

What to Talk About

Use this form to help begin conversations with your spokesperson, loved ones and health care providers.

Share who you've chosen as a spokesperson

Once your spokesperson has agreed, you should let your loved ones know that you have chosen a spokesperson and tell them who that person is. This is especially important if your spokesperson isn't a member of your family. You might say something like this:

I've asked [name of the person you've chosen] to be my spokesperson in case I need medical care and can't speak for myself. After careful thought, I feel that [person's name] is the right person to handle this responsibility.

Also, you should let family and friends know if you filled out a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care document to legally appoint your spokesperson as your health care agent. You should provide your loved ones with a copy of the document.

Discuss the responsibilities of a spokesperson

When you ask someone to be your spokesperson, it's a big responsibility for them. You want to make sure you are both comfortable with this and have no doubts.

To start the conversation, you can ask questions like:

I've been doing some thinking about who might be able to speak on my behalf regarding my medical care if I can't speak for myself. Would you consider doing it?

Would you feel comfortable doing this?

Do you think you can make decisions for me that are based on my values, preferences, and wishes, even if they're different from yours?

If the person agrees to be your spokesperson, you can reassure them that you aren't expecting them to be "superhuman" or "all knowing." Tell them they have your permission to make decisions for you. This is especially important for situations that you haven't discussed or can't predict.

Life-sustaining treatments

Life-sustaining treatments are medical treatments and interventions that keep you alive for a period of time but will not cure you or make you better. Use the Guide Sheet, "Treatment Decisions" to help you think about and express your views based on different scenarios.

Your beliefs

If you couldn't speak for yourself, what would be meaningful or important to you? Are there religious or cultural sensitivities and traditions that you want to make sure are honored? Do you want to be in the comforts of home during your last days? The Guide Sheet, "Treatment Decisions" will help you to think and talk about these things so that those around you can help implement your wishes.

Who to contact

You may have specific preferences for certain people you want your health care providers to contact—or not to contact—if you have a medical emergency or a mental health crisis. You can use the Guide Sheet "Who to Contact in an Emergency" to discuss your preferences. This is also a good place to note who you would like to care for things that you value in case of an emergency. For example: who might care for your home, pets, children, etc.

What you want to happen after your death

Many people take comfort in knowing their wishes will be honored after they die. Using the Guide Sheet "End of Life Arrangements" you can think about and document important wishes like where to be buried or cremated. You can also have important conversations with your physician about organ donation and the decision to allow for an autopsy.