

N-U-R-S-E-S

A framework for acknowledging and attending to emotion

- Dealing with emotion is often necessary for effectively discussing serious illness decisions.
- When patients express strong emotion, it is helpful to actively listen even if the situation can't be "fixed."

Name — Acknowledges an emotion. (Anger, sadness, frustration) "It sounds like you are frustrated/sad/upset," then pause.

Understand — Acknowledges the emotion or situation. Stop short of "I understand how you feel." For example, "I can't imagine what you are going through," or "This helps me understand what you are thinking."

Respect — Expressions of praise or gratitude about things the patient and family are doing. "I really appreciate and can see you have been working hard to follow the instructions," or "You have been so strong throughout this difficult time."

Support — Expresses support and affirms non-abandonment. "We will do everything we can to support you through this process." or "I will do my best to make sure you have what you need."

Explore — Asking a focused question from a place of curiosity. "Could you say more about what you mean when you say....?"

Silence — Using silence intentionally to show presence.

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WISH-WORRY-WONDER

A framework for empathic communication

I wish...I worry...I wonder statements

KEY IDEAS

- “I wish” allows for aligning with the patient’s hopes.
- “I worry” allows for being truthful while sensitive.
- “I wonder” is a subtle way to make a recommendation.

Align with patient hopes, acknowledge concerns, and then propose a way to move forward:

“I wish we could slow down or stop the growth of your cancer and I promise that I will continue to look for options that could work for you. I worry that you and your family won’t be prepared if things don’t go as we hope. I wonder if we can discuss a different plan today.”

ASK-TELL-ASK

A framework for assessing the understanding of information.

Ask what they know and what they want to know. (Ex. “What is your understanding of...”)

Tell Provide a few short sentences using simple language to fill in the gaps. (Ex. “Here’s what the tests show...”)

Ask them to repeat back what was just explained in their own words. (Ex. “If you were to go home and relay this information to your sister, what would you tell her?”)