the conversation project

Our Purpose

The Conversation Project is a national campaign dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care. It was founded by Pulitzer Prize winner Ellen Goodman.

Too many people are dying in a way they wouldn't choose, and too many of their loved ones are left feeling bereaved, guilty, and uncertain.

It's time to transform our culture so we shift from not talking about dying to talking about it. It's time to share the way we want to live at the end of our lives. And it's time to communicate about the kind of care we want and don't want for ourselves.

We believe that the place for this to begin is at the kitchen table—not in the intensive care unit—with the people we love, before it's too late. Together we can make these difficult conversations easier. Our goal is to make sure that every person's wishes for end-of-life care are expressed and respected.

Our History

The Conversation Project began in 2010, when Ellen Goodman and a group of colleagues and concerned media, clergy, and medical professionals gathered to share stories of "good deaths" and "hard deaths" within their own circle of loved ones. They realized that the difference between the two experiences often hinged on whether or not they had had the conversation.

Over several months, a vision emerged for a grassroots public campaign spanning both traditional and new media that would change our culture. The goal: to make it easier to initiate conversations about dying, and to encourage people to talk now and as often as necessary so that their wishes are known when the time comes.

In order to make this vision a reality, The Conversation Project began its collaboration with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in September 2011. IHI is a not-for-profit organization that helps lead improvement of health and health care throughout the world. The Conversation Project, which officially launched on August 2012, does not promote any specific preference for end-of-life care. Instead, it seeks to support people as they consider their preferences and share them with those closest to them.

The Conversation Project's cornerstone is a website that offers users a Conversation Starter Kit, and asks people to submit personal stories to theconversationproject.org, and via YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. By sparking cultural change at the kitchen table—not in the intensive care unit—The Conversation Project hopes it will become easier for people to express their end-of-life wishes in advance and have them respected at the end.

60%

Sixty percent of people say that making sure their family is not burdened by tough decisions is "extremely important."

56%

Yet fifty-six percent have not communicated their end-of-life wishes.

Source: Survey of Californians by the California HealthCare Foundation (2012)

One conversation can make all the difference.

Have you had the conversation?

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The Conversation Project is the beneficiary of a collaboration with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, a not-for-profit organization that is a leader in health care improvement worldwide. However, we rely on the generous support of funders to achieve our mission.

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