



## COMMUNICATION EXERCISE

**NOTE: It is important to remember that hospice volunteers are not “counsellors”. There will be times when a social worker, a chaplain or other professional would be the most appropriate person for the client to talk to. In these cases it would be appropriate to say (after validating their feelings and a few moments of conversation) “Sounds like this is a very important issue for you. I’m feeling that the social worker/chaplain might be better qualified to help. Would it be OK with you if I ask her to come and talk with you?” Sometimes the client will refuse – they may have built up enough of a rapport that they are more comfortable talking to you. Remember your listening skills - you are not there to “fix”- you are there to offer support.**

*Most important, always try to validate feelings and invite the person to share more. The following are some of the many possible responses in these scenarios.*

1. *“The weather is so depressing. It rains all the time.”*

Feelings: *Sadness, loss, discouraged, despairing, boredom, upset, lonely, hopelessness, low, frustrated, depressed.*

Responses:

*“Sounds like you are feeling pretty blue (or grey) today”*

*“Could it be you are feeling a bit like the weather?”*

*“Hard to feel sunny without the sun?”*

2. *It is near Christmas time and a woman says “This is such a hard time of year for me this year.”*

Feelings: *grief, lonely, abandoned, sad, lost, anxiety, stressed, nostalgic. This may be a grieving person. If a palliative client they might also fear being a burden, or scared it will be their last Christmas.*

Responses:

*“What’s happened this year that makes it so difficult?”*

*“Christmas can be a hard time, especially if you have lost someone you love”*

*“Sounds as if you are feeling different this year. Has something happened to change your feelings?”*

3. *“I should have been a better husband/wife. I let him/her down many times.”*

Feelings: *guilt, fear of loss, regret, failure, self-doubt, disappointment, sadness, despair, inadequacy, anxiety, anger, hopelessness, lonely, grief over lost opportunities.*

Responses:

*“Sounds like you have a lot of regrets.”*

*“Sounds like you have been reflecting on your relationship.”*

*“Sounds like you’ve given this a lot of thought – how do you feel you let him/her down?”*

*“What do you wish you had done differently?”*



**4. “That doctor...he never gets in here when he says he will.”**

**Feelings:** fear of abandonment, anger, frustration, insignificance, rejection, lack of control, afraid, resentment, worthless, impatient, anxious, disrespected

**Responses:**

“It must seem like an eternity waiting for doctors sometimes.”

“Pretty frustrating eh?”

“Do you feel like you’re always waiting for something these days?”

**5. “I’m dying. I don’t want to die....”**

**Feelings:** anger, fear, regret, anxiety, defeat, sadness, sorrow, anguish, questioning, helplessness, defiance, self pity, denial, disbelief, concern for loved ones, panic, loss of control.

**Responses:**

Silence and a comforting touch.

“I can’t begin to imagine how you are feeling?”

“Sounds like there are still things you want to do.”

“This must be so hard for you.”

**6.** A 35-year-old woman has been in the Palliative Care unit for 3 weeks and you have conversed with her a little each week. She says, **“I feel dreadful today.”**

**Feelings:** pain, sorrow (suffering), discouraged, helpless, fear, fatigue, foreboding, weary.

**Responses:**

“What’s going on for you today?”

“Sounds like you are feeling discouraged – what’s happening today that makes you feel dreadful?”

**7.** An elderly woman has just found out she has cancer of the stomach and it is too advanced for treatment. She says, **“There must be something that can be done. I’m not ready to go yet.”**

**Feelings:** fear, denial, feeling of incompleteness, shock, feisty, loss of control, frustration, disbelief, wanting hope, cheated, anger, panic, bewilderment

**Responses:**

“It must be so hard to hear that sort of news?”

“Sounds like you still have things you want to do.”

”Sounds like you have had quite a shock.”

**“Must be hard to believe this is really happening to you?”**



8. A young woman has breast cancer, which has metastasized, and she knows she is dying. She says, **“I wonder if my husband will find somebody else soon.”**

**Feelings:** grief, fear of being forgotten, sadness, insecurity, lonely, concerned, jealous, love, betrayal

**Responses:**

“Is that something that you fear?”

“Are you worried that that’s what will happen?”

“Are you thinking he might forget you once you are gone?”

**“Is that a distressing thought or a comforting one?”**

Courtesy Nanaimo Hospice Society