

## **Dealing with a terminal diagnosis**

A terminal diagnosis can impact on a person's life in many ways - physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual and social.

On a physical level, a newly diagnosed person may become more focused on the fragility of their health. This can lead to increased interest in the signals that the body naturally gives. A great deal of helpful information for those seeking positive ways of managing their health following a diagnosis can be found at [www.terminalillness.co.uk](http://www.terminalillness.co.uk)

The emotional and psychological impact of a terminal diagnosis can be experienced as something of a roller coaster ride. It is common for the person faced with the life limiting reality of their illness to review and re-examine their lives. Tied in with this is the process of saying goodbye. A great deal may need to be worked through before the person is ready to say goodbye. They may experience a range of intense feelings including shock, anger, disbelief, confusion, denial, fear, blame, guilt, depression and vulnerability. These are common, normal feelings and the newly diagnosed person will need a great deal of understanding and support.

The spiritual pain a person experiences following diagnosis is closely linked to their psychological and emotional distress. All are internal processes. Spiritual pain differs in that it addresses the deepest values, meanings and longings of a person's life. It is common for the newly diagnosed person to experience something of a personal crisis, asking questions such as:

Why me?  
What have I done to deserve this?  
What has been the point of my life?  
How have I lived my life?

The experience of spiritual distress may prompt a person to ask many difficult and searching questions:

Are there parts of my life I wish I could have lived differently?  
Are there grudges or hurts I am still carrying?  
Who do I need to say sorry to?  
Is there anyone I need to ask forgiveness of?

These deep and personal questions probe the very fabric of a person's life and are common to those with faith or no faith. The religious person may find support and comfort in religious practices

or in contact with their faith community, whereas the non-religious person asking the same kind of questions may benefit from more frequent human contact.

The social impact of a terminal diagnosis can be significant, particularly when the newly diagnosed person has a large family, work or social network. The common experience for people is that of a shrinking network. The limitations of illness may mean less energy or less opportunity for social contact. Some people may begin to feel lonely or isolated. Maintaining contact is a valuable form of support, taking into account the person's needs, wishes and energy levels.