



# Communication Skills Guide

Practical approaches to support expert communication with clarity and empathy

## 1. Relaying Information

### Warning Shot

To signal the brain to pay attention because something important is about to be said.

“Unfortunately, I have **serious news** to share.”

### Reframe

To signal a change in course is needed because treatment is no longer working.

“I am worried that we are in a **different place** now.”

### Headline


To succinctly share serious health information. Pairs **information** with its **meaning**.

“Unfortunately, your scans show **the cancer got bigger**, which is why you have more pain and feel so tired.”

## 3. Responding to Emotion

### NURSE

Phrases that articulate empathy. Use to focus on, and respond to, patient emotion.

- N** **Name**  
State the emotion you observe  
“It sounds like you are upset/worried/angry/relieved to hear this news.”
- U** **Understand**  
Acknowledge their emotion  
“I can’t imagine how difficult it must be to hear me say this.”
- R** **Respect**  
Tell them you see their hard work  
“I admire how much you are doing for your mother.”
- S** **Support**  
Show unconditional support  
“I’ll be here with you every step of the way.”
- E** **Explore**  
Be curious about their experience  
“Tell me more about that.”
- S** **Silence**  
Choose one type of NURSE statement from above and follow it with silence 

### I Wish / I Hope

An alternative to “I’m sorry”. Aligns you to their wishes.

- “**I wish** I had better news.” / “**I hope** to be able to share good news.”
- “**I wish** they had more treatment options.” / “**I hope** more treatment will be available to you.”

### Thank You

An alternative to “I’m sorry”. Emphasizes appreciation rather than guilt, fostering more constructive interactions.

- “**Thank you** for your patience.” instead of “Sorry I’m so late.”
- “**Thank you** for helping me learn.” instead of “Sorry for asking so many questions.”

## 2. Asking Permission

### I Wonder / Would it be ok

A way to gently ask to move a conversation forward or to think about a difficult topic. Gives them control and choice, which can build trust.

- “**I wonder** if we can talk about other ways for us to help you if the treatment does not work as planned?”
- “**Would it be ok** to have a conversation about what your day-to-day living might look like as your illness progresses?”

## 4. Exploring Further

### Tell Me More

An ‘explore statement’ helping you learn more about your patient. Use to clarify hopes/concerns to tailor recommendations.

- “**Tell me more** about what you would do if you got stronger.”
- “**Tell me more** about what you mean by being a burden.”