

and longer in duration to provide the family with additional support as the death nears. The most distressing change for parents to observe is the change in the respiratory pattern. In the final hours of life, the dying patient's respirations may become labored, with deep breaths and long periods of apnea, referred to as *Cheyne-Stokes respirations*. Families should be reassured that this is not distressing to the child and that it is a normal part of the dying process. However, the use of opioids can slow the respirations to make the child breathe more easily, and scopolamine, usually applied as a topical patch, can help reduce noisy respirations known as the "death rattle." Noisy respirations are more likely to occur if the child is overhydrated.

Box 17-9

Physical Signs of Approaching Death

Loss of sensation and movement in the lower extremities, progressing toward the upper body

Sensation of heat, although the body feels cool

Loss of senses:

- Tactile sensation decreasing
- Sensitivity to light
- Hearing the last sense to fail

Confusion, loss of consciousness, slurred speech

Muscle weakness

Loss of bowel and bladder control

Decreased appetite and thirst

Difficulty swallowing