



Meaning and Effect of ELEs on Families

Our past research has shown that ELEs are very meaningful for our patients and greatly affect those in the dying process. We have also found this to be true for the loved ones left behind. For families, the meaning and effects derived from ELEs are clearly linked to the meaning and effects found by their dying loved one.

Like our patients, family members often find dreams to have a spiritual or religious meaning, such as the existence of an afterlife where deceased loved ones are waiting. Here, ELEs mean that their loved one is safe, won't be alone, and that they will see them again when it's time. Though we cannot prove that an afterlife exists through the research conducted by Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo, it is important to understand that one should not impose their own beliefs and perspectives of ELEs on the patient and their families. For others, ELEs are viewed as a natural part of the dying process and a signal that the end is near. In some cases, ELEs mean very little to our bereaved families, especially when they feel that what has occurred is due to medication or the effects of a dying brain.

From our research, we know that being aware of a loved one's ELEs can later ease the grief and bereavement process of families. When the bereaved have employed sense-making techniques (such as those mentioned above), they are more able to accept their loss, feel less pain associated with grief, are more accepting of a world without their loved one, and feel that they are better able to continue the bond they had prior to their loved one's death. In some cases, this bond is actually strengthened through ELEs, as families can often learn more about their loved ones and their past than they had previously known. When dreams are comforting for the deceased, they are generally comforting to those left behind as they see the effects they had on their loved one. Many of our families look back on their loved ones and these experiences with amazement and wonder, feeling that something truly special has occurred. For each individual the experience may be different, but what remains is the true capacity for meaning and effect ELEs can have extending beyond the dreamer.

This tool is provided courtesy of Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo.

CITATIONS

Grant PC, Depner RM, Levy K, LaFever SM, Tenzek KE, Wright ST, Kerr CW. **Family Caregiver Perspectives on End-of-Life Dreams and Visions during Bereavement: A Mixed Methods Approach.** *Journal of Palliative Medicine.* July 2019. doi:10.1089/jpm.2019.0093.