
How to run a Death Cafe

A guide for celebrants.

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Session aims

- To understand what a Death Cafe is, and what it is not.
- To examine the Death Cafe guidelines and principles, especially relating to hosting and facilitating a Death Cafe session.
- To evaluate why we, as celebrants, would wish to host and facilitate Death Cafes, and understand how we can get the most from the Death Cafe model.
- To inspire you to be a Death Cafe host who inspires others to talk about death in a safe and life-affirming environment.

What is a Death Cafe?

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

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

What is a Death Cafe?

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.

What is a Death Cafe?

Our Death Cafe today was number 7030.

Since 2011 there have been more than 7000 Death Cafes in 58 countries.



What is a Death Cafe?

1.1. Death Cafe is a social franchise.

This means that people who sign up to Death Cafe guidelines and principles can:

- use the name Death Cafe,
- post events to the Death Cafe website,
- talk to the press as an affiliate of Death Cafe.

The Principles of Death Cafe:

1.2. Death Cafes are always offered:

- On a not for profit basis
- In an accessible, respectful and confidential space
- With no intention of leading people to any conclusion, product or course of action
- Alongside refreshing drinks and nourishing food - and cake!

How do I run one?

Follow the Guidelines

- Working with Death Cafe
 - Hosting a Death Cafe
 - Being a Death Cafe Facilitator
 - The Death Cafe Session
 - Issues for Celebrants facilitating Death Cafes.
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- Choosing a venue
 - Refreshments
 - Health & Safety
 - How often to host your Death Cafe
 - Publicising your Death Cafe
 - Money and sponsorship



The Guidelines

In order to run a Death Cafe you must agree to abide by Death Cafe principles as set out in the Death Cafe guidelines and sign up to the 'Working with us' document.

The guidelines are very clear on what Death Cafe is, and what it is not.

The Guidelines

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

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

*So, you should not be inviting people on the grounds that they can talk about their bereavement.

The Guidelines

*Sue Barsky-Reid is an experienced psychotherapist and she developed the core model.

Death Cafe creates a space for people to say whatever they wish to say about the subject of death.

This could be distressing for bereaved people.

Please trust the model.

The Guidelines

1.3. What Death Cafe is not:

Death Cafes aren't an opportunity to give people information about death and dying - regardless of how important it is.

Rather we create time to discuss death without expectations, and without leading people.

For this reason having guest speakers and information materials available is actively discouraged.

The Guidelines

1.3. What Death Cafe is not:

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 prevent the use of this concept by those with an interest in leading people to conclusions, products or a specific course of action.

The Guidelines

7.2. Please do not:

- **Use the name 'Death Cafe' for things that aren't Death Cafes as set out in our guidance.**
- Start websites, blogs or twitter accounts with Death Cafe in the title. It is fine to start Death Cafe facebook pages for your Death Cafe but please be willing to let others in your area post their Death Cafes there too.

The Guidelines

7.5. When you do talk to the press as an affiliate of Death Cafe 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 Cafe based on the work of Bernard Crettaz.
- Please ask them to give a link to deathcafe.com
- Please do not use Death Cafe to promote your business, as this is against Death Cafe guidelines*

The Guidelines

7.2. Please do post to Death Cafe's social media accounts on facebook and please do tweet

@deathcafe

The Guidelines

Promoting your business

8.4 Please understand that Death Cafe is **not** an opportunity for you to promote your own business. You should never decide to offer a Death Cafe for this reason. Promoting a particular business contravenes our principle of not leading people to any conclusion, product and course of action.

The Guidelines

Promoting your business

8.5 It is ok for you to mention your business in your Death Cafe biography. It isn't appropriate for your business to be mentioned at the Death Cafe session. Reports that you're promoting your business via Death Cafe will be investigated.

**If I can't talk about being a
celebrant and what I offer,
what's the point?**

So why would I want to hold a death cafe?

Think of the bigger picture...

- Opening up the conversation around death benefits us all.
- People make plans, they explore their options, they aren't afraid of asking, they become curious.
- When someone does die, their next of kin is less likely to just walk into a local funeral directors thinking that things must be done one way.

So why would I want to hold a death cafe?

Holding a Death Cafe is also good for us individually:

- We learn so much by just listening to people.
- Facilitating a Death Cafe informs our work as celebrants.
- It is healthy for us to talk freely about our thoughts and feelings about death, especially when we spend so much time holding space and listening to the stories of the recently bereaved.

Still want to hold a Death Cafe?

Great!

To hold a Death Cafe you will need to:

list your Death Cafe at deathcafe.com

and sign up to the 'Working with us' document.

This means reading, and signing up to work within, the
[Death Cafe guidelines](#).

Back to the Guidelines

2. 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 or whistles.

The venue

A good venue is a pleasant environment which helps people relax and talk about death.

Death Cafe has been run successfully in many settings - people's homes, cafes and restaurants, community spaces, festivals, tents and parks.

The venue

- Make sure it feels safe
- Make sure it is easy to obtain refreshments
- Make sure it is a convenient location
- Make sure that the conversation can be confidential in that space

The difference between host and facilitator - hosting

3. A host is the person who makes the Death Cafe happen.

Activities of a host include:

- Co-ordinating the other people involved
- Arranging the venue and refreshments
- Letting people know about the Death Cafe
- Ensuring the safety of the event
- Dealing with RSVPs, if you decide to have them

As a host you are responsible for the safety of your Death Cafes. This includes:

- Being sure that your facilitator has the necessary skills to facilitate the Death Cafe in accordance with the guidelines
- Ensuring you know where and how to refer people who need more support
- Refusing to admit anyone who comes to a Death Cafe intoxicated
- Ensuring that people know that Death Cafe is not a bereavement/grief support resource.

The main qualities of a host are enthusiasm for talking about death and dying and high ethical standards. Good organisational skills, abilities to form relationships, and patience all help.

The difference between host and facilitator - facilitating

4. A facilitator makes people feel safe to talk about death. This role is essential.

Activities of a facilitator include:

- Welcoming people and introducing the session
- Ensuring that Death Cafe guidelines are respected
- 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 (these are very rare)
- Closing the session and asking for evaluation

Facilitators do not need experience with, or qualification in, death and dying.

Death belongs to everybody. In a Death Cafe there are no hierarchies. We all meet simply as people who are going to die.

Any facilitators who do work around death and dying should be willing to leave their professional identity at the door.

This is tough for us as celebrants!

Why? **Because we care.**

“A facilitator makes people feel safe to talk about death.”

In our role as a Death Cafe facilitator we are not an expert in the field, we are just another human being who will also die at some point, making it feel safe for others to chat.

Death Cafes are not information sessions, they are group discussions. As facilitators we don't share information, we ask questions and we listen.

But I want people to understand their options and what a celebrant offers.

So, how do we avoid sharing what we know, when it is so important for people to feel empowered about their choices?

We perhaps empower people more by allowing them to explore their thoughts and beliefs in a safe space, with no 'expert' guidance.

Have faith in the model. Try it. It works.

So, what can I say?

Anything that is not about your work as a celebrant!

Talk from the position of humanity, not from being a celebrant.

As a Death Cafe facilitator, please, never begin any sentence with 'As a celebrant...'.

You must leave your professional identity at the door.

We are the keepers of so many people's stories.

At a death cafe we should not share other people's stories, only our own.

i.e. talk about your experience of another person's story only because it had a direct influence on the way you feel about death. Why did it affect you? Tell it through your own lived experience, without the details of their story.

You need to be able to talk about your thoughts and feelings without sharing other people's stories.

Running your Death Cafe

6. Death Cafe is always straightforward and open discussion about death.

There are two basic ways to hold a Death Cafe:

- Cafe model - one facilitated group, min. 3 - max. 20 people
- Salon model - groups of 4-8 people with the facilitator floating between groups

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

The Start

You have got your venue, you have advertised, you have arranged cake (or refreshments of your choice), and people have come.

Say 'hello', tell people your name and introduce Death Cafe...

Please remember you cannot mention your business at the Death Cafe session at all as it contravenes guidelines 8.5

The Start

6.4. As you begin the session it's good to set out some things:

- What Death Cafe is and its history
- Death Cafe principals
- Basic ground rules
- What we are going to do in the Death Cafe session
- Questions

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A Death Cafe is a group directed discussion of death with no agenda, objectives or themes.

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Death Cafe's history

Death Cafe was developed by Jon Underwood and Sue Barsky-Reid in 2010, based on the work of Bernard Crettaz, who had held Café Mortels in Paris, talking about death together with food and drink.

Jon immediately decided to use a similar model to form Death Cafe.

The first Death Cafe was offered at Jon's house in Hackney in September of 2011, facilitated by Sue. Since then there have been over 7000 Death Cafes in 58 countries around the world.



Death Cafe's history

Jon died suddenly on 27 June 2017 from acute undiagnosed leukemia, aged 44.

We are hugely indebted to him, and his work has made a massive impact on many of us.

Death Cafe is maintained and moderated by Sue and by Jon's sister Jools.

The Death Cafe website is maintained on Friday morning so all listings for the week will be moderated then only.

Photograph ©Richard Pohle



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Basic ground rules:

- Listen when others are talking
- Respect others' opinions and views
- Respect confidentiality
- Leave your professional identity at the door*
- Be curious and inclusive*

What we are going to do in the session:

Death Cafe is a group-directed discussion without specific topics, questions or speakers, with no agenda.

Explain how you will run the session (cafe or salon style) and timings for the session.

Will you mix the seating or groups after the first hour?

How will people know when you are going to wrap up the session?

How do they get your attention if they need help?

Ask if anyone has Questions before you continue

The Middle

6.6. Ask the group to introduce themselves and say why they came to this Death Cafe today

This gives an opportunity for people to say whatever they want to say. If you as the facilitator are in the group, then take your turn.

Death Cafe favours group directed discussion offering participants time to reflect on and share what they think is important. This yields the best results.

If the conversation needs facilitation, you can ask if anything came up for the group whilst people were speaking - thoughts, questions or reflections. That will get things going again.

The Middle

6.6. If the group does not just keep chatting away, you can ask some questions to help them along.

Have some questions in mind, in case they would help a discussion.

Keep questions very open, so that you can leave this group and go to another.

Don't ask more than 3 questions of a group in a Death Cafe session. It doesn't work to do too much as a facilitator.

Useful questions for facilitation.

How? What? & Where? Ask open questions

Especially to bring a quiet person into the group, you can ask them 'how do you feel about that'.

Have you thought about...?

Ask an open question and then just listen.

Some of Jon's suggestions:

What is death like?

Why do we fear it?

How do our views of death
inform the way we live?

Allow people to talk and let the group lead the discussion

As celebrants we tend to be good talkers. Others are not always as confident. So feel your way with the group.

Share your thoughts when asked about them or to get a stagnant conversation going again, by way of creating safety. Otherwise let others lead.

Sometimes we can share an example from our own life so that people don't feel odd or freaky for having their own thoughts and feelings.

“A facilitator makes people feel safe to talk about death.”

The End

6.7. After the allotted time, or if it feels like you've finished, bring the Death Cafe session to a close.

Depending on the intensity of the conversations, give people between 5 and 20 minutes notice so they have a chance to share anything they want to before the end.

Thank everyone for attending and offer evaluation forms.

6.8 Stay around and talk to anyone who wants to talk. It's also good to debrief with the other hosts and facilitators.

Wrapping up

Hosting and facilitating Death Cafe is a wonderful, fascinating, life-affirming experience.

We cannot use the Death Cafe model for promotion, sharing information or letting people know about the work that we do. However, Death Cafes build safety and awareness around the subject of death and that benefits us all.

Wrapping up

If you want to promote your business, run an information session in your area to tell people about celebrancy and their funeral options.

If you want to be part of a great movement to open up the discussion around death, run a **Death Cafe**.

Wrapping up

Do not be tempted by specific topics, meditations, readings, set questions or guest speakers. When it comes to death, people have enough to discuss already!

The Death Cafe model is tried and tested, and it works.

Please use Death Cafe according to the guidelines and trust the model.

Wrapping up

The complete guidelines are online at deathcafe.com.

Read them, sign up to follow them, and enjoy hosting and facilitating **Death Cafes**.

You will love them.

**And they might just change the way that
you live your (finite) life!**

Thank you!

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