

Advance Care Planning Communication Guide

Part 2 – Communication Tips



Tips	Examples
Establish Trust	
Encourage Residents and Families to Talk	“Tell me what you understand about your illness.” “Help me get to know you better tell me about your life before you came to this nursing home.” “How are you coping with your illness?”
Recognize Resident and Family Concerns, but Do Not Put Down Other Health Care Providers	“I understand that you didn’t feel heard by other doctors/nurses. I’d like to make sure you have a chance to voice all of your concerns.” “It sounds like Dr. X left you very hopeful for a cure. I’m sure he really cares for you, and it would have been wonderful if things would have gone as well as he/she wished.”
Acknowledge Mistakes	“You are absolutely right. Four days was too long to wait for that [test or procedure].”
Be Humble	“I really appreciate what you have shared with me about the medication we prescribed. It is clear that it is not right for you.”
Demonstrate Respect	“I am so impressed by how involved you have been with your [relative] throughout this illness. I can tell how much you love her/him.”
Do Not Force Decisions	“We’ve just had a very difficult conversation, and you and your family have a lot to think about. Let’s schedule another meeting and see how you feel about things then.”
Attend to Emotions	
Attend to the Emotion	“Is talking about these issues difficult for you?” “Making these decisions is not easy.”
Identify Loss	“I bet it’s hard to imagine life without your [relative] – I can see how close you are to him.”

(cont’d on reverse)

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Attend to Emotions <i>(cont'd)</i>	
Legitimize Feelings	<p>“It’s quite common for someone in your situation to have a hard time making these decisions – it can feel like an enormous responsibility.”</p> <p>“Of course talking about this makes you feel sad - it wouldn’t be normal if it didn’t.”</p>
Explore	<p>“You’ve just told me you feel scared. Can you tell me more about what scares you most?”</p>
Offer Support	<p>“No matter what the road holds ahead, I’m going to be there with you.”</p>
Communicate with Hope	
Hope for the Best, But Prepare for the Worst	<p>“Have you thought about what might happen if things don’t go as you wish? Sometimes having a plan to prepare for the worst makes it easier to focus on what you hope for most.”</p>
Reframe Hope	<p>“I know you hope your illness will improve. Are there other goals you want to focus on?”</p>
Focus on the Positive	<p>“Some treatments are really not going to help and may make you feel worse or uncomfortable. But there are a lot of things we can do to help you – let’s focus on those.”</p> <p>“What sorts of things are left undone for you? Let’s talk about how we might be able to make these happen.”</p>

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Tulsky, JA. Beyond Advance Directives – Importance of Communication Skills at the End of Life. JAMA 2005; 294:359-365.