation like that?'

Feedback from HCPs



aD

How do I start? What if they get upset? What if they don't want to know? What if their family gets upset/cross with me? Isn't this the doctor's/their GP's/somebody else's job?

'Doesn't this all boil down to giving somebody a really good talking-to?'

Watching master communicators in action, what do we see?

- Questions more than statements
- Silence more than talking
- Curiosity more than certainty
- Acceptance of complexity, distress and uncertainty
- Companionship

What do we not see?

- Reassurance
- 'Fixing'

It all comes down to giving people a really good listening-to



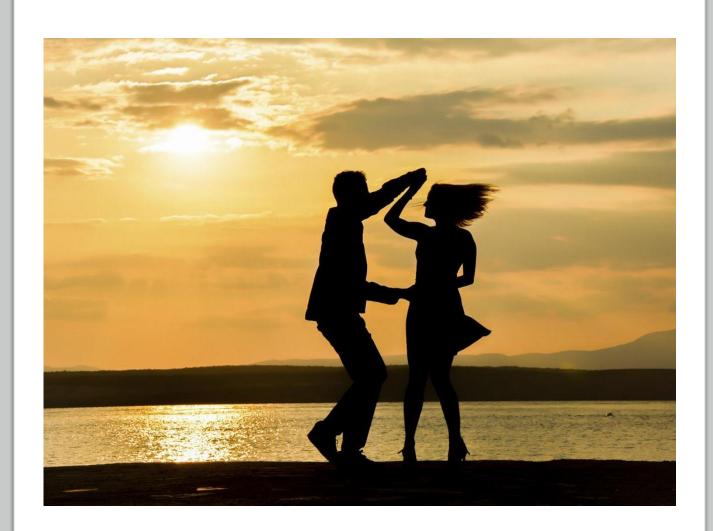
That delicate conversation...

- It may require courage
- It may need all your skill
- It may feel daunting, difficult, even dangerous
- The circumstances may feel challenging
- It may evoke difficult-to-hold emotions

All those ideas are not the conversation's fault. Don't bring your armour, bring your tenderness

Tender conversations

- A partnership
- A shared endeavour, a joint responsibility
- Allow each participant to make sense of the ideas under discussion
- Require a space for thinking



...and one thing led to another...

Every conversation is different, no matter how regularly we cover that ground in our work.

A 'script' can't fit all the possibilities in a genuinely personal conversation.

Can we distil the principles of the Tender Conversation?



Stories to illustrate principles of:

- Invite, don't insist
- Listen to understand
- Remain curious
- Use helpful questions
- Sit with distress without trying to fix things
- Let silence do its work
- Finish safely
- Look after yourself

You're invited to talk about....

SOMETHING THAT MATTERS

★ to both of us.

WHEN:You and I are both readyWHERE:LocationWHAT TO BRING:Curiosity; an Open Mind

RSVP

Invite, don't insist

'Please may we talk about...?'
'It would help me if I could ask you about...'
'I've had some news I'd like to share with you...'
'There's something I'd like to mull over with you...'

'I'd like to find a time that's good for both of us. It need not be right now...'

Listen to understand

Forget about what to say. Your job is to understand the other person's perspective.

Listen

Understand

Reflect

- You cannot respond until you have
- Listened
- Reflected
- Understood

Check your understanding: the 'QQS Waltz'

Remain curious

Curiosity allows all possibilities and simply remains curious

'Tell me more about...'

'I'd like to understand better about...'

'Help me to know what that was like for you...'

As a person tells you their story, they hear it too. Saying it out loud helps them to make sense of it.

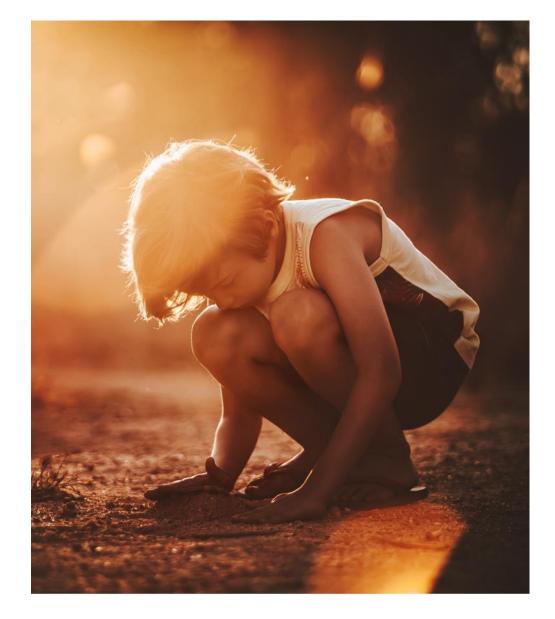


Photo by Helena Lopes from Pexels

Use helpful questions to reach a fuller picture

Questions about the current situation:

- What else did you think/say/do/feel?
- What do you make of it all now?
- Could we be missing anything here?
- Could there be a different way to interpret this?

Questions about possible ways forward:

- What have you considered so far?
- Is there something that could easily be changed?
 - What previous experience could you apply here?
 - What would you advise a friend?



Sit with distress

Don't try to fix it Don't offer reassurance

This is hard for 'helpers'!

'I'm sorry this is so hard...' 'I'm here...'

'I can't imagine how this must be for you/you all...' 'Take your time...'

'I'm in no hurry...'

Let silence do its work

Be quiet, but stay present Silence is where the work happens Think about gaze; touch; moments of shared humanity Tea

Tissues

Sit on your inclination to explain, excuse, give details $M_{3} B_{3} R_{1} A_{1} C_{3} E_{1}$ $L_{1} E_{1} N_{1} C_{3} E_{1}$

Be a companion in distress

Finish Safely

Identify time constraints from the beginning

'I need to catch a bus in 20 minutes''I've got an hour now, or all morning tomorrow''How are you fixed for time?'

Share timekeeping

Give a ten-minute warning, to allow time to gather and prepare to end

Check you are both OK

Check what your next steps will be

Identify if there is more to talk about on another occasion



Look after yourself



Say 'no'

- 'I wish I could talk about this, but this isn't the right time'
- 'I'm sorry I can't take that on'
- 'I don't have the time this needs right now'
- 'No' is a complete sentence. It's so short and clear, you may need to repeat it!

Value yourself as much as everyone else you look after: sleep, exercise, good food – you all know the drill



Look after yourself after each tender conversation

Take a few minutes immediately:

- Mindfulness
- A cup of tea
- Look at the sky, nature, photos
- Listen to music
- Phone a friend
- Cry/rage
- Re-centre

Take care of yourself later, too:

- Reflection
- Writing, journals
- Supervision
- Relaxation time

We are the instruments of kindness. We are our workforce's most precious assets. We deserve to be cared for, maintained and respected as much as our most expensive equipment.

Tenderness

How do you feel about the idea of being 'tender'?

What would it feel like to listen without judging, reassuring or trying to fix things?

What two things will you do differently in your important conversations, to see what happens?

Thanks and good luck

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