

Guidelines/ Thoughts/Suggestions

For hospice singers

1) Hospice Philosophy

--If you are already a hospice volunteer, and familiar with the hospice philosophy, practice and services, be aware that these apply to singers as well.

If you are not familiar with hospice, it is essential to educate yourself through training or an orientation offered by your singing coordinator.

--Confidentiality applies in all hospice work. Remember we are legally and morally bound by the same rules of confidentiality that hospice practices.

2) Expectations/ Preparation

Each sing will be a different experience. This almost goes without saying, as each family we work with is unique, has their own energy/dynamics/rhythms. Most often, families who invite singers into this intimate time of transition are open to creating a positive experience around death. It is important to remember and be aware of what may arise during a sing. Here are some possible situations and suggestions:

--singing often stirs emotions, sometimes unexpectedly. If family members are present, there is likely to be crying or open displays of emotion as the music moves people. As hearts are already open in the presence of death, our songs allow an even greater opening of hearts. Be prepared for this.

--You may feel moved to tears as well. Keep singing if possible. Allow yourself to feel whatever may come up for you. However, be aware of how your energy is affecting the family/dying person. There will be a time for your personal process later. While singing for a client, we are the "angels" gathered round the bed to soften this journey.

--Look to each other as a group for support and guidance. Look also to the group leader for clues about volume, where to stand, what to sing, how long to stay, how to relate to the family/dying person.

--Remember that you are in a sacred space, in the presence of death, invited into a family's intimate circle. Be prepared for--emotions, physical appearances that may be difficult to witness, bad smells, tubing, oxygen, IV's, strained breathing.

--Do not ever expect an audience. Remember we are here to offer our music, our songs in harmony. We are not performing for anyone. We are simply offering a gift and hoping it eases the transition from life into death. Sometimes, expect to sing around a bed where a person is completely non-responsive and in a different reality. There may be no one else in the room. Always assume the dying person can hear everything that is said or sung.

--As much as possible, the leader/coordinator should "prepare" the group ahead of time as to what the situation is, who the dying person is, what the family is like, what the

space is they will be singing in, what their spiritual practice is, if any, and anything else that might be of concern to help create the best experience for everyone.

3)How to Behave

--Assume nothing

--Quiet energy is best. If you feel anxious or excited before going in to a sing, a quiet circle, breathing together or singing a calming song before going in can be centering and helpful to create a quiet group energy.

--Wait to be invited into family connection or conversation. It may be too difficult for people to make new connections at this point. Expect to be an anonymous loving presence in their home or hospital room, and to leave as quietly as you arrive.

--Don't assume it's okay to touch the dying person.

--Try to be aware of the energy already present in the room and respect that.

--Use good judgment.

--Again, if your own emotions are surfacing because the experience is bringing up something personal for you, it may be best to remove yourself from the room and process with your leader/group/or hospice support team afterwards.

4) Emotional Processing

--Process with the group after is essential, even if it's just a few moments of circling together. This could be done anywhere---in a lobby, hallway, driveway. It is important to hold the energy of the group for a few moments after a sing and to allow a space for anyone to speak into or share emotions or just feel connected and blessed by the experience.

--If emotions arise later, call the leader or hospice for counseling resources.

Remember

We are offering/providing another means of palliative care at the end of life with our songs. We are not here to fix or change anything, only to add comfort and possibly ease the transition at the end of life. We hope our harmonies will add grace to this passage.