



A Kitchen Table Conversation Guide

Talking with the people who may one day speak for you

Planning ahead helps protect our freedom to make personal choices about our care while offering clarity and reassurance to those who may one day be asked to make decisions for us.

Many people find it helpful to begin these conversations at home — around a kitchen table, during a quiet walk, or whenever there is time to talk without pressure or urgency.

You do not need to have all the answers. The goal is simply to help the people who care about you understand what matters most.

This is a worksheet to get you started. There are all sorts planning tools out there, and the NH Alliance for End of Life Options website has links to several of them we find most helpful. But if you want quick and dirty but still substantive, this worksheet is a good place to start.

Getting Started

You might begin by saying something like:

- “I’ve been thinking about planning ahead for my health care.”
- “If something ever happened and I couldn’t speak for myself, I’d want you to understand what matters to me.”
- “Can we talk a little about the kind of care I would want if I became seriously ill?”

Remember: this does not have to be a single conversation. It can unfold over time.

Topics to Discuss

You don’t need to cover everything at once. Even a few of these questions can be helpful.

What makes life meaningful to you?

- What activities or abilities are most important to your quality of life?
- What would you most hope to maintain if you became seriously ill?

Notes:

What worries you most about serious illness?

- Are there situations you would find especially difficult or unacceptable?
- What would you want others to understand about those concerns?

Notes:

What role should medical treatment play?

- Would you want doctors to try all possible treatments, even if recovery is uncertain?
- Are there situations where comfort would matter more to you than prolonging life?

Notes:

If treatments involved difficult trade-offs, what would feel acceptable to you — and what wouldn't?*

Who do you trust to speak for you?

- Have you chosen a healthcare proxy (Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare)?
- Does that person understand your wishes?

Name of proxy: _____

What would help your proxy feel confident?

- Are there specific wishes you want them to remember?
- Is there anything you would want them to say to doctors on your behalf?

Notes:

***Now Self/Future Self**

The answers people give around the kitchen table today may not be exactly the same answers they would give if they were facing serious illness in the future.

If we are healthy (our now self), it can be hard to imagine what trade-offs we might sometime accept (future self) for the possibility of living longer. When serious illness becomes real, people sometimes discover they are willing to endure treatments they once thought they would refuse. Or, they may find that they value quality of life over quantity, if treatments include side effects they do not want.

That is why these conversations are not about predicting every possible medical decision in advance.

They are about helping the people who care about you understand **what matters most to you**, how you think about difficult trade-offs, and where your priorities lie.

Revisiting these conversations over time helps ensure that the people who may one day speak for you can do so with clarity, confidence, and a deeper understanding of your values.

These conversations are a gift to those who care about you.

Learn more about advance directives, healthcare proxies, and end-of-life planning at
New Hampshire Alliance for End of Life Options – www.nhendoflifeoptions.org