



Reflections from
the Water



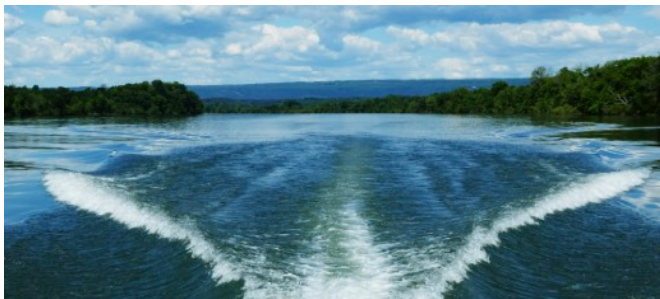
Learn more about
games that help you
explore difficult topics



Upcoming Episode!
End-of-Life University
Podcast

Still Waters Mediation

Newsletter



Reflections from the Water: Beneath the Surface

One of the things I enjoy most about paddleboarding is being out on the water early in the morning, before the lake gets busy. On a calm day, the surface can look almost like glass. Looking across the lake, everything appears peaceful and still.

What I've learned, though, is that calm water doesn't always mean still water. Beneath the surface, there are currents, movement, and living things that aren't visible to me.

The longer I work with families navigating conflict, the more I see a similar dynamic in difficult conversations.

Families often come together to discuss caregiving, medical decisions, finances, or what should happen after a loved one's death. On the surface, the disagreement may seem to be about a specific decision. But what is driving the conflict is often something deeper.

One sibling may be carrying a promise they made to a parent years ago. Another may be trying to balance safety and independence. Someone else may be struggling with guilt, grief, fear, or a sense of responsibility. (cont.)

Upcoming Events

August 13th

All Things Grief!

8:00am - 5:00pm

St. Paul RiverCentre

Presentation: "Staying Neutral in a Charged Room: Supporting Families When Values Collide"

<https://brighterdaysgriefcenter.org/all-things-grief/>

September 15th

FamilyMeans Caregiving & Aging Education Series

1:00 - 2:30pm

Hardwood Creek Library

Forest Lake

Presentation: "Navigating Estate Planning with Intention" co-presented with estate planning attorney Melissa Miroslavich

<https://www.familymeans.org/classes/groups.html>

October 6th

St. Croix Grief Coalition: Growing Through Loss Series

St. Andrew Lutheran Church

Mahtomedi

Presentation:

"When Grief Boils Over"

<https://www.scvgriefcoalition.com/>

We don't always see those struggles right away, but they are often influencing the conversation nonetheless.

In mediation, I often see a shift occur when people move beyond explaining what they want and begin sharing why it matters to them. Those deeper stories are not always easy to tell, but they often help family members see one another in a new light.

That is why I am excited to share the article below by Lisa Pahl, hospice social worker and creator of *The Death Deck*. Lisa has spent years helping families navigate some of life's most difficult conversations and developed The Death Deck as a way to make discussions about death, dying, and future wishes more approachable. Her article highlights why these conversations matter and how having them now can ease the burden on those we love later.

I Just Wish I Knew What Mom Would Have Wanted

By Lisa Pahl, LCSW, APHSW-C

“I just wish I knew what my mom would want us to do.”

“It feels impossible to make a decision about my dad’s care. We never talked about any of this.”

“My sister and I are constantly arguing about what’s best for our mom, and now it’s too late to ask her what she would want.”

These are just a few of the hundreds of comments I’ve heard over the years as a hospice and emergency medicine social worker.

I’ve watched family after family struggle with making healthcare decisions on behalf of someone they love. Siblings disagree. Adult children interpret the same situation differently. People worry about making the wrong choice. Many are hesitant to make decisions based on quality of life rather than quantity of life, even when they believe that’s what their person would want, unless they have had a clear conversation about it beforehand.

What’s especially heartbreaking is talking with these same family members after the death. Grief is often accompanied by second guessing. Did we make the right decision? Did we do enough? Did we honor what they would have wanted?

When we avoid conversations about death and dying, we often avoid the practical preparation that can make an already difficult time a little easier for those left behind. Things like wills, passwords, account information, advance directives, and life insurance policies are often left unaddressed, creating additional stress during an already overwhelming period. (cont.)

Upcoming Podcast Episode

I'm excited to share that I'll soon be a guest on the **End-of-Life University Podcast**, hosted by Dr. Karen Wyatt. Since 2015, the podcast has featured thoughtful conversations with experts, caregivers, and advocates exploring death, dying, grief, caregiving, end-of-life planning, and the lessons these experiences can teach us about living well. Its mission is to provide compassionate, accessible education that helps people navigate some of life's most challenging transitions with greater understanding and confidence.

I look forward to joining Dr. Wyatt to discuss family conflict, caregiving, and the role of mediation in helping families navigate difficult decisions during times of illness, loss, and transition. End-of-Life University is a resource for professionals, caregivers, and anyone interested in creating more meaningful conversations about what matters most at the end of life.

[Click here to learn more](#)

The reality is that these conversations become much harder after a diagnosis or medical crisis. Emotions are running high. The focus is usually on treatment and recovery. Bringing up end of life wishes can feel uncomfortable, especially when someone has embraced a “we’re going to beat this” mindset. In some cases, the opportunity is lost altogether because a person becomes unable to communicate their wishes.

That’s why we created The Death Deck.

The Death Deck is designed to make conversations about death and dying more approachable through humor and multiple choice questions. With 112 cards covering a wide range of topics, it offers an entry point for almost anyone, including those who would never sit down for a traditional end of life planning conversation. Over the years, I’ve seen how talking about the future before a crisis can help families in meaningful ways.

It can reduce family conflict.

When wishes have been discussed openly, loved ones are less likely to find themselves in disagreement during stressful situations.

It helps ensure your wishes are honored. The more people understand your values and preferences, the more likely they are to make decisions that reflect what matters most to you.

It eases fear and anxiety. Open conversations reduce uncertainty and help everyone feel more prepared for what may come. It helps maintain a sense of control. Making choices now gives you a voice in future decisions, even if there comes a time when you can no longer speak for yourself.

It gives your family confidence. Loved ones often feel more at peace making difficult decisions when they know they are carrying out your wishes rather than guessing what you would have wanted.

None of us can predict exactly what the future will hold. But we can make it easier on the people we love by talking about what matters before a crisis forces the conversation.

About Lisa Pahl

Lisa Pahl is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) and advanced palliative and hospice social worker who has spent her career supporting patients and families in hospice and emergency medicine settings. Through her clinical work, she has witnessed firsthand how difficult it can be for families to make care decisions without prior conversations about values and wishes. She is also the co-creator of *The Death Deck*, a tool designed to make end-of-life conversations more approachable, accessible, and even a little easier to start.

Learn more and explore The Death Deck [here](https://thedeathdeck.com)

