



Die Well Death Education Death Education Series Syllabus

Presented by: Leona Oceania

Session One: Why Talk About Death?

In this session we will discuss why talking about death is important, and the benefits it can and does provide. We will review the process of creating an End-of-Life Plan, and discuss funeral and body disposition options. (There are more than you think!)

*Individually wrapped, homemade skull cakelets will be provided.

Session Two: Film: Barbara Karnes's 'This is How We Die - Part One: Natural Process of Dying from Disease & Old Age'

This is How People Die addresses the normal dying process, from months before death through the actual moment of death. This presentation provides knowledge and tools for working with the end of life. It includes non-medical terminology, and a practical guide for working with patients & families facing end of life issues. Part one focuses on the natural process of dying from disease and old age, and includes information every living person should be aware of. Open discussion to follow.

Barbara Karnes, RN, is an internationally respected speaker, educator, author, and thought leader on matters of end of life. She is a renowned authority on the dying process and a leading educator for families, healthcare professionals, and the community at large.

Barbara's award-winning DVDs and books about death and dying are changing lives - in this country and around the world. In her work, Barbara compassionately explains stages of the dying process, living with a life-threatening illness, pain management, and how people grieve. She explains how important it is to take care of yourself as a caregiver and offers guidelines for professionals.

Barbara has dedicated the last 40 years of her life to the education, care, and support of dying people and their loved ones. The most useful and important things that she's learned along the way have been distilled into her materials.

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Session Three: The Importance of Legacy Work: What to Do, and Where to Start

Legacy work is not about dying and death, it is about life and living; and creating your own legacy for your family, friends, and loved ones...and yourself. Only you can tell your story, expound upon your personal wisdom, and express your feelings to and about others that are important to you. It is ideal to start this sooner than later; preferably before you are actively dying. We will discuss different methods of documenting your legacy, including several prompt questions, etc.

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Session Four: Film: Barbara Karnes's 'This is How We Die - Part Two: Labor of Dying'

This is How People Die addresses the normal dying process, from months before death through the actual moment of death. This presentation provides knowledge and tools for working with the end of life. It includes non-medical terminology, and a practical guide for working with patients & families facing end of life issues. Part two focuses on the labor of dying, and includes information every living person should be aware of. Open discussion to follow.

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Session Five: MAID (Medical Aid in Dying) and VSED (Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking)

We will discuss MAID (Medical Aid in Dying); focusing primarily on Maine's "Death with Dignity" Act/law. Medical Aid in Dying/Death with Dignity is the process by which competent and terminally ill state residents who are within 6 (six) months of death may legally obtain oral prescription medication, which they may voluntarily take without assistance to peacefully end their own life.

We will also discuss VSED (Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking), which is a legal option for any mentally capable, determined, and well-informed person as a means to advance the time of their death. VSED requires significant caregiving and support, which we will discuss further.

Short Film: Dying Wish: A Dying Doctor's Decision to Stop Eating and Drinking and Die with Grace

Retired surgeon, Michael Miller is dying of end-stage cancer and is determined to avoid the hospital at all costs. He has researched the dying process and believes that stopping eating and drinking will ease his suffering and result in a peaceful, more natural death. During his fast, Michael suffers neither thirst nor hunger. Buoyed by the legacy of this film, he enjoys a last meal, surrounds himself with art and music, and takes leave of his family. Medical ethicists speak about patients' rights, and hospice staff share their own, similar experiences of others who have made this choice. (29 minutes)

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Session Six: Film: Letting Go: A Hospice Journey

For terminally ill patients and their families, hospice can provide an opportunity to find comfort, companionship, and peace in the weeks, days, hours, and moments before death. Taking an intimate look at three patients – an eight-year-old boy with an incurable brain disease, a 46-year-old woman with lung cancer, and a 62-year-old man with an inoperable brain tumor – this program shows how hospice care helps them cope with fear and pain in the final stages of their lives and prepares loved ones for their imminent loss. In addition to extensive footage of the hospice patients and their families, the program sheds light on the decision-making process of the doctors, nurses, chaplains, social workers, and volunteers involved in hospice. An HBO production. (90 minutes)

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Session Seven: The Basics of a Home Funeral

In this session, we will review the basics of a home funeral; from getting your loved one home if they have died elsewhere, to how to wash, care for, and maintain the body, as well as different ideas for a meaningful home vigil for your loved one. If time and space allow, a “mock home funeral” may be performed.

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Session Eight: Film: Flight from Death: The Quest for Immortality

Narrated by Gabriel Byrne, this seven-time Best Documentary award winning film is the most comprehensive and mind-blowing investigation of humankind’s relationship with death ever captured on film. Flight from Death uncovers death anxiety as a possible root cause of many of our behaviors on a psychological, spiritual, and cultural level. Following the work of the late cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker and his Pulitzer Prize-winning book Denial of Death, this documentary explores the ongoing research of a group of social psychologists that may forever change the way we look at ourselves and the world. Over the last twenty-five years, this team of researchers has conducted over 300 laboratory studies, which substantiate Becker’s claim that death anxiety is a primary motivator of human behavior, specifically aggression and violence. (86 minutes)

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Session Nine: Writing Your Own Obituary

Relying heavily on James R. Hagerty’s book, *Yours Truly: An Obituary Writer’s Guide to Telling Your Story*, we will discuss tips for telling your own story and preserving your personal history in a meaningful and engaging way in your obituary.

“Whatever your age or health, an inventory of your life so far can help you decide if you’re on the path you intended, and if you aren’t, lead you to another.” – James R. Hagerty

Session Ten: Film: Grief: Exploring the Process (Barbara Karnes)

Grief: Exploring the Process is a DVD presentation that offers guidance on navigating the stages of grief. This presentation explores the normality of grief by defining the grieving process and the feelings that unravel as we deal with the loss of someone we know. Grief: Exploring the Process suggests ideas for visitations and funerals, addresses differences between male and female grieving patterns, and gives ideas for addressing issues left unresolved by death. Grief: Exploring the Process is a teaching tool for professionals and lay people alike, with no medical terminology, just simple, direct ideas for understanding the grieving process. (58 minutes)

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Session Eleven: Open

I will often leave this session open-ended to either discuss something that has been brought up over the course of the series that needed more time for discussion, to show a film that has not yet been seen but has been discussed, and/or to provide the opportunity for a completely open discussion regarding death. There is **ALWAYS** something to be discussed and questions to be answered!

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Die Well Death Education is the passion project of Leona Oceania. Always fascinated with death and baffled by the fact that we don’t talk about the one thing that is going to happen to all of us, she decided to do what she could to encourage that conversation. She has trained to become an End-of-Life Doula, a Home Funeral Guide, a Life Legacy Facilitator, and a Death Educator. She also serves on the board of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maine, is the facilitator of the Portland Death Café, and is a volunteer with a local hospice organization. She has built a bookcase coffin with the prodigious Chuck Lakin, which is currently in use as a bookcase in her living room until it is needed as a coffin.