

Dignity Talk Question Cards

*An enhanced conversation tool extending the Dignity Talk framework
developed by Guo and Chochinov.*

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A Dignity-Centred Reflection on Life

The Questions of Life

Every life is a collection of countless experiences.

Moments of joy and sorrow, success and disappointment, love and loss become woven into the unique story of who we are. Although everyday life often moves these experiences quietly into the background, they never lose their significance. They remain enduring landmarks, shaping the paths we have taken, the choices we have made, and the person we have become.

The questions contained within this collection invite you to revisit these moments.

Carefully gathered together, they offer opportunities to remember, to reflect, and to give voice to experiences that have helped shape your life. Once spoken, memories often become easier to understand. Thoughts that may have remained hidden for many years can gradually find their place within the larger story of a life lived with purpose and meaning.

These questions are not intended to test your memory or to evaluate your life.

- They are invitations.
- Invitations to pause.
- To remember.
- To reflect.
- To share what matters most.

You may return to these questions whenever you wish. Some may speak to you today, while others may become meaningful at another time. There is no expectation that every conversation should take place at once, or that every question should be answered. Every life deserves the time required for its story to unfold naturally.

- Choose someone you trust.
- Choose someone who is willing to listen with patience, openness, and respect.
- The answers to many of life's deepest questions often already exist within us.
- Sometimes they simply need another person who is prepared to listen.
- Take your time.
- Every life is rich in memories, relationships, and meaning.
- No single conversation can ever tell the whole story.

Dignity at the Centre

Dignity is something every person possesses simply by being human.

It is not earned through achievement, diminished by illness, or lost through dependence. Even when health changes, dignity remains.

When illness becomes part of life, people often discover that what matters most is not only treatment, but also being seen, heard, and understood as the person they have always been.

Dignity grows where respect, compassion, and genuine human presence are experienced.

It is strengthened when memories are shared, relationships are honoured, and the unique story of a life is acknowledged.

The Dignity Talk Question Cards are designed to support these conversations.

They invite reflection, encourage listening, and create opportunities to speak about what matters most, at a pace that feels right for each person.

There is no right or wrong way to use them.

Every conversation is unique because every life is unique.

Dignity Therapy

Dignity Therapy was developed to help people reflect upon their lives, preserve what matters most, and leave something meaningful for those they love.

Rather than focusing only on illness, it invites attention to the person whose life extends far beyond a diagnosis.

Through carefully guided conversations, memories, values, accomplishments, hopes, and relationships become part of a lasting narrative.

Many people discover that speaking about their lives brings comfort, strengthens connections with family, and affirms their continuing sense of purpose.

The Dignity Talk Question Cards are inspired by these same principles.

They are not intended to replace Dignity Therapy. Instead, they provide an accessible way to encourage meaningful conversations whenever people wish to reflect together.

Every card offers an invitation rather than an obligation.

Every conversation is guided by the pace, wishes, and readiness of the person using the cards.

Dignity Is Vulnerable

Dignity is an inherent part of being human.

It does not depend upon health, independence, age, or achievement. It belongs equally to every person throughout life.

Yet dignity can be challenged.

Serious illness, increasing dependence, physical limitations, or the awareness of mortality may affect how people see themselves and how they believe they are seen by others. Experiences that once seemed ordinary may suddenly become uncertain. Familiar roles may change. Confidence may diminish. People may begin to wonder whether they still matter in the same way they once did.

These experiences are not signs that dignity has been lost.

Rather, they remind us how deeply dignity depends upon relationships. Every encounter has the potential either to strengthen a person's sense of worth or to weaken it. A respectful conversation, genuine interest, attentive listening, or the simple willingness to remain present can reaffirm what illness can never take away: the value of the person.

For this reason, conversations matter.

When people are invited to speak about their lives, their relationships, their values, and the experiences that have shaped them, they are reminded that they are far

more than a diagnosis or a collection of symptoms. They remain authors of a unique life story that deserves to be heard.

The Dignity Talk Question Cards are intended to support these conversations.

They do not seek to solve problems or provide ready-made answers.

Instead, they create opportunities for people to encounter one another with openness, curiosity, and respect.

In doing so, they help preserve what has always been present:

Human dignity.

Dignity Talk

Meaningful conversations do not require perfect words.

They begin with a willingness to be present.

Many people wish to speak about their lives, yet do not know where to begin. Others hesitate because they fear asking the wrong question or saying the wrong thing. The result is often silence, even when both people long for conversation.

Dignity Talk was developed to make these conversations easier.

Rather than following a rigid interview or therapeutic structure, it offers carefully considered questions that invite reflection on the experiences, relationships, values, and memories that have shaped a person's life. The questions create opportunities for authentic dialogue while allowing each conversation to unfold naturally.

There is no prescribed order.

Some questions may lead to long conversations.

Others may be answered in only a few words.

Some may simply invite quiet reflection.

Each response is equally valuable because it reflects the wishes and readiness of the individual at that particular moment.

The Dignity Talk Question Cards build upon this approach.

Each card presents a single conversation prompt. Together they offer a gentle structure that supports meaningful dialogue without directing it. Participants remain free to choose the questions that feel most relevant, to return to favourite topics, or to leave some cards untouched until another occasion.

The purpose is not to complete every card.

The purpose is to create a conversation in which people feel heard, understood, and valued.

When this happens, dignity is not simply discussed.

It is experienced.

How to Use the Dignity Talk Question Cards

There is no single correct way to use the Dignity Talk Question Cards.

They are designed to support conversations that develop naturally, guided by the interests, wishes, and readiness of the person who chooses to use them.

Begin by creating a setting in which you feel comfortable.

Choose a place where you will not be interrupted and where there is enough time for the conversation to unfold without feeling hurried. A calm and unhurried atmosphere often encourages openness and thoughtful reflection.

The cards may be used with a partner, a family member, a friend, or another trusted person. They may also be used in the presence of a healthcare professional, a counsellor, a spiritual caregiver, or a trained volunteer. What matters most is not professional expertise, but a willingness to listen with genuine interest and respect.

- Take time to look through the cards.
- Choose the one that speaks to you at that moment.
- There is no expectation that the cards should be used in sequence or that every question should be explored. Some conversations may remain with a single card for an extended period. Others may move naturally from one topic to another. Both approaches are equally valuable.
- Allow silence to become part of the conversation.
- Moments of quiet often provide space for memories to emerge, for emotions to settle, and for thoughts to become clearer. There is no need to fill every pause with words.
- Not every question will feel appropriate every time.
- You are always free to set a card aside, return to it later, or choose another that feels more meaningful. The cards are an invitation, never an obligation.
- Some conversations may be joyful.
- Others may be deeply moving.
- Some may bring unexpected laughter.
- Others may awaken grief or longing.
- Every response is welcome.
- Every emotion has its place.

The value of these conversations lies not in finding perfect answers, but in creating opportunities to know one another more deeply and to recognise the enduring dignity that every person possesses.

The Lasting Value of These Conversations

Some conversations stay with us long after the words have been spoken.

- A shared memory.
- A story told for the first time.
- A moment of laughter.
- A long silence understood without explanation.

These moments often become lasting gifts for everyone involved.

- Many people discover that speaking about their lives brings a renewed awareness of what has mattered most.
- Relationships become clearer.
- Personal values become more visible.
- Memories that once seemed ordinary are recognised as important chapters in the story of a life.
- Those who listen are often changed as well.
- They come to know the person beyond illness, beyond age, and beyond the circumstances of the present moment. They encounter a lifetime of experiences, achievements, disappointments, hopes, and enduring relationships that together reveal the uniqueness of an individual life.
- Not every conversation will feel complete.
- Some questions may remain unanswered.
- Some memories may return only gradually.
- Others may never be spoken aloud.
- This, too, is part of every human life.

The value of these conversations does not depend upon completeness.

It lies in the willingness to be present with one another.

The Dignity Talk Question Cards are intended to accompany these moments.

They encourage conversations that honour personal experience, strengthen relationships, and affirm the inherent worth of every individual.

In this way, they help preserve something that illness, frailty, and the passage of time can never diminish:

Human dignity.

Further Support

If these conversations encourage you to explore your life story more deeply, additional support may be helpful.

Hospice and palliative care services, healthcare professionals, counsellors, spiritual care providers, and trained volunteers can offer opportunities to continue these conversations in a safe and supportive environment. Their role is not to provide the right answers, but to accompany people with respect, attentiveness, and compassion.

- Some conversations will continue over many days.
- Others may return unexpectedly months or even years later.
- There is no time limit.
- There is no expectation that every question must be answered.
- Each conversation is valuable because it acknowledges the person behind the experiences and honours a life that continues to have meaning.

The Dignity Talk Question Cards are intended to remain companions rather than instructions.

- They invite conversation.
- They encourage attentive listening.
- They strengthen relationships.

Above all, they remind us that every person deserves to be seen, heard, and remembered with dignity.

Further Reading

Readers who wish to learn more about the principles of dignity-conserving care are encouraged to consult the publications that inspired the development of these cards.

Harvey Max Chochinov's work on Dignity Therapy established an evidence-based approach that helps people reflect on their lives, preserve what matters most, and leave a meaningful legacy for those they love.

Building on this foundation, Qingxuan Guo, Harvey Max Chochinov, and colleagues developed Dignity Talk, a structured question framework that enables patients and families to engage in meaningful conversations outside the context of formal psychotherapy.

The Dignity Talk Question Cards extend this work by providing a tactile, visually guided conversation tool that supports reflection, strengthens relationships, and encourages dialogue in clinical, community, and family settings. The addition of a thirteenth conversation card further broadens the opportunities for personal reflection while remaining faithful to the underlying philosophy of dignity-conserving care.

References

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Chochinov HM, Hack T, Hassard T, et al. Dignity Therapy: A Novel Psychotherapeutic Intervention for Patients Near the End of Life. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2005;23:5520–5525.

Guo Q, Chochinov HM, McClement S, Thompson G, Hack T. Development and Evaluation of the Dignity Talk Question Framework for Palliative Patients and Their Families: A Mixed-Methods Study. *Palliative Medicine*. 2018;32(1):195–205.

Acknowledgement

Dignity Talk was developed by Qingxuan Guo, Harvey Max Chochinov, and colleagues to support meaningful conversations between patients and those who matter most to them.

The Dignity Talk Question Cards, developed by Roland Martin Hanke, build upon this foundation by transforming the original question framework into a tactile and visually guided conversation tool. In addition to the original themes, the concept has been expanded through an additional conversation card and a facilitator-oriented framework designed to support reflective dialogue in healthcare, social care, and community settings.

This work is dedicated to every person whose life story deserves to be heard, whose relationships deserve to be honoured, and whose dignity remains inherent throughout every stage of life.