



# Death Café

## Menu

The following refreshments are available.

### Drinks

Fair trade coffee  
Fair trade tea  
Herbal tea (blackcurrant, peppermint)  
Elderflower cordial  
Sparkling mineral water  
Orange juice

Please let your host know your preferences when asked.

### Sandwiches

Mozzarella, tomato and pesto on baguette  
Roasted pepper and cream cheese on granary bread

### Cake

Sticky date.

### Conversation

Thoughtful, respectful and provocative.

*Over...*



# How to Offer a Death Café

Version 1 produced by Jon Underwood and the Death Café team in December 2011 & January 2012

These words have been written to help those who are looking to host Death Cafés or conversations about death. However, you are welcome to read them whoever you are.

In this document we:

- Describe an affiliate scheme for those who wish to work with us
- Set out what Death Café is all about
- Share what we've learned so far from hosting conversations about death.

We're going to keep this document updated and welcome your comments, advice and suggestions. Please send them to [underwoodjon@gmail.com](mailto:underwoodjon@gmail.com).

Thanks for reading!

## Working with us

We think it's a great thing for people to come together and talk about death, and we're keen to help it to happen more. We figure that we can do this more effectively if we work with others. To this end we have set up a Death Café 'affiliate' scheme.

You're reading this because (we guess) you're interested in hosting conversations about death. That's great and we support what you're doing. Your activities can either be affiliated with Death Café or not. You are welcome to use these materials whether you want to be affiliated with us or not.

Being affiliated with us involves having an ongoing relationship with Death Café. One point to make upfront is that it does not involve sending us any money!

The benefits of affiliation are that affiliates can:

- Use the name Death Café
- Use the Death Café logo and branding, which is in development
- Advertise events via the Death Café website and through our social media, such as Twitter and Facebook
- Be part of our community of practice - sharing materials, support and resources.

To be affiliated to Death Café you should agree to:

- Uphold the principles we work to (set out below)
- Agree to share information with Death Café regarding events and participant feedback
- Help to positively publicise Death Café and the work we are doing.

We feel that the work we are doing is part of a greater movement towards increased death awareness – something that will be beneficial for the planet as a whole. Only time will tell whether Death Café will be a large or small part of this. However there is no doubt that together we can be more effective. As such we're keen to work with likeminded people.

If after considering the matter you decide you want to be affiliated with us please get in contact with me at: [underwoodjon@gmail.com](mailto:underwoodjon@gmail.com).

## About Death Café

The objective of Death Café is "*To increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives*". To do this we try to get people to think about death and share their feelings and experience.

The sessions so far tell us that there is an appetite for this. But this isn't to say that we hold the view that everyone *should* talk about death. There may well be people for whom it is not helpful to focus on death at any particular time.

We believe that our society doesn't make it isn't easy for people to talk about death. This is what Death Café does - make time for people to talk and think about death.

At our Death Cafés groups of people, usually strangers, meet to discuss death, dying and connected subjects. We are also developing a website - [www.deathcafe.com](http://www.deathcafe.com) - which is intended to function like an online death café. Currently the website exists as a blog, bringing together material on death and dying

We think that the primary audience for this work is people that are not immediately dying or in the white-heat of bereavement - though of course everyone is welcome. It is really for all of us on the other side of the curtain, and who are living our lives not thinking that much about death.

The operation of Death Cafés and the Death Café website are not for profit ventures.

## Who are we?

I, the primary author of this document, am Jon Underwood. I am a 39 year old father of 2 living in London. I am pursuing a range of projects around death and dying of which Death Café is one. These are taken forward under a company called Impermanence Ltd.

Sue Barsky-Reid has facilitated most of the Death Cafés to date. Sue is a qualified psychotherapist from the Gestalt school whose practice focuses on a range of areas including parent-child attachment, fostering and adoption and death and dying.

Impermanence Ltd. was founded by Jon and has 2 other founding partners. These are Jools Barsky, who is responsible for design and marketing, and Mark Morris who is responsible for overall strategy.

## The story so far

I heard about Death Café from an [article](#) in the Independent in November 2010. The article explains that the idea comes from Bernard Crettaz who is Swiss sociologist. He had run a series of 'Cafe Mortels' in Switzerland and Molly Guinness covered the first Death Café in Paris for the Indy. Bernard has written a book in French about the Café Mortels that is currently out of print.

I was immediately struck by a strong wish to hold similar events in England. As Bernard and his work was inaccessible to me at this point I developed my own model based on what I understood of his work. I adopted the name 'Death Café' and discussed it with Sue Barky-Reid, who enthusiastically agreed to facilitate the first event.

We initially thought to hold Death Café in a real cafe and I approached one in Hackney London in January 2011. I was met with bemusement. I felt uncomfortable and my instinct told me to wait.

Then in the summer of 2011 some friends suggested holding a cafe in our house. Pop up cafes and restaurants were springing up all over the place in London and this approach was attractive as it gave us much more control.

We had our first Death Café on September 2011 and 6 people attended. The event was beautiful and we were elated afterwards. A couple of people who attended wrote powerful accounts of the event such as [this](#) and [this](#). We sent out a press release and there was a small piece in the London Evening Standard entitled [\*Death is the Only Subject in this Sad Cafe!\*](#)

In the last quarter of 2011 we held 3 more Death Cafés with a further 14 people attending. Each was very special in its own way. We had another interesting write-up in the [Standard](#) and some other lovely [coverage](#).

Based on the coverage we received in the Evening Standard we received a call from the Southbank Centre, which operates the Royal Festival Hall – a major arts venue in central London. They had the good sense to commission a Death Festival for the end of January 2012 and they asked us to be a part of it.

We have just completed this, and offered 3 Death Cafes on each of the 2 days of the festival weekend. This involved having 3 tables each with their own facilitator drawn from a pool of Sue, me and [Kristie West](#). In total 49 people participated in a Death Café over the weekend and the feedback we received was very positive.

Recently though a French-speaking friend we have made contact with Bernard Crettaz, the originator of the Café Mortels. He has given his blessing for our activities and we will continue to develop our relationship with him.

Also, during this time I continued to post on a death blog I had started in September 2009, and renamed [Death Café](#). This is currently on the Blogger platform and receives around 2,000 page views a month.

## Our Future Plans

We are going to:

- Continue to hold Death Cafés in a range of places.
- Support other people who want to hold Death Cafés.
- Develop our website which will become an online Death Café, or place for people to share thoughts, feelings and materials related to death.
- Eventually open up an actual Death Café as a dedicated place to reflect on death whilst enjoying delicious food and drink. We already have a building in mind for this!

We are working on a range of things to help us to achieve these objectives, such as the document that you are reading and our logo. We are also going to put effort into press and promotion in 2012.

## Our principles

We operate by the principles below and affiliates are required to uphold them too.

Death Cafés are always:

- Offered for free - though donations towards expenses can be requested.  
Attendees are told before the event that donations will be requested 'for expenses and to help us to offer more Death Cafés.' Donations are retained by the Death Café organiser for these purposes.
- Free from ideology.  
Our only belief is that it is useful to reflect on death for some people at some time. As such it is absolutely against our principles to attempt to lead participants towards any conclusions about life, death or the afterlife apart from their own. Organisers and participants are asked to be respectful of others' views, even if they think they're wrong.
- Safe and nurturing – which includes offering nice refreshments.  
Speaking about death is challenging for many people. As such we put considerable effort into making Death Cafés a safe and nurturing environment for people to do so. A big part of this is related to the name Death Café – we provide delicious food and drink for people to enjoy whilst they talk about death. These refreshments help people to relax, feel safe and feel looked after. In this context they are more likely to open up and share their thoughts. It is our belief that they also serve a psychological function. On some level we may worry that talking about death brings death nearer. Eating and drinking are life-giving activities and so may serve to protect against this fear. We also have a strong preference for vegetarian food.
- Accessible to and respectful of all regardless of gender - age - sexual orientation - religion / faith - ethnicity and disability.  
This links to the above but has further practical considerations, i.e. we aim to make Death Cafés accessible to all. This may include being flexible to accommodate those who are disabled and have other specific requirements.
- Confidential  
Death Cafés need to be a safe space for people to offer their thoughts and feelings about death. As such people's views are kept confidential.

# How to offer a Death Café

## Introduction

The rest of this document is a how to guide based on what we've learned from offering Death Cafés so far.

One point to make up front is that the Death Café model is very flexible. What you're offering is an opportunity to talk about death. *How* you provide this is very much up to you.

Death is a very rich subject and people often come with a lot to say that they've not had the opportunity to say before. As such, when things go well, the actual conversations about death take care of themselves. Your job in organising a café is to create the right context for this to happen. And so it's possible for you to bring your creativity into play whilst doing this.

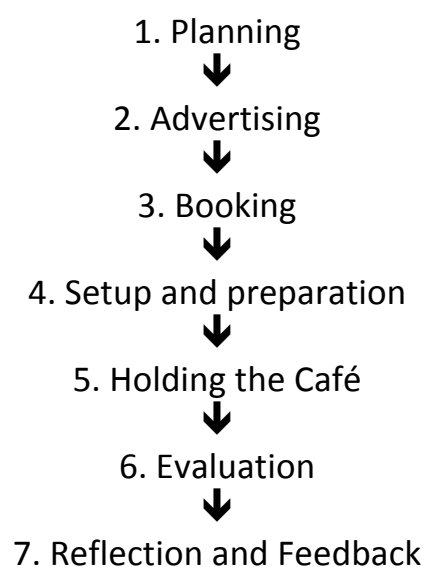
For example, you could hold a 'standard' Death Café. Or how about a death dinner party? Or a death film screening followed by discussion? Or a death café with older people in sheltered accommodation? The possibilities are endless...

The only rules are that your Death Café:

- Is focused on death
- Offers space for people to talk
- Abides by the principles detailed above (if its affiliated with us)

## Overview

The diagram below shows a rough outline of the process of offering a Death Café:



## Roles

In general all the stages above can be done by 1 person apart from number 5, the actual café. This will take a minimum of 2 people – one to facilitate the discussion and another to fetch drinks and another to act as a ‘waiter’.

With regard to the skills that you need to offer a death café, the following are the most important:

- Administration. There is a fair amount of admin involved so you need to be reasonably organised
- Facilitation. The facilitator needs general [facilitation skills](#) and needs to be comfortable talking about death
- Event management. You’re providing an event and so thinking this through carefully in advance will help you be successful.

And of course all this work around death will challenge your own thoughts and feelings on the subject. This can be one of the most beneficial aspects of providing a death café but of course you have to be willing to engage with the subject matter. Challenging stuff will be raised – we’ve had murder, abuse, guilt and ghostly visitations alongside the more commonplace grief and fear.

To go through each of the stages of offering a Death Café in turn...

### 1. Planning

At this stage you need to decide the basic parameters for your Death Café:

- Where its going to be held

So far we’ve held our Death Cafés in the dining room of my house and in the Royal Festival Hall! The advantage of using your own space is that you have control. The advantage of an external space is that it may be easier as many of the practical things you need may be on hand. Also, if you’re using your own home you need to be comfortable (and safe) inviting strangers to come. If you’re wanting to use an external space now is the time to book it.

With regard to the ideal number of people to attend, our facilitator Sue Barsky-Reid says “You want more rather than fewer as this leads to a more stimulating session with a wider range of opinions. In a larger group my experience is that people are keener to talk which makes it easier to facilitate. Overall, 6 to 8 people is an ideal number, and up to 12 is manageable for an experienced facilitator.”

- When its going to be held

If you can imagine the people who might attend your death café you’ll be able to decide the time that works best for them. If not you should go for a time which is



as accessible as possible to a range of people. So far we have gone for weekend afternoons and this has worked well and seems to be accessible to a wide range of people. Evenings may also work well. We allowed two hours for the session when they were in our space. In the Royal Festival Hall we had less than an hour and still managed to have a memorable and meaningful discussion.

- Who is going to do what

There are a range of tasks involved in providing a Death Café and its good to agree up front who is going to take responsibility for specific ones i.e.:

- Booking people in
- Arranging refreshments
- Facilitating the session

## 2. Advertising

So, having decided the where, when and who of your death café you need to let people know about it. Feel free to describe it in your own terms though the material above might give you some pointers.

In terms of where to advertise it here are some ideas:

- Telling people face-to-face. This is the single most effective way of getting people interested.
- Using social media such as Facebook and Twitter
- Advertising on the Death Café website and through our Twitter and mailing lists (for affiliates – see above)
- Putting up posters in your local area such as cafes, cinemas, arts venues etc.
- Using listings from likeminded people such as those interested in art, food or death
- Contacting the local or national press, especially if you know people working in the media. Use your contacts!

You want to advertise at the right time of course – not too early or too late.

One good thing about Death Cafés is that people become curious very quickly. Clearly, once you advertise your event the fact that you're doing a death café is 'out there'. Be prepared for some interesting conversations along the lines of 'you're doing what!?' However these can be extremely valuable and in themselves meet the objectives of Death Café. Sue Barsky-Reid says 'There is something a bit eccentric about doing a Death Café. However, if you're anything like me, you'll like being thought of as an eccentric!'

## 3. Booking

There are 2 general options here. You can choose to do either:

- An un-booked session

This means that people don't need to tell you that they're coming, they simply turn up. The advantage of this is that it removes a degree of administration which is probably more significant than you think. The disadvantage is that you lose a degree of control and it's clearly harder to anticipate how many people will turn up. The risk is that your session will be significantly under or oversubscribed. We adopted this model at the Royal Festival Hall and managed to gauge it correctly.

- A booked session

In this you ask people to confirm that they're intending to come which allows you to anticipate numbers. One thing to remember is that as Death Cafés are free people won't have to pay a deposit and therefore dropout rates might increase.

Our first 2 Death Cafés had 100% attendance, but our second 2, on a wet weekend in December, had dropouts of 46%. The lesson is that unless you're sure that everyone will attend it's good to overbook your sessions. Our rule is to overbook by 30 – 50%, so if you wanted 8 people you'd book between 10 and 12 people. But you need to also be prepared if they all turn up!

One advantage of a booked session is that you can interact with people before the session. We've used this opportunity to ask people who express an interest in attending to briefly say in an email 'why they want to attend a Death Café and what they hope to get out of the session'. You could of course ask them something else if you wanted.

There are 2 main reasons for asking people to consider . Firstly it gets people thinking about death and dying before attending the session so they're more likely to be 'warmed up'. Secondly it functions as a screening process that checks out that they are serious about participating. This is particularly important if you're inviting people into your personal space.

If you're not comfortable with someone on email it is entirely appropriate to exclude them in the interest of creating a safe space for the other participants and yourself. We have not had to do this as yet – we think that the subject matter tends to attract people who are ready to engage in this kind of discussion.

#### 4. Setup and preparation

We have worked hard to ensure that the Death Cafés we have held so far have been high quality events. To this end we have carefully considered how the session will run. With our first Death Café we had a very structured approach which worked well. In the interest of trying a different format, we made our second Death Café much less structured, and have tended to let subsequent events be relatively free-flowing too.

In Appendix A below you can find some ‘schedules’ we wrote up for the first 2 Death Cafés. As you will see, these are pretty detailed! They include how we’ll set up the space and run the session, plus some elements we’ve not mentioned before:

- A shift in focus from ‘death’ to ‘life’ during the session. As you will recall, our objective is to *"To increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives"*. As such, we tend to devote  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the session to talking about death and the final  $\frac{1}{4}$  to talking about what this means for the rest of our lives. This has generally worked really well, though Sue Barsky-Reid says that there is “A need to listen to the room and understand when people haven’t finished talking about death yet. In the second Death Café for example people wanted to carry on doing death.”
- A Death Café menu. We have printed out, on nice card, special Death Café menus for each session. This was another way of making the people attending the event feel nurtured, and the event feel special. An example of one of these is at the start of the document. We printed a double-sided menu, and the second page is at the end of the document.
- Evaluation forms. We ask everyone who comes to fill one of these in. If they have to leave quickly we email it to them, but as much as possible we get people to fill it in there and then. These have proved really useful – mainly in giving us confidence that we were doing OK as most of the feedback has been really good! The evaluation form we’re currently using is included in Appendix B below.

So, all of this needs setting up prior to the café – i.e. planning the session and printing out the bits and pieces you need.

You’ll also need to get together the things you need for your café – pens and paper if you’re going to use them, food and drink (we’ve had to tell people that an item on the menu isn’t available before – very embarrassing!), candles, firelighters, whatever you need. If you buy them in good time it’ll save you stress and money.

## 5. Holding the Cafe

The hard work is almost done – now for the fun bit! I say almost but setting up the space (and cleaning up afterwards) is actually pretty hard work too. This is important – Sue Barsky-Reid says that “You generally want the Death Café space to be inviting. Its important that the café is physically comfortable so that the participants feel nurtured and safe.”

Its easy to get caught up in the details and think that everything needs to be perfect but the main thing is for you and the people you’re working with to feel relaxed and enjoy the session.

So all we would say here is remember to enjoy the experience. Remember that you’re doing something important and relax because it will be beautiful.

## 6. Evaluation

We've found it really useful to collect as much feedback from participants as possible with a view to making future Death Cafés as rich as possible. The evaluation form we currently use is included in Appendix B. It's best to get people to fill them out as soon as possible, while the experience is still fresh in their minds (and they're still there!) It's good to bring the various forms together and look for themes. We've got a form for this too if you want one!

## 7. Reflection and Feedback

It's good to spend time afterwards assimilating what you've heard in the Death Café, especially with those who were involved alongside you. But our recommendation is not to dwell too long. Bernard Crettaz, who started the 'Death Café movement' in Switzerland says in his book that afterwards he would return home, drink a glass of wine and think about what he'd heard. After that he'd go to bed and draw a line under it.

We can't all be like that of course, and some of the material that's discussed is extremely strong. It might be good for you to think in advance how you will get support if you find it difficult to process what you've heard. It's probably good to think about where you could refer participants who are troubled by the experience too.

And for affiliates please provide us with feedback from your events. We can discuss this in more detail if you decide to work with us.

### Good Luck

And that's it! We wish you the best of good luck with your work. Please do get in contact if you want to discuss any element of this with us. Initial contact details are: [underwoodjon@gmail.com](mailto:underwoodjon@gmail.com) and (+44) (0) 7958 556 077.

All the best,

Jon and the Death Café team.

# Appendix A - Death Café Schedules

## Schedule from the first Death Cafe

Date: Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2011  
Facilitated by: Sue Barsky-Reid  
Assisted by: Jon Underwood  
Start Time: People told to come at 1.50pm for a 2pm start.  
End Time: Circa 4pm, with evaluation afterwards.

### Part 1: People arrive (1.50 – 2.15pm)

Setting: Living Room and Hallway

- The hallway is clear and there is space to hang coats
- The living room is bright and tidy with a fragranced candle lit
- There is a record playing quietly
- There is a jug of water and some disposable cups

When there is a knock at the door, Sue answers and welcomes people,  
They hang their coats and are welcomed into the living room  
Sue introduces me as her assistant  
I show them to a seat and tell them we'll do proper introductions when everyone is here.

Participants are given a piece of paper, which is a '*Death Café Menu*'.

Sue and I both leave the room after each person arrives though I am on hand if they need anything

This part concludes after the last person has arrived and has had a moment to settle.

### Part 2: Introduction (2.15 or as soon as everyone is here – 2.25pm)

Setting: Living Room

Sue introduces herself and welcomes people to the first Death Cafe  
Sue says where toilets are, what to do in case of fire or emergency, exits, and if they need to leave for air or toilet break then to feel free to go.  
We ask, are they OK for us to take some photos?

Sue asks each person to say their name and what they've been up to today so far

Sue tells people what Death Café is and why we're doing it, which possibly includes the following points:

- The idea for Death Cafes comes from Switzerland, and was developed by a man called Bernard Crettaz who has been doing this for a number of years, with over 400 people participating.

- Its based on the idea that talking about death is important and helpful, but that we don't often make time to do it, hence the death café is a dedicated space for doing this
- We're the first to offer death café's in the UK, and this is the first one
- As such we're interested in getting your views and opinions about what works and what doesn't. There will be time to do this afterwards, or if you prefer we can email you some questions.

Sue gives an overview of what we're going to do:

- We're going to go downstairs to the café to eat sandwiches and cake and talk about death for about an hour
- Specifically we're going to do a couple of exercises to look at our feelings about death, and how this might be holding us back in life. At the end of that there will be a brief ritual aimed at getting rid of some of our unhelpful feelings about death and dying
- The space is confidential so please respect this. Also please be respectful of people's different views, feelings and opinions
- For many people, death is an emotional subject. If you want some quiet 'time out' you can return up here to chill out for a little bit
- Are there any questions, or anything people want to say before beginning?

After questions are answered Sue tells people that so I will be assisting her today. I ask people what they'd like to drink and scurry off and make it.

### Part 3: Cafe (2.25 – 3.25 pm)

Setting: Dining room

- Participants are to sit round the table which we've moved to make room. Sue sits at the head.
- The room is bright and fresh, tidy but not over tidy. It looks and feels like a comfortable domestic space.
- If it is cold we will put the heater on to ensure its comfortable
- The room should have a special atmosphere with lots of candles and flowers.

This is the main part of the event and has a number of sections:

- First exercise, lasting about 40 minutes during which drinks and sandwiches are served
- Second exercise lasting about 10 minutes during which cake is served
- Conclusion, which involves a burning envelopes from each person in the fire

### First Exercise Activities (2.25 – 3.25pm)

People are asked to sit at the table and given a moment to get comfortable and settle

Sue says something like:

- We're going to spend some time now looking at our feelings about death.

- In the next 5 minutes please think about what comes up for you when you think about death. Please write these down on the post-it notes. Write as many as you like, with whatever feelings you like.
- After 5 minutes we're going to discuss some of these. You won't have to share what you've put down if you don't want to.

Jon serves drinks and puts out food or nibbles.

Then Sue gently initiates a discussion of what people have put down.

At the conclusion of the discussion Sue says:

- If there are any feelings you've written down already or want to add on the basis of the discussion that you'd like to let go of, put them in the envelope, which we're going to dispose of
- For the remaining feelings you've written down you can either take them with you or leave them with me

Second Exercise Activities (3.25pm – 3.40pm)

To introduce this, Sue will say something like:

- One of the positive things about thinking about death is that it helps us to focus on what we want to achieve in life
- So, for the next 5 - 10 minutes I'd like you to give a bit of thought to what's really important to you in life – what you'd like to be able to look back from your death bed and be glad you've done
- Then, if there are some obstacles or barriers to you achieving these, write them on a post it and put them in your envelope
- These barriers could be physical, mental, emotional, of any type at all. They are private so you won't be asked to share them unless they want to.
- Any questions?
- So whilst you're doing this we're going to eat cake!

Jon brings over the cake.

When people have finished writing, Sue checks if they want to discuss what they've put down.

Once the discussion has finished people take and seal their envelopes.

Conclusion Activities (3.40 – 3.50pm)

Sue collects the sealed envelopes and hands them to Jon

Jon takes their envelopes and puts them in the fire. They are then burned.

Whilst they are burning Jon puts on some music (we used [Ikue Asazaki - Obokuri-Eumi](#)).

Part 4: End (3.50 pm)

People sit in silence or say something if they want to.

Sue asks if anyone wants to say anything.

Sue says that feedback is welcome and that there is a form which people could fill in now if they want, with a box to put them into anonymously. Alternatively we could email them some questions.

## Schedule 2 – from the second Death Café

### Part 3: Cafe (2.25 – 3.25 pm)

This is the main part of the event. We are going to leave this a lot more fluid this time.

Our predicted overview of the session contains the following parts:

#### 1. Introductions.

People are asked to give their name and asked to say what made them decide to come. There is time for discussion of whatever arises  
*(During this section Jon serves drinks)*

#### 2. Death talk.

Sue makes the point that we're here to talk about death and leaves time for people to talk about what comes up for them  
*(During this section Jon serves sandwiches)*

#### 3. Life talk.

Sue makes the point that one potential benefit of focusing on death is that it makes us use our life as wisely as possible. People are invited to reflect on what really matters to them in their life, which they may have already achieved or are planning to achieve  
*(During this section Jon serves cake)*

#### 4. Overcoming obstacles.

Based on the discussion in 3. Sue will ask people to think about what are the obstacles to achieving people's goals. These can be written down on a piece of paper. Sue can also ask if there are any feelings people want to get rid of. These are also written down.

### Other optional prompts or questions:

- What 3 words that come into your mind when you think about death? These could be written down and then people could read their own or others
- Have you had experience of people close to you dying?
- Does death and dying have any good qualities?
- Are there any specific events that have informed your views of death?



Appendix B

# *Death Café*

## Evaluation Form

- Overall, how would you rate this event? 5 = excellent, 1 = poor:

Comment:

- Would you say that attending this event affected your feelings about death and / or life?

If Yes, please attempt to say how:

- How comfortable did you feel during the Death Café? 5 = very comfortable, 1 = very uncomfortable.

Is there anything you can think of that would have made you feel more comfortable?

- How well did the structure of the discussion at the death café work? 5 = very well  
1 = not very well at all.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Overall, how would rate you the facilitation of the event by Sue? 5 = excellent, 1 = poor

Any suggestions for improvement:

- How would you rate the food and drink? 5 = excellent, 1 = poor

Any suggestions for improvement:

- Please choose 3 words which best describe your experience of death café:
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
- If someone told you they were thinking of attending a death café what would you say to them?

- Do you have any other comments or things you think we should hear?

*Thanks again for attending and giving us your feedback. If you don't want what you've written here to be quoted let us know.*

*Please stay in touch with us via [www.deathcafe.com](http://www.deathcafe.com) or [@deathcafe](https://twitter.com/deathcafe) on Twitter.*



## On Letting Go...

"A contemporary American spiritual teacher, Da Free John, reports in his autobiography 'The Knee of Listening' how he overcame the fear of death by 'dying'.

When his fear of death became overwhelming he discovered the ancient wisdom of giving in (which is quite different from giving up). Here's what happened:

'I was lying home in the afternoon. It was as if all my life had constantly prevented this experience from going to its end. All my life I had been preventing my death.

'I lay on the floor, totally disarmed, unable to make a gesture that could prevent the rising fear. And thus it grew in me, but, for the first time, I allowed it to happen. I could not prevent it. The fear and the death rose and became my overwhelming experience. And I witnessed the crisis of that fear in a moment of conscious, voluntary death. I allowed the death to happen, and I saw it happen.

'When the moment of crisis passed I felt a marvellous relief. The death had occurred, but I had observed it! I remained untouched by it. The body and the mind and the personality had died, but I remained as an essential and unqualified consciousness ... There was just an infinite bliss of being.'

*Excerpted from the Natural Death Handbook  
Produced by the Natural Death Centre*

