



Serious Illness Conversation Guide

Ensure all participants have chairs and that you are in a private location. Introduce the guide and that you will refer to it during your conversation to ensure that you do not forget to ask/explore something.

1. **Set up the conversation**

- Introduce the idea and benefits
- Ask permission

"I'm hoping we can talk about where things are with your illness and where they might be going- **is this okay?**"

2. **Assess illness understanding and information preferences**

"What is your **understanding** now of where you are with your illness?"

"How much information about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?"

3. **Share prognosis**

- **Tailor information to patient preference**
- **Allow silence, explore emotion**

"I'm worried that time may be short."

or

"This may be as strong as you feel."

4. Explore key topics

- Goals
 - Fears and worries
 - Sources of strength
 - Critical Abilities
 - Tradeoffs
 - Family
- “What are the most important **goals** if your health situation worsens?”

or

- “What would you like to do with the time you have left? People? Activities?”
- “What are your biggest **fears and worries** about the future with your health?”
- “What gives you **strength** as you think about the future with your illness?”
- “What **abilities** are so critical to your life that you can’t imagine living without them?”
- “If you become sicker, **how much are you willing to go through** for the possibility of gaining more time?”

- “How much does your **family** know about your priorities and wishes?”

5. Close the conversation

- Summarize what you’ve heard
- Make a recommendation
- Affirm your commitment to the patient

“It sounds like _____ is very important to you.”

“Given your goals and priorities and what we know about your illness, at this stage, I **recommend...**”

“**We will continue to be here for you to support and help you through all of these problems (or ‘this illness’).**”

6. Document your conversation