

[New Research Says We Shouldn't Be So Afraid of Death](#)

by [Kate Ryan](#) July 26, 2017



Image by [Matt Singer/Wikimedia Commons](#).

I got my first writing job in college penning blog posts for a website about death — or rather, “[embracing the end-of-life experience](#).” As a writer for an ambitious startup with the goal of eliminating the death taboo, I had the privilege of talking with countless people about losing loved ones, having near-death experiences, and caring for others on the verge of passing away. Before my first interview with someone who’d lost a parent, I was nervous that I’d become infected with their overwhelming grief or, worse, say the wrong thing and cause them to suffer more. That time and dozens thereafter, I found those who’d been bombarded by death had the easiest time appreciating life.

Most of our anxieties can be whittled down to a fear of death — from manic fixations with hot pilates to obsessively swiping for Tinder dates. But [according to new research](#), it doesn’t have to be that way. For the study, published on June 1 in SAGE Journals, researchers compared the blog posts of terminally ill writers with passages by healthy participants who had the assignment of imagining they had mere months to live. They found those actually facing death used positive language more often than those with imaginary diagnoses.

Kurt Gray, who helped write the study, [told The Guardian](#), “I imagine this is because they know things are getting more serious, and there’s some kind of acceptance and focusing on the positive because they know they don’t have a lot of time left.”

Anyone who’s suffered from a serious illness or watched a loved one wither away will likely find this unsurprising. With an approximate timeline, you have to make the most of what’s left. To be clear, it wasn’t that the terminally ill writers found their impending deaths to be wonderful news; rather, they learned to live in contentment more often than dread.

What’s perhaps more interesting is the idea of finding acceptance in the brief moments immediately preceding death. In 2014, New York EMT Matthew O’Reilly [gave a TED Talk](#) on this topic. As someone whose job involves walking patients through their dying moments — often unexpectedly — he did what anyone would do when asked, “Am I going to die?” As described in the lecture, at first, he lied, telling them they were going to be fine in the hopes of instilling calm in their final moments of life. Through trial and error, he realized telling the truth to be far more soothing for those who had no chance of survival.



Link to YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/laMnRrrQx48>