

# Serious Illness Conversation Guide

## CONVERSATION FLOW

### 1. *Set up the conversation*

Introduce the idea and benefits  
Ask permission

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

### 3. *Share prognosis*

Tailor information to patient preference  
Allow silence, explore emotion

### 4. *Explore key topics*

Goals  
Fears and worries  
Sources of strength  
Critical abilities  
Tradeoffs  
Family

### 5. *Close the conversation*

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

### 6. *Document your conversation*

## PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE

SET UP

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

ASSESS

"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?"

SHARE

**Prognosis:** "I'm worried that time may be short."  
or "This may be as strong as you feel."

EXPLORE

"What are your most important **goals** if your health situation worsens?"

"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?"

CLOSE

"**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're in this together.**"