

## *One: Choosing a Front Runner*

---

Being at the bedside of someone as they prepare for their final journey, while they are in their eleventh hour, does not mean you need medical credentials. Dying is not a medical event, it is a communal event. People and their interactions are the value here, not medical interventions.

The doula may be your hospice nurse, social worker or volunteer, a palliative care provider, a parish nurse, a rabbi, chaplain or minister. The doula may be your neighbor or close friend. Most families have a “front runner.” Someone becomes the primary care giver, the gatherer of information, the liaison with the doctor and other family members. That person can naturally fall into the role of the doula. What I am saying is that any of us, with a bit of knowledge, can be a doula. If you do not have access to outside help from a person of hospice, palliative care or clergy, choose a doula from your family and close friends. After reading the information in this booklet, the chosen doula will have the tools to offer guidance during this special time.

There are many similarities between birth and death. Birth into this world can be seen as a death from another world. Death in this world can be seen as a birth into a new world.

Labor is another similarity between birth and death. We go through labor to enter this world and labor to

leave it. Some labors are short, some long. During both labors, our family and friends support and guide us up to the time of delivery. In both cases, the person who is birthing or dying is doing the majority of the work.

The dying process frightens most of us because we have little real experience with death. Very often, our feelings about dying are shaped by the sometimes frightening images we see on television and in movies. I often hear, “I just don’t want mom to choke to death.” What is really being expressed is, “I am so scared about how mom will die.”

Most people dying from disease or old age just go to sleep. Their breathing changes, they go to sleep with eyes partially open and just don’t wake up. When we get past our fear, we can see the experience as it is really happening and be of support in the moment.

Because we are taught to fix disease, the time during the dying process is one of feeling helpless. “What can I do?” You can be a presence: words and deeds are less important than just being there.

## *Two: Signs of Approaching Death*

---

For the sake of this booklet, the person who is dying is non-responsive. Their breathing is rapid, shallow, irregular, and they may be breathing like a fish with their mouth open and gasping. Labor is almost finished. Delivery into the other world is hours to minutes away.