as possible (Fanslow, 1981). Once patients near death stop expressing hope, those close to them must accept this. Family members who find letting go very difficult may benefit from expert, sensitive guidance. Applying What We Know above offers suggestions for communicating with the dying.

Spirituality, Religion, and Culture. Earlier we noted that a strong sense of spirituality reduces fear of death. Informal reports from health professionals suggest that this is as true for dying patients as for people in general. One experienced nurse commented,

At the end, those [patients] with a faith—it doesn’t really matter in what, but a faith in something—find it easier. Not always, but as a rule. I’ve seen people with faith panic and I’ve seen those without faith accept it [death]. But, as a rule, it’s much easier for those with faith. (Samarel, 1991, pp. 64–65)

Vastly different cultural beliefs, guided by religious ideas, also shape people’s dying experiences:

- Buddhism, widely practiced in China, India, and Southeast Asia, fosters acceptance of death. By reading sutras (teachings of Buddha) to the dying person to calm the mind and emphasizing that dying leads to rebirth in a heaven of peace and relaxation, Buddhists believe that it is possible to reach Nirvana, a state beyond the world of suffering (Kubotera, 2004; Yeung, 1996).

- For African Americans, a dying loved one signals a crisis that unites family members in caregiving. The terminally ill person remains an active and vital force within the family until he or she no longer can carry out this role—an attitude of respect that undoubtedly eases the dying process (Sullivan, 1995).

- Among the Maori of New Zealand, relatives and friends gather around the dying person to give spiritual strength and comfort. Elders, clergy, and other experts in tribal customs conduct a karakia ceremony, in which they recite prayers asking for peace, mercy, and guidance from the creator. After the ceremony, the patient is encouraged to discuss important matters with those closest to her—giving away of personal belongings, directions for interment, and completion of other unfinished tasks (Ngata, 2004).

In sum, dying prompts a multitude of thoughts, emotions, and coping strategies. Which ones are selected and emphasized depends on a wide array of contextual influences. A vital assumption of the lifespan perspective—that development is multidimensional and multidirectional—is just as relevant to this final phase as to each earlier period.

A Place to Die

Whereas in the past most deaths occurred at home, today about 70 percent in Canada and 80 percent in the United States take place in hospitals (O’Connor, 2003; Wilson, 2002). In the large, impersonal hospital environment, meeting the human needs of dying patients and their families

### Communicating with Dying People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Be truthful about the diagnosis and course of the disease.</td>
<td>Be honest about what the future is likely to hold, thereby permitting the dying person to bring closure to his or her life by expressing sentiments and wishes and participating in decisions about treatment.</td>
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<td>Listen perceptively and acknowledge feelings.</td>
<td>Be truly present, focusing full attention on what the dying person has to say and accepting the patient’s feelings. Patients who sense another’s presence and concern are more likely to relax physically and emotionally and express themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain realistic hope.</td>
<td>Assist the dying person in maintaining hope by encouraging him or her to focus on a realistic goal that might yet be achieved—for example, resolution of a troubled relationship or special moments with a loved one. Knowing the dying person’s hope, family members and health professionals can often help fulfill it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assist in the final transition.</td>
<td>Assure the dying person that he or she is not alone, offering a sympathetic touch, a caring thought, or just a calm presence. Some patients who struggle may benefit from being given permission to die—the message that giving up and letting go is all right.</td>
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