

Serious Illness Conversation Guide

PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE

- SET UP** “I would like to **talk together** about what’s happening with your health and **what matters to you. Would this be ok?**”
- ASSESS** “To make sure I share information that’s helpful to you, can you tell me **your understanding** of what’s happening with your health now?”
- “How much **information about what might be ahead** with your health would be helpful to discuss today?”
- SHARE** “Can I share my understanding of what may be ahead with your health?”
- Uncertain:** “It can be difficult to predict what will happen. **I hope you will feel as well as possible** for a long time, and we will work toward that goal. **It’s also possible that you could get sick quickly**, and I think it is important that **we prepare** for that.”
- OR
- Time:** “I **wish** this was not the case. I am **worried** that time may be as short as *(express a range, e.g. days to weeks, weeks to months, months to a year).*”
- OR
- Function:** “It can be difficult to predict what will happen. **I hope you will feel as well as possible** for a long time, and we will work toward that goal. **It’s also possible that it may get harder to do things** because of your illness, and I think it is important that we prepare for that.”
- Pause: Allow silence. Validate and explore emotions.**
- EXPLORE** “If your health was to get worse, what are your **most important goals?**”
- “What are your biggest **worries?**”
- “What **gives you strength** as you think about the future?”
- “What **activities** bring joy and meaning to your life?”
- “If your illness was to get worse, **how much would you be willing to go through** for the possibility of more time?”
- “How much do the **people closest to you know** about your priorities and wishes for your care?”
- “Having talked about all of this, **what are your hopes** for your health?”
- CLOSE** “I’m hearing you say that ____ **is really important to you** and that you are **hoping for** _____. Keeping that in mind, and what we know about your illness, I **recommend** that we _____. This will help us make sure that your **care reflects what’s important to you. How does this plan seem to you?**”
- “**I will do everything I can** to support you through this and to make sure you get the **best care possible.**”