

Serious Illness Conversation Guide

PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE

ASSESS

“I would like to talk together about what’s happening with your health and what matters to you. Would this be ok?”

“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.”