

Giving news of a death to a loved one: Telephone call checklist for healthcare staff

PREPARE YOURSELF	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Besides news of the death, are there other things you need to tell and/or ask? 2. Clarify whether this news is likely to be expected or not 3. Know the future arrangements you'll need to cover towards the end of the call 4. Know that you are doing this from a place of compassion 5. Know that you are doing this as a member of a team, and that you are doing your best in very difficult circumstances
FIND OUT ABOUT THE PERSON YOU ARE TALKING TO	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce who you are, your role 2. Who are you talking to? 3. Is it safe for them to talk [e.g. are they working or driving]? 4. Tell them the name of the person you're calling about, ask / check their relationship to that person 5. Are they alone, is someone else around to support them?
SIGNPOST WHAT IS COMING	<p>With compassionate preface tell them you have very sad, unhappy, upsetting news - something like 'I am so sorry, I am calling with very sad news'. Avoid calling it 'bad news'</p>
TELL THE NEWS	<p><i>If they ask now whether the person has died:</i> Answer yes, with compassion, then follow with a summary of what happened <i>If they don't ask now whether the patient has died:</i> Start with summary, culminating in the news Don't force yourself to follow this exact wording, but try to follow this general pattern:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'I know you already knew they were very sick with.....' 2. Use the term 'we' as you outline the treatment and care given, then 'In the last few hours/minutes, things got worse' 3. Tell clearly, with compassion first, that the person has died 4. Cover the following: when, how, that they were not in distress/pain (if true), who was with them 5. Use non medical words. Pause to let them take in each part of your message. Express compassion whilst also allowing silence after giving the news
CLOSE THE CONVERSATION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Orient them to now: what will you do now? are there people you need to tell? Who will support you after we finish our call 2. If feasible 'Can we call someone for you?' 3. Future arrangements including death certificate and belongings 4. Compassion again. Remind them of your name. Say goodbye 5. Write the conversation up straight away, the next person to call will need to build on the conversation you have just finished
SELF CARE	<p>Take a break, speak with someone in your organisation delegated to listen. Regular supervision sessions help you debrief & reflect</p>