

Handout 4-1

Communication Exercise

NOTE: It is important to remember that hospice volunteers are not "counselors." There will be times when a social worker, a chaplain, or other professionals 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 significant issue for you. I feel 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 importantly, 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, discouragement, 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, loneliness, 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 three 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."

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, jealousy, 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 comfort? "

Courtesy Nanaimo Hospice Society

Resources: BCHPCA Facilitator's Guide - Module 6: Communication

Courtesy Nanaimo Hospice Society - 6.10 Resources: Bchpca Facilitator's