

DEATH CAFE

Guide to running your own Death Cafe

Introduction

This guide is for those who are looking to host Death Cafés or conversations about death. However, you are welcome to read this whoever you are. We recommend you read the page on [What is Death Cafe](#) before reading this guide.

This is a copy of version 2.1 of our guide. The master version, with links, is kept on our website at <http://deathcafe.com/how>.

It has been written by Jon Underwood with input from a number of others. In particular, thanks goes to [Sue Barsky Reid](#) who developed our core model.

This document is open to discussion, edit and improvement. Please post constructive suggestions or queries on the [Death Cafe practitioners page](#).

Thank you for your interest in Death Cafe!

1. Working with us

1.1 Death Cafe operates a free affiliate scheme. This means people who sign up to our principles are authorised to do certain things, i.e.:

- Use the name Death Cafe for their events.
- Post events to our website.
- Talk to the press and others as an affiliate of Death Cafe.

1.2. Our principles are that Death Cafes are always offered:

- With no intention of leading participants to any conclusion, product or course of action.
- As an open, respectful and confidential space where people can express their views safely.
- On a not for profit basis.
- Alongside refreshing drinks and nourishing food – and cake!

1.3 It's also worth stating here what Death Cafes is not:

- Death Cafe is not a bereavement support or grief counselling setting. Death Cafe doesn't work for people who, for whatever reason, aren't able to discuss death

comfortably and openly. There are many projects better set up for this.

- Death Cafes aren't an opportunity to give people information about death and dying - regardless of how good or important it is. Rather we create time to discuss death without expectations. For this reason having guest speakers and information materials available is actively discouraged
- Death Cafe doesn't work as a method of community engagement, research or consultation. It shouldn't be used for these purposes.

We have established this structure to keep Death Cafe positive. This is also to prevent the use of this concept by those with an interest in leading people to conclusions, products or a specific course of action.

1.4 When you post your Death Cafes on our site you'll be asked to sign up to our 'Working with us' document which contains all our terms and conditions. To see this [click here](#).

2. What do I need to hold a Death Cafe?

2.1 The things needed to hold a Death Cafe are:

- A host and facilitator.
- A venue with refreshments booked for a certain time and date.
- People who want to talk about death.

That's it! The Death Cafe format is flexible, lightweight and straightforward. What makes it special is the discussion about death, there is no need for bells and whistles.

The sections below give more detail the things you'll need to hold a Death Cafe.

3. Hosting a Death Cafe

A Death Cafe host is the person or people who make the Death Cafe happen. Being a Death Cafe host tends to be an enlightening and pleasant way of working with death in the community, and investing in your personal growth.

3.1 The main qualities of a host are enthusiasm for talking about death and dying and high ethical standards. It also helps to have good organisational skills, the ability to build relationships, good networks and patience! Ideally you'll have attended a Death Cafe before organising your own but we recognise this is sometimes not possible.

3.2 The activities of a Death Cafe host are likely to include:

- Recruiting and co-ordinating the other people involved in the Death Cafe.
- Arranging the venue and refreshments for the Death Cafe (see section on Venues, refreshments and timings.)
- Letting people know about the Death Cafe (see section on Publicising your Death Cafe.)

- Ensuring the quality and safety of the event.
- Dealing with RSVPs if you decide to have them.

3.3 The steps involved in hosting a Death Cafe begin with a thorough read of this guide. After that, they roughly consist of:

- Agreeing who will do what.
- Finding the venue and setting the date.
- Letting people know.
- Holding and enjoying your Death Cafe.
- Writeup / debrief and evaluation.

3.4 As a host you're responsible for the safety of your Death Cafes. Death Cafes tend to be very safe and positive events and we have had very little incident in our 200 Death Cafes to date. Having said that, to ensure the safety of your Death Cafe please:

- Check all facilitators meet the criteria in the section below.
- Have a minimum of 2 Death Cafe people at the event, especially if the Death Cafe is in a domestic setting.
- Ensure you know where and how to refer people who need more support.
- Refuse to admit anyone who comes to a Death Cafe intoxicated.
- Ensure people know that Death Cafe is not a bereavement / grief support resource.

3.5 We're now fortunate to have a number of experienced Death Cafe facilitators in our community. If you've questions please post them to the [Death Cafe practitioners page](#). Some hosts are open to mentoring others in their Death Cafe work. Please feel free to get in touch with them via their profile pages.

4. Being a Death Cafe facilitator

Facilitation is essential to Death Cafe. This role can be summarised as making people feel safe to talk about death. Death Cafes tend to be very nice to facilitate - everyone there wants to talk about death and most have a lot to say. Facilitators can be the same person as the host or different but unlike hosts, a facilitator only performs her/his role during the Death Cafe session.

4.1 In general the facilitator's role consists of:

- Welcoming people to the Death Cafe and introducing the session.
- Ensuring, during the discussion, that our guidelines are respected especially regarding tolerance for others' views.
- Bringing people into the discussion if you think they want to say something.
- Moving the discussion on if things get stuck.
- Managing any difficult situations. Fortunately these instances are very rare.
- Closing the session and asking for evaluation.

4.2 We don't insist that facilitators have a formal qualification in, or specific level of experience with, death and dying - we believe that death belongs to everybody.

However, all Death Cafe facilitators should:

- Be able to listen to and discuss all aspects of death and dying with equanimity.
- Have good group facilitation skills.
- Be able to handle any issues or problematic situations at or arising from the Death Cafe.

Along with the skills above, the main qualities of a facilitator are enthusiasm for talking about death and dying, empathy, clear boundaries, flexibility and a friendly manner.

4.3 In the Death Cafe there are no hierarchies. We all meet simply as people who are going to die. As such any facilitators who work around death and dying should be willing to leave their professional identity at the door.

4.4 In general facilitators leave a Death Cafe feeling uplifted, but this doesn't always happen. It is not unusual to feel concerned or even downcast. If you'd like to discuss any aspect of what you've heard please post to the [Death Cafe practitioners page](#) or [contact us](#).

5. Venues, refreshments and timings

Venues

A good venue is important as a pleasant environment helps people relax and talk about death. Death Cafe is very flexible and has been run successfully in a variety of setting including people's homes, cafes and restaurants, community spaces, festivals halls, tents and parks.

5.1 The following questions might help you find the right venue for your Death Cafe:

- Where will you feel most comfortable and relaxed?
- Where will you get free, or if not inexpensive, room rental? Houses and cafes mostly tick this box.
- Where is it easy to obtain refreshments? Cafes are good in respect of this as people can just buy their own refreshments.
- Where is a convenient location within the community?
- What might be an interesting and different venue and so catch people's attention?

5.2 Experience shows that once you decide on a venue and set the time and date, everything tends to fall into place. We would recommend you confirm your date a minimum of 1 month before the Death Cafe to allow time to let people know.

Refreshments

5.3 As you'll have seen, it is one of our principles to have refreshments at a Death Cafe. The linking of death, food and drink comes from Bernard Crettaz's Café Mortels concept. Mr. Crettaz said that 'nothing marks to community of the living like sharing food and drink'.

5.4 Death Cafe likes to talk about cake a lot, and cake is certainly popular. However any sort of food and drink is ok so this can be geared to your community. We have a preference for vegetarian food and it is good to have vegan options. Occasionally alcohol (in moderation) has been drunk at Death Cafes with no observable ill effects.

5.5 There are a range of options for providing food and drink and it is worth making reference your choice when you publicise your Death Cafe. Some options are less expensive and time consuming than others. These include:

- Hosting a potluck where attendees contribute food to share.
- If you're holding your Death Cafe somewhere that sells refreshments, asking people to buy their own. This might persuade venue owners to give you the space.
- Making your own food and drink for the Death Cafe.
- Asking someone else to provide the food and drink, either voluntarily or (if there's no alternative) professionally.

5.6 If you decide to have home prepared food or potluck, please have regard to food preparation and handling guidelines and regulation. These vary greatly from area to area, and from community to community. It is the host's responsibility to ensure that any food and drink provided is safe.

Timings

5.5 People often ask how regularly they should organise a Death Cafe. The answer is that there are no recommended timescales - hosts organise them whenever feels right. A minority of Death Cafes take place monthly but most are on an as-and-when basis. Sometimes people organise a run of 4 or so Death Cafes and then take a break.

5.6 The average time to a Death Cafe is around 2 hours. It is possible to have longer and it is also possible to have a meaningful Death Cafe in an hour. When considering your timings please remember that people often arrive late and take time to settle.

5.7 There is no particular day of the week or time that works particularly well for Death Cafe. In general weekday evenings and weekend afternoons have been most popular. It's worth considering what works well for you and is accessible for those who want to come.

5.8 One final thing to say in relation to Death Cafe timings - don't rush! Taking the time to plan delivers a better event.

6. The Death Cafe session

6.1 **Please note:** The Death Cafe model doesn't include having specific topics, set questions and (in particular) guest speakers. We ask you not to have these at your Death Cafes. Our view is that, when it comes to death, people have enough to discuss already.

To elaborate, giving extra input or setting too much of an agenda risks being presumptuous, restrictive and/or disempowering. As such we favour offering a

group directed session offering participants time to reflect on and share what they think is important. In our experience this yields the best results.

6.2 This refers to the Death Cafe session itself, which is always straightforward and open discussion about death. It is ok to situate your Death Cafe in a wider programme of events and this has happened a number of times at large events focused on death. Death Cafes could also happen in other settings too, such as art shows, film screenings, political debates, training sessions and days of spiritual practice. However the Death Cafe should always be separate from these, and observe our principles. Only the Death Cafe part of such events will be advertised on this website.

6.3 In general Death Cafes are open to, and respectful of, people of all communities and belief systems. However it is fine, and can be very good, to have Death Cafes for specific communities and belief systems. For example we have had a number of Death Cafes specifically for the **LGBT** community. In the same way it is possible to have Death Cafes for other communities / groups e.g. Muslims, young people, older people, homeless people etc. Wherever possible these should be facilitated by people who are from that community.

6.2 There are 2 basic ways to hold a Death Cafe and it's best to decide which you'll use in advance:

- Cafe model. This is when there is facilitator with the group throughout the discussion. In this case, the ideal group size is between 6 and 12 people. Generally 3 would be a minimum group size and 20 a maximum.
- Salon model. This is when the groups are self facilitating. Generally the facilitator/s would give an introduction and then float between groups when needed. This works better for large Death Cafes. In this case the group size would generally be between 4 and 8 people.

6.3 Generally Death Cafes are for adults. However occasionally people have asked to bring children / young adults, or just shown up with them. When they have been admitted the session has been fine for them and their parents, but sometimes other group members have felt inhibited. If you decide to admit young people please ensure you're adequately set up for this to be safe, and ask the consent of other group members.

Like life, a Death Cafe has a start, middle and an end:

Start

6.4 At the start of your Death Cafe it is good to set out some things:

- What Death Cafe is and where it has come from (see [here](#)) and our principles (above).
- Whether you're asking for donations and, if so, what these are for (see Death Cafe and money below).
- Some basic ground rules: listening when people are talking, respect for others'

views and confidentiality.

- What you're going to do in the session.
- Ask if there are any questions before continuing.

6.5 In terms of confidentiality we generally say that we share feedback for publication on the Death Café website, but no information is linked to any particular person. It's also good to ask whether people are comfortable with photos being taken if you plan to do so. If there are any journalists present it is appropriate that they identify themselves to the group. If the Death Cafe is to be filmed or recorded then attendees should be notified before the event.

Middle

6.6 As we've said, a core model is a group-directed discussion without specific topics, questions or speakers. Basically there is no agenda. As such the session tends to run as follows:

- The facilitator asks the group to introduce themselves and say why they've come to Death Cafe. This gives an opportunity for people to say whatever they want to say. Everyone takes a turn apart from people who don't want to speak. People volunteer some amazing things! If the facilitator is with the group, she/he takes a turn to speak too. This part of the Death Cafe can take some time - up to an hour in a group of 10.
- After that the facilitator asks if anything came up for the group whilst people were speaking - thoughts, questions or reflections. This may feel challenging or risky for the facilitator but attendees tend to take over the discussion and the time flies by.
- If, after trying the group-directed approach, you think your attendees would prefer a more structured session then it is ok to introduce a couple of specific questions. It is good to have these in mind anyway in case they would help the discussion. It is good to keep any questions very open. Please don't ask more than 3 - the Death Cafe tends to fly by and it doesn't work to try to do too much. It is always possible to have more Death Cafes!

End

6.7 After the allotted time, or if it feels like you've finished, bring the Death Cafe session to a close. It's good to give people between 5 and 20 minutes notice so they have a chance to share anything they want before the end.

6.7 Please thank everybody for attending and ask them to evaluate the session. In due course people will be able to submit their evaluations on this site. In the meantime we have a form which you can download **here**.

6.8 It's good to stay around after the session has ended to talk to anyone who wants to talk. It's also good to debrief with the other hosts and facilitators sometime after the event.

7. Publicising your Death Cafe

The objective of Death Café is to ‘increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives’. Publicising your Death Cafe is a great way to do this. You'll be talking to people about death whether they're coming to your Death Cafe or not.

7.1 As soon as you're ready, please post your Death Cafe to this site. You can do this [here](#). You can also give updates about your Death Cafe (e.g. 'we're full!') that will appear on the main news pages.

7.2 It's also worth thinking about how you will publicise your Death Café locally. The Death Cafe website reaches a number of people but reaching out yourself is really effective. Ways that you can do this include:

- Reaching out to your personal networks. Let your friends, family and social circles know you're doing this (if you want to).
- Contact the local press and also others working in media whom you know. The media are often interested in Death Cafe and of course they need things to write about - what better than death! The traditional way to do this is send a press release and follow up with a phone call.
- Post on social websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Meetup. To avoid confusion we ask people not to start blogs or twitter accounts with Death Café in the title. It is fine to start Death Café facebook pages for your Death Café but please be willing to let others in your area post their Death Cafes there too.
- Identify communities of interest locally (e.g. students, artists, philosophy groups) and connect with them.

7.3 Some hosts prefer to request RSVPs from potential attendees. This enables them to control numbers and communicate prior to the session. The only disadvantage of requesting RSVPs is the increased admin. RSVPs are only essential if the Death Cafe is in a private location and many hosts prefer to do without. When you post your Death Cafe on the site there is an option to add a booking form to your Death Cafe page. If people fill this in we will send you an email. Your email address is never displayed on this site.

7.4 Some people like to create their own Death Cafe posters to post on line and / or put up locally. This is fun but printing and design can be time consuming and expensive.

7.5 When talking to the media as an affiliate of Death Cafe here we ask you to:

- Wherever possible convey our principles i.e. not for profit, with not intention of leading people... etc.
- Credit Jon Underwood with founding Death Café based on the work of Bernard Crettaz.
- If you're in the United States please add that Lizzy Miles was the first person to offer Death Café in the US.
- Please ask them to give a link to deathcafe.com.

7.6 Once people find out that you're offering a Death Cafe, be prepared for some

interesting conversations. 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!'

8. Death Cafe, money and sponsorship

8.1 We request hosts to help make Death Cafe sustainable by minimising the costs of your event. It really isn't necessary to have very expensive cakes, or order a Death Cafe stamp or pay for a posh room. What makes a Death Cafe special is the conversation about death. However we do recognise that Death Cafes sometimes cost money to organise.

8.2 There are 3 ways to organise your Death Cafe in terms of money:

- Offer it for free. This is the most straightforward way. Please acknowledge those who have contributed to the Death Cafe being free in your publicity.
- Ask for a non-specific donation e.g. by saying something like 'donations welcome' on your publicity. The amount received from donations is variable and rarely very much. People need to be reminded to donate at the start and end of the session.
- Request a specific donation e.g. \$4 per person. If you do this please clearly set out what the donation is going to be used for so people can see that it accords with our not-for-profit ethos. A specific donation is different from a ticket price in that people shouldn't be excluded who aren't able or willing to pay it.

8.3 Death Cafes never have a ticket price or exclude those who can't afford to donate.

Sponsorship

8.4 We also accept contributions towards our Death Cafe. Organisations or people who contribute are called sponsors. Their contributions can take a number of forms such as:

- Money for expenses.
- Donation of a room.
- Provision of drinks and refreshments.
- Access to networks.
- Allowing employees to organise the Death Cafe during work time.

8.5 Our current policy is to acknowledge sponsors in the text about the Death Cafe. We don't include the names of organisations in the title of the Death Cafe. However this is under review as some in our community believe that sponsorship contravenes our principle of not leading people to any conclusion, product and course of action.

8.6 There are some types of organisations we never accept sponsorship from or associate with:

- Large private sector organisations in the death and dying sector.
- Political organisations.

- Campaign groups whose remit includes contentious issues involving death such as right to die, abortion or vivisection.

8.7 We reserve the right to reject sponsorship at our discretion. If the amount of sponsorship is larger than that needed for the Death Cafe or to discuss our policy please [contact us](#).

9. Death Cafe quick start guide

9.1 Here's a rough checklist of what you need to do to organise a Death Cafe:

- Read this guide from cover to cover.
- Decide who is going to do what regarding refreshments, publicity, facilitation etc. and how this will be done.
- Decide on your venue and set the date and time.
- Post the Death Cafe the Death Cafe website.
- Let others know - friends and family, media, networks.
- Enjoy your Death Cafe!
- Evaluate, writeup and debrief.

9.2 If you have any questions about any of this please post them to the [Death Cafe practitioners page](#)

Final remarks

This guide is likely to change as time goes by. Please get in [contact](#) if you'd like to play a role in maintaining it, or have specific suggestions for improvement. In time I would like to establish a wiki for this document.

If you have any questions please post them on the [Death Cafe practitioners page](#).

In the meantime thanks for your interest in holding a Death Cafe and good luck with your events!

Death Cafe is provided by [Impermanence](#)