



COMMUNICATION: SOME WORDS OF WISDOM

LEARN to listen and LEARN to receive in silence: an open, calm silence that makes the other person feels accepted. Be as relaxed as you can, be at ease; sit there with your dying friend or relative *as if you had nothing more important or enjoyable to do*.

Do not interrupt, deny or diminish what the terminally ill or dying persons are saying. They are in the most vulnerable situation of their lives and you will need all your skill and resources of sensitivity, warmth and compassion to enable them to reveal themselves (if they choose).

In all grave life situations these two reminders will go a long way:

- a) a common sense approach
- b) a sense of humour

It is essential not to take anything too personally. As Elizabeth Kubler-Ross says, anger and blame can "be displaced in all directions and projected onto the environment at times almost at random". ***It is not aimed at you. It springs from fear and grief.***

Often we forget that the dying are losing their whole world: their house, their job, their relationships, their body, their mind. They're losing everything. All the losses we could possibly experience in life are joined together in one overwhelming loss when we die. Therefore it is not surprising that the dying need to express or communicate their sadness, panic, anger and fear.

Cicely Saunders once asked a man who knew he was dying what he needed above all else from those who were caring for him. He said his need was "for someone to look as if they are trying to understand me." He did not ask that they succeed, only that they care enough to try.


Do not expect too much from yourself or expect your help to produce miraculous results. Do not expect to "save" or "change" the dying person. This expectation will only set you up for disappointment. People will die as they have lived, as themselves.

For real communication to be established, you must make a determined effort to see the person in terms of his/her life, character, background and history. You must accept the person without reservation. Don't be distressed if your help seems to be having very little effect and the dying person does not respond. We cannot know the deeper effects of our care.

Don't try to be too wise. Don't always try to search for something profound to say. You don't have to do or say anything to make things better. Just be there as fully as you can. Be a presence. And if you are feeling a lot of anxiety and fear and don't know what to do, admit that openly to the dying person and ask his or her help. This honesty will bring you and the dying person closer together, and help in opening up communication. Sometimes the dying know far better than we how they can be helped, and we need to know they can be helped, and we need to know how to draw on their wisdom and let them give us what they know.



“BEING THERE”

1. LISTEN LISTEN LISTEN: This word will be mentioned several times during the training. Continue to LISTEN and stay tuned in.
2. UNHURRIED TIME: It's very important to mentally prepare prior to the visit so as not to seem rushed. Volunteers give the gift of time.
3. P.O.S.I.T.I.V.E.: This is an acronym that spells out ways to be physically present. **P**repare. Be **O**pen and **O**bservant. **S**low down. Inhale. Stay in **T**oday. Be Interested and Invested. Remember **V**olunteer values. **E**xit with assurances of another visit.
4. CALL THE CLIENT BY NAME: Everyone likes to be called by name. Ask them what name they prefer? Mrs. Brown or Mary?
5. ALLOW FOR PRIVACY: This may be hard in a shared or hospital room. Try to position your body to block strangers out of your conversation. Talk slowly and clearly. Close the curtain. Take them outside or go to the T.V. room.
6. BE YOURSELF: We all have our own special gifts. People can sense  when we are not comfortable. Let your visit come from the heart.
7. OBSERVE AND MATCH MOOD AND ENERGY: Get a feel for the situation. If we are observant, we will be able to be with them wherever they are at.
8. BE GUIDED BY THE CLIENT: They set the agenda. Regarding contact, touch, hugs, etc.: Ask permission if you're in any doubt about the propriety, or the client's wishes.
9. FIND SOME COMMON GROUND: Observe the room for objects, pictures drawings from children or grandchildren etc.
10. RECOGNIZE NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION: Heavy emotions may need to be acknowledged before moving on.
11. BE SPECIFIC ABOUT HOW YOU CAN HELP: How much time you have to visit? Set boundaries.
12. RESPOND TO OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK ABOUT DEATH: Let the patient or family member initiate the subject. This is an opportunity for you to help them explore their feelings about death/dying.
13. BE RESPECTFUL: Treat people the way that you would like to be treated.



TIPS

- If you are not sure what is helpful, ask the client. For example: “Where would you like me to sit?” or “What would you like to focus on today?”.
- Consider the environment of the visit. What would you do differently if you were visiting a client:
 - In a private hospital room?
 - In a ward bed?
 - At home?
 - At home with close family members nearby?
 - In an unusual place?
- When you begin, let the client know how much time you have to offer them so that, when the time is running out, the client will not feel that you are simply trying to get rid of them.
- Let the client have as much control of the length and intensity as possible. Let the client set the conversational topic: if you start talking about the weather, the client may assume you are only willing to talk about light and superficial matters. Listening should outweigh talking.
- Know and be clear about your boundaries. Do not engage in behaviour which is uncomfortable for you merely because it is something you think you ‘should’ be doing. The person will pick up on your reluctance or distaste. Instead, inform the client that you are not able to discuss that subject and refer them to someone who can.
- Remember: every situation is different. What works for one person may not work with another. The best thing you have to offer the person is yourself.

I. First Impressions

Remember the old adage:

“You never get a second chance to make a first impression”