

Tips for hosting a Dying to Know Day Event

What is Dying to Know Day?

D2KDay is designed to encourage all Australians to develop new knowledge and attitudes about how to deal with death, dying and bereavement and support each other at the end of life. It inspires local initiatives and promotes information to enable all Australians to discuss and plan their wishes.

With this focus in mind, it is easy to see that the possibilities really are endless! So let's toss around a few ideas and some helpful hints!

Before you start you might also like to read some of the ideas suggested by previous hosts.

- Organise a Will Writing or Advance Care Planning workshop in partnership with a local law firm
- Run a creative workshop focusing on creating memoirs of deceased loved ones
- Arrange a group visit to a local funeral home to discuss 'after death' possibilities, or have one of their staff come to talk to your group
- Run a Dying To Know Day information stall at your local shopping centre or library
- Plan a legacy-leaving session where you write letters or create memorabilia to leave your loved ones when you die
- Arrange a morning tea for people who have experienced the loss of a loved one, and share stories and coping mechanisms. Perhaps have details of support services on hand to share.
- Organise a 'death stories' session, where people can speak openly about their journeys with death
- Invite local religious and spiritual leaders and their communities to come together to discuss death from a variety of perspectives
- Arrange a behind the scenes tour of a local crematorium
- Plan a picnic with friends in a local cemetery and see where the conversation goes!
- Run a Death Cafe (see right column for more details)

Run a Death Cafe

Death Cafe is a global 'social franchise' whose objective is 'to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives.

At a Death Cafe people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss death.

A Death Cafe is a group directed discussion of death with no agenda, objectives or themes. It is a discussion group rather than a grief support or counselling session.

For more information please visit <http://deathcafe.com>

What's involved

These sort of events can be as big or as small as you want them to be. Regardless of WHAT you do, you'll need to follow the same process, which will look something like this:

1. Planning
2. Advertising
3. Booking
4. Set up and preparation
5. Holding the event
6. Data collection and/or evaluation
7. Reflection and debrief

Let's look at those 7 key stages

1. Planning

Remember that you do not need to run a huge event with hundreds of people....your event could just involve you and a couple of friends! It may be good to start small, and it's good to decide how much time you have on your hands regarding preparation and running the actual gathering, and how many people you are comfortable working with. Once you have done that, then dream up some ideas! You can always build on your event next year, spreading your D2KDay wings, so to speak.

- What you want to run?
- Who is your target audience?
- Where and when you want to run it? (including clear starting and finishing times)
- WHO is going to do what? e.g. booking people in, arranging refreshments, facilitating the event and so forth.

2. Promoting your event

So, having decided the where, when and who your event is for, you need to let people know about your event. You could do that in a number of ways:

- Tell people face to face (this is the single most effective way of getting people interested)
- Use social media such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn etc
- Utilise the posters we have provided and make your own
- Create media releases and promotional emails to send out to like-minded networks

When you are approaching people about your event, prepare to be met with all sorts of responses ranging from "that's weird" to "oh that is so awesome!"

The subject of death, dying and bereavement touches people on such a variety of levels, and can stir up fears, old hurts, and on the other extreme, excitement at the mere prospect of having the space to talk freely about a topic that causes so much discomfort!

3. Bookings

You can approach your event in two ways: have people "just show up" or insist they "RSVP and book in". What you decide to do will depend on such factors as what you are doing and where, and any expenses relating to the event. Obviously if your event is low-cost, then it's probably not essential that you get a certain number of attendees, and on the flip side, if there are costs involved (or catering, for that matter) you may need to know how many people intend to come so you can cover your event costs.

Tip:

Consider getting in contact with local community organisations and groups that regularly gather for meetings, workshops, talks or hobbies, such as; Rotary Clubs, U3A, Sport Clubs, Schools and Universities, hobby groups like gardening, arts and crafts, book clubs, faith groups, the local library and neighbourhood centres.

This is a great way to connect with people in your community who may not ordinarily attend a death/end of life related event, but will turn up with their friends for regular gatherings.

These community groups are often looking for new and unique speakers too!

One advantage of having a booked session is that you can start to develop rapport with people before the event, and you may find people even put up their hands to help out on the day! Also, you can get a sense of where people are at before the event, and if you don't think this event quite meets their needs, you could direct them elsewhere. A real example of such a scenario may be if someone is recently bereaved and is in the raw stages of grief, a light hearted chat over coffee may not be what they are after, and perhaps they could be directed to a more appropriate support service.

4. Set-up and preparation

How you choose to set up your event is entirely up to you, and is obviously dependent on such things as budget, locale, how much help you have, and so forth. It's probably fairly safe to assume that you would like to run a good-quality event that leaves a good impression, so perhaps lets set the bar there! Remember though, the event does not have to be "perfect!". The main thing is that you deliver what you said you would, that people feel welcomed and safe, and that hopefully people enjoy the event.

It's great to consider the overall 'feel' that you'd like to create for the event (warm, comfortable and welcoming is a good start given the subject matter), as well as finer "practical" details. Here's a check list of some of the things you might like to prepare and/or bring along:

- A task list or running sheet, outlining who is doing what and in what time frame
- Signing in sheet
- Name labels
- Mailing list
- Resources such as local support services, D2KDay resources, related books etc.
- Pens
- Handouts and/or evaluations
- Housekeeping list i.e. where are the toilets? exits?
- Group agreements/ground rules e.g. confidentiality, mobiles off/on silent, respect for differing views and beliefs
- Some information about Dying To Know Day
- "Acknowledgement of Country" (acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land upon which the event is taking place.
- Food and/or drink (if that is what you are offering)
- Candles and matches (if the venue allows)
- Petty cash (or portable eftpos) if people are 'paying on the door' and maybe even a receipt book

5. Holding the event

Ensure you keep the event safe, hygienic and look for any potential hazards.

This is where the fun really begins! Be sure to enjoy the experience and relax! You are running this event because of your passion and interest in the subject, rather than being "an expert".

Generally people are so grateful for the opportunity to do some work around death, dying and bereavement, that they are appreciative of your efforts and a lot more generous with you than perhaps you may be with yourself!

6. Data collection and/or evaluation

This side of the work can be a little dry, but evaluating your event can:

- Help us all to improve our future D2KDay events
- Help you (and us) obtain funding in the future
- Help participants feel valued and included

We will endeavour to send all D2KDay event coordinators a brief on-line survey. It will ask such questions as the number of attendees at your event (so be sure to count them!) and how you rated the day. If you need help devising an evaluation sheet for use on the day, please let us know.

7. Reflection and debrief

It's important that after the event is finished, and your guests have gone home, that you take the time to sit down and reflect on the day's proceedings. If you are working alongside others, this is a great time to share your reflections with one another, consider what worked best, and maybe even what you would change if you ran the same event again next year. This is also great time to jot down a few notes, consider whether or not you met your objectives, acknowledge and congratulate yourself/selves and then move right along! If the event wasn't "perfect" and there's room for improvement, that's ok!

If some topics were raised that were challenging to you, you may need to talk about them. If you were working alone, however, this can be difficult. Think about who else you could talk with: a family member, a work colleague, or a trustworthy friend. It's actually great to consider this need potentially arising, and having someone lined up before the event, just in case.

If you'd like to connect with the Dying to Know Day team, please contact us at hello@dyingtoknowday.com.