

**The terminally ill may have had a Near-Death Experience (NDE) prior to the final phase of their illness, but the remarkable experiences that they have as death approaches are called Nearing Death Awareness or NDAs. NDAs are similar to, but have profound differences from the NDE.**

- ◆ The NDA experience can occur without the sudden shift in physical condition that usually precedes an NDE in an acute setting such as a heart attack, a near drowning, or a car accident.
- ◆ Meeting deceased relatives is almost universal, whereas in the acute setting this occurs only occasionally.
- ◆ The purpose of the NDAs in terminal illness seems to be to prepare a person for death; generally these NDAs are quite reassuring. In the acute setting, the purpose of the NDE seems to be to teach the person how to live better.
- ◆ Like NDEs that occur in the acute situation, the terminally ill person may have a NDE when he or she is in a coma or an unresponsive state. However, some NDAs occur when the person is fully conscious. The person can stop conversing with a deceased relative and can immediately pay attention to what is happening in the room.
- ◆ Visitations differ from hallucinations, in that people experiencing hallucinations cannot suspend their hallucinatory reality momentarily to converse with people in their room.
- ◆ Living, absent relatives never seem to be perceived by the dying person. However, persons whom the patient knew to be alive sometimes do appear if they have actually died since the time the patient last heard about them.
- ◆ If the dying are reassured that their experiences are perfectly normal for this stage of life, they can take great comfort from these encounters.

**As people approach death, they often participate in several tasks.**

- ◆ They consciously review the life they have lived, often in great detail. Aspects that are of greatest interest to them involve relationships.

- ◆ Dying people look for themes in their lives, often for the first time. They want to identify what they have learned and what they have contributed. Sometimes they are surprised at what they find.
- ◆ Forgiveness emerges as a chief concern. Dying people often realize that forgiveness is an important aspect of completing unfinished business.
- ◆ They begin the process of saying ‘good-bye’ to all aspects of this life. They start to let go of things, one at a time. Categories of letting go include activities, signs of independence, roles they have played, and finally relationships.

**Things to consider when communicating with the dying.**

- ◆ Be straightforward and honest, but let them lead the way.
- ◆ They may talk about “going on a journey” or “going home” as a metaphor for preparing to die.
- ◆ Be sensitive about how close they want you to sit to them, how much company they want, and how much talking is comfortable for them. People vary widely on this, and it is important to ask each one what is comfortable for him or her.
- ◆ People’s skin seems to become more sensitive as they approach death. Even gentle stroking may be irritating at such times. Merely gently holding their hand may be the most comfortable.
- ◆ Understand that as they approach death, they may withdraw as part of the process of saying good-bye to this life and all that it has meant. This means that they may be unable to focus or absorb what is going on around them or with family members, and they may not want to visit as much with loved ones as they did before. It is important not to have your feelings hurt, but to understand that this may be a necessary part of their preparation for death.
- ◆ It seems that the dying often have the ability to choose the actual moment of dying and so it is not uncommon for people to die when their

loved ones are out of the room, even for the briefest of times –to spare them. It appears as if some people who are dying find it easier to let go when they are alone. Not understanding this, families often feel unnecessarily guilty under such circumstances.

- ◆ Terminally ill people may remain close to death for a long period of time if they are waiting for a significant relative or friend to come to the bedside, in order to complete ‘unfinished business’ with them before going into spirit.
- ◆ Many dying people like to have someone with them, but they may not wish to (or be able to) interact very much. Your quiet presence may be all that they want.
- ◆ Allow them to talk about their NDEs and their NDAs if they have occurred, and know that not every dying person has such experiences. There are no studies yet that explain why some people have them and others don’t.
- ◆ Please know that most dying people can be kept quite comfortable. If your loved one appears to be uncomfortable, please notify their health care provider.
- ◆ Know that this last stage of life often provides the most powerful interactions that loved ones will have in their entire lifetime.

**After the person has died, it is common for surviving loved ones to sense their presence.**

- ◆ Some people may feel ‘notified’ of the death by the person who has just died.
- ◆ The bereaved often feel the presence of their recently deceased loved ones who seem to be checking in on them. They may hear words, see their image, smell a familiar aroma such as a favorite shaving lotion, or merely sense their presence.
- ◆ Deceased loved ones may ‘alert’ friends or family about some impending danger.
- ◆ Such contact with the deceased usually decreases over time as unresolved issues of grief also decrease.

**Books about NDEs, NDAs and dying that might be helpful:**

- ◆ *Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, A Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson* by Mitch Albom. New York: Doubleday, 1997. (Also available as a video with Jack Lemmon.)
- ◆ *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying* by Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley. New York: Poseidon Press, 1992.
- ◆ *Grace in Dying: How We Are Transformed Spiritually As We Die* by Kathleen Dowling Singh. San Francisco: Harper, 1996.
- ◆ *Hello from Heaven: A New Field of Research Confirms that Life and Love are Eternal* by Bill Guggenheim and Judy Guggenheim. Longwood, FL: The ADC Project, 1995.
- ◆ *Love is the Link: A Hospice Doctor Shares Her Experiences with Near-Death and Dying* by Pamela M. Kircher, MD. New York: Larson Publications, 1995.
- ◆ *On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, MD. New York: Macmillan Publications, 1997.
- ◆ *One Last Hug Before I Go: The Mystery and Meaning of Deathbed Visions* by Carla Wills-Brandon, PH.D. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2000.



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**IANDS**

**2741 Campus Walk Avenue  
Building 500  
Durham, NC 27705**

**telephone . . . (919) 383-7940;**

**or visit . . . our web site at  
[www.iands.org](http://www.iands.org)**

Incorporated in Connecticut in 1981 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization according to Internal Revenue Service regulations, the International Association for Near-Death Studies, Inc. (IANDS) mission is to respond to needs for information and support concerning near-death and similar experiences. IANDS' goals are:

- ◆ To encourage thoughtful exploration of all facets of near-death and similar experiences;
- ◆ To provide reliable information about such experiences to experiencers, caregivers, researchers, and the public;
- ◆ To serve as a contact point and community for people with particular interest in near-death and similar experiences.

IANDS maintains no "party line" on the interpretation of near-death or similar experiences and is open to the presentation of varying responsible points of view. The Association is committed to scholarly investigation of the NDE and to providing accurate information based on those findings.

IANDS publishes two quarterly periodicals, the scholarly *Journal of Near-Death Studies* and the newsletter *Vital Signs*, in addition to other informational materials. It sponsors a national conference in North America annually and other conferences occasionally.

If you found this brochure helpful and would like to help others have access to such information, you can support IANDS through

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*Near-Death  
Experiences and  
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**Terminally Ill**



International Association for  
Near-Death Studies, Inc.

2741 Campus Walk Avenue  
Building 500  
Durham, NC 27705  
(919) 383-7940  
[www.iands.org](http://www.iands.org)  
[services@iands.org](mailto:services@iands.org)

*Created by Pamela M. Kircher, M.D.,  
Maggie Callanan, RN, CRNH, and  
the IANDS Board of Directors  
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