

Compassionate Communities

# Handbook

of Ideas for Libraries



**Compassionate  
Communities SA**

Program of Palliative Care SA

*We are inclusive. We celebrate multiple approaches and points of view.  
When we say palliative care is everybody's business, no matter their age, we mean everybody.*

## Acknowledgements

Our organisation acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and seas on which we live and work, and pays respect to Elders - past, present and emerging.

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# About This Ideas Handbook



## Purpose

To create a supportive environment where serious illness, dying, death, grief and caregiving are acknowledged as part of life, and where people feel comfortable seeking and offering help.

## Why Libraries?

Libraries are vital community spaces that foster learning, reflection and connection—making them uniquely suited for exploring the complex topics of serious illness, dying, death, grief and caregiving.

As accessible, inclusive environments, libraries provide a safe and nonjudgmental setting for people to seek information, share experiences and engage in conversations that are often difficult to have elsewhere. Through curated resources, public programs, groups activities and partnerships, libraries help normalise these universal experiences and reduce isolation. In doing so, they empower individuals and communities to face the last chapter of life with greater understanding, less fear and compassion.



# ACTIVITY IDEAS

# 1

## Compassionate Communities Book Club

- **Choose Books:** *Using the list in this handbook*
- **Schedule regular meetings (ie monthly):** *To build continuity and trust*
- **Establish group guidelines:** *Around respectful listening, confidentiality and nonjudgmental discussion. Remind people that this is not a support group its a book discussion on this topic.*
- **Acknowledge emotional content:** *Remind participants they can step back at any time.*
- **Consider partnering with community professionals:** *co-host or support discussions. (Ie: local social workers or counsellors).*
- **Create a welcoming atmosphere:** *Offer tea, soft lighting, and a calm setting for in-person gatherings.*
- **Create a flyer for your book club:** *Ie: Join our Compassionate Communities Book Club. It's a group for people who come together to read, discuss, and reflect on books with a theme about the last chapter of life. Our book club meets in person monthly and focus on a range of different books around serious illness, aging, dying, grief or caregiving. More than just a discussion group, our Compassionate Communities book club fosters connection, compassion and a love of reading.*
- **Advertise through library channels:** *Local health centers, community hubs and social media.*

# 2

## Host a Compassionate Communities art competition with your community or local school

- **Define a theme:** *Ie. Last chapter of life or Compassionate Communiites*
- **Choose who can participate:** *To build continuity and trust*
- **Establish group guidelines:** *Around respectful listening, confidentiality and nonjudgmental discussion. Remind people that this is not a support group, it's a book discussion on this topic.*
- **Set a timeline:** *for submissions, judging and exhibition dates.*
- **Decide on format:** *digital entries, physical artwork, or both.*
- **Reach out to local schools, art teachers, aged care, community centres or community groups:** *to invite participation.*
- **Send an info pack:** *With guidelines, consent forms, and submission instructions*
- **Advertise through library channels:** *Local health centers, community hubs, and social media.*
- **Display submissions:** *in the library, on your website, or as a virtual gallery.*
- **Host an event for judging:** *Form a judging panel of local artists, library staff, and community members and host a small opening event or celebration, inviting families, schools, and the public.*

# 3

## Blue Christmas Tree

- **Choose a quiet, reflective spot:** *Near a window, reading nook, or a designated wellness space in the library.*
- **Decorate simply:** *Use a small to medium-sized artificial Christmas tree*
- **Display a gentle, welcoming sign explaining the purpose:** *le: “This Blue Christmas Tree is a space to honor and remember loved ones who have died. During a season that can be joyful for many, it can also bring sorrow for those grieving. All are invited to leave a memory, name, or message in remembrance.”*
- **Memory tags:** *Set out paper tags, stars, doves, or ornament-shaped cards for visitors to write on.*
- **Pens:** *Offer pens so people can easily add their remembrance.*
- **Optional Box:** *For those who prefer to write privately and not display their message.*
- **Encourage Participation:** *Mention the tree in your newsletter, social media, or library website, emphasizing that all are welcome, regardless of religious beliefs or traditions*
- **Supports:** *Include a display for books about grief and loss available to borrow and a handout for local support such as Palliative Care Connect*
- **Closing Ritual:** *Consider a quiet closing activity—such as a moment of silence or a virtual reflection post.*
- **Storage of Messages:** *Keep the tags (if people consent) in a memory book or archive them respectfully*

# 4

## Grief Training for your Library Staff and Volunteers

- Create an opportunity for your staff or volunteers to watch the “Showing up for grief”
- Download the Guide: <https://www.deathliteracy.institute/showing-up-for-grief-program>
- Watch the three videos together in a group and work through the Guide
- Create the space of open discussion

# 5

## Engage with existing awareness raising activities in this area

### ✓ National Advance Care Planning Week \_ March

National Advance Care Planning Week is the perfect time to have a conversation with your loved ones and health providers so they know what matters most to you and respect your treatment preferences.

<https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au/advance-care-planning-week>

### ✓ National Palliative Care Week \_ May

National Palliative Care Week is the perfect time to raise awareness that everyone is affected by serious illness, dying, death and grief.

<https://palliativecaresa.org.au/national-palliative-care-week/>

### ✓ Dying to Know Day \_ August

Dying to Know Day is the perfect time to encourage open and honest conversations about death and dying.

<https://proveda.com.au/community-programs/dying-to-know-day/>

### ✓ World Compassionate Communities Day \_ November

World Compassionate Communities Day is the perfect time to celebrate wonderful people around the world doing amazing things reducing loneliness, supporting people who are seriously ill, dying, grieving or caregiving

<https://www.phpci.org/worldccday-resources>

# Book List



## Adult Book List Ideas

- Atul Gawande (2014). **Being Mortal**
- Megan Devine (2017). **It's OK That You're Not OK**
- Paul Kalanithi (2016). **When Breath Becomes Air**
- Katy Butler (2019). **The Art of Dying Well**
- Kathryn Mannix (2017). **With the End in Mind: Dying, Death and Wisdom in an Age of Denial**
- Kathryn Mannix (2021). **Listen: How to Find the Words for Tender Conversations**
- Rachel Clarke (2020). **Dear Life: A Doctor's Story of Love and Loss**
- Allan Kellehear (2008). **Compassionate Cities: Public Health and End-of-Life Care**
- Frank Ostaseski (2017). **The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully**
- Megan Devine (2017). **It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand**
- Elisabeth Kübler-Ross & David Kessler (2000). **Life Lessons: Two Experts on Death and Dying Teach Us About the Mysteries of Life and Living**
- C.S. Lewis (1961). **A Grief Observed**
- Joan Halifax (2008). **Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death**
- BJ Miller & Shoshana Berger (2019). **A Beginner's Guide to the End: Practical Advice for Living Life and Facing Death**
- Ken Hillman (2017). **A Good Life to the End**
- Bronnie Ware (2011). **The Top Five Regrets of the Dying: A Life Transformed by the Dearly Departing**
- Barbara Karnes (2012). **The Final Act of Living: Reflections of a Long-Time Hospice Nurse**
- Jennifer Collins Taylor (2021). **Pocketful of Hospice Wisdom: 100 Messages of Hope and Inspiration from the End of Life**

*This booklist includes titles that explore themes of death, dying, palliative care, and grief. Some content may be emotionally challenging or may not reflect everyone's cultural, spiritual, or personal experiences. We encourage readers to engage with these materials at their own pace and seek support if needed. These books are intended to offer insight, comfort, and conversation—not medical advice.*

## Children Book List Ideas

- Judith Kerr (2003). **Goodbye Mog**
- Pat Thomas (2001). **I Miss You – A First Look at Death**
- Wolf Erlbuck (2007). **Duck, Death and the Tulip**
- E.B. White (2006). **Charlotte’s Web**
- Mem Fox (2019). **Tough Boris**
- Patrice Karst (2018). **The Invisible String**
- Bryan Mellonie & Robert Ingpen (2005). **Beginnings and Endings With Lifetimes  
in Between**
- Patrick Ness (2011). **A Monster Calls**
- Tricia Irving (2001). **When Tough Stuff Happens**
- Margo Rabb (2007). **Cures for Heartbreak**
- Jason Reynolds (2015). **The Boy in the Black Suit**
- Molly Carlile (2010). **Sometimes Life Sucks: When Someone You Love Dies**
- Annette Aubrey (2005). **Why Did Grandpa Die?**
- Pat Thomas (2001). **I Miss You: A First Look at Death**

*We acknowledge CareSearch’s ‘Dying to Learn’ for many of these book ideas:  
[www.caresearch.com.au](http://www.caresearch.com.au)*

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# Stay Connected



**Compassionate  
Communities SA**

Program of Palliative Care SA



**Compassionate Communities are groups of people and places where everybody recognises that we all have a role to play in supporting each other in times of serious illness, dying, death, grief and caregiving.**

**Residents of Compassionate Communities recognise that care for one another at times of crisis and loss is not simply a task solely for health and social services but is everyone's business. Everyone is ready, willing and confident to support each other in emotional and practical ways.**

## **About our Compassionate Communities SA (CCSA) program:**

- We host Compassionate Community Conversations
- We manage the:
  - Compassionate Communities Charter SA project
  - Nurturing Compassionate Communities in SA projects
- We deliver public education programs – Last Aid, PalliLEARN and TLC
- We act as a source of guidance on policy formation at local, regional, national and international levels
- We create community awareness initiatives that promote and develop an understanding about compassionate communities
- We host a SA Death Literacy Working Group

*and more...*

**Keeping LOVE, LAUGHTER and FRIENDSHIP  
central to people's lives in the last chapter of life**

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**palliativecaresa.org.au/CCSA**



We strive to create a community where members say: *“everybody has a role to play in supporting each other in times of serious illness, dying, death and grief. We are ready, willing and confident to have conversations about living, dying and grieving well and to support each other in emotional and practical ways.”*

Palliative Care South Australia’s mission