



## Navigating End-of-Life with Comfort: The Role of Death Doulas

By Dr. Jen Vogtmann, Occupational Therapist/End of Life Doula

As the demographics of the United States shift, with one in six Americans aged 65 years or older, there's a growing need for **innovative approaches to end-of-life care**. In response to this, the ancient practice of death doula has reemerged as a vital profession, offering indispensable support to individuals and families navigating the final stages of life's journey.

In today's caregiving landscape, many individuals find themselves in the **sandwich generation** – juggling the responsibilities of caring for both children and aging parents. In such scenarios, the need for additional support becomes paramount, allowing caregivers to focus on providing love and companionship rather than feeling overwhelmed by the logistics of end-of-life care.

A notable trend is the increasing preference for **families to care for their loved ones at home, fostering a nurturing environment** where individuals can spend their final days surrounded by familiar faces and cherished memories. For nine out of ten hospice patients, the desire to remain at home during their final moments is profound – a wish that highlights the importance of creating a peaceful and supportive environment.

However, challenges arise within the confines of insurance limitations and the resources of the medical system. While palliative and hospice teams offer invaluable medical care, their time and

resources are limited. It is within this space that death doulas step in, providing continuous, **personalized assistance without insurance limitations** complementing and working with loved ones and other services as part of your caregiving team.

Death doulas transcend traditional caregiving roles; they serve as companions, space holders and advocates, bridging the gap between medical care and emotional support. They **alleviate the fear of dying**, guiding individuals and their families through conversations, decisions and the complexities of grief. With a foundation in compassion and dignity, death doulas offer unwavering support, prioritizing holistic care to meet the **physical, emotional and spiritual needs** of those they serve.

End of life doulas provide comprehensive support, initiating as guides in **holistic death planning**, which includes considerations of eco-friendly and traditional funeral and burial options, as well as decisions regarding your location, personal care and companionship during your final days. They facilitate conversations on advance care planning, aiming to clarify your wishes with loved ones to reduce suffering. People of any age can benefit from the reassurances and guidance offered by doulas, even if the threat of a terminal illness or other health events is not imminent.

Their assistance continues upon diagnosis of a life-limiting illness. They offer **preparation**, engage in honest discussions about what to expect, and provide education for you and your family on the process. If there are unfulfilled dreams, such as traveling to Italy, they can help recreate such experiences locally, like hosting an Italian dinner at the Port Sanilac Museum and Village with close friends. Death doulas also contribute to legacy projects, provide companionship and support both you and your loved ones during this phase.

During the final months, weeks and days, doulas may **advocate and serve as liaisons** between hospitals, hospices and funeral homes

WOULD YOU LIKE TO ENSURE A POSITIVE END OF LIFE EXPERIENCE?

Doulas assist patients and families in navigating the healthcare system, planning ahead, and providing companionship during the final days to enhance quality of life.

Free Consult

810-292-0014  
Jen Vogtmann, Doula  
5402 Main St Unit 2  
Lexington MI 48450

inspired BY JEN

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if desired, allowing loved ones to focus more on being present with you. They offer **vigil services, respite, life reviews, assistance with unfinished business** and may provide **calming techniques**, such as Reiki or meditation if desired. Additionally, they offer grief support and aid your loved ones during this phase.

Each death doula brings a **unique set of skills and experiences** to assist their clients during life's most challenging moments. They all offer compassionate guidance and expertise. They help create peaceful environments and advocate for your wishes. Additionally, they offer caregivers much-needed respite.



In times of profound transition, the presence of a death doula offers reassurance – a compassionate reminder that individuals and their families **do not walk this path alone**. With dignity, grace and understanding, death doulas ensure that every step of the end-of-life journey is met with **comfort and support**. To learn more about doulas or to locate one in your area contact the National End of Life Doula Alliance.

Editorial note: Find out more at [inspiredbyjen.info](http://inspiredbyjen.info) or on Facebook @inspiredbyjen.



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