

COVID-19: Real Talk Training

evidence based advice for difficult conversations

Summary of the key principles

Prepare yourself and the environment as best you can:

- What is the key purpose of this conversation?
- If possible, find a comfortable and private place to have this conversation.
- How will you end the conversation – what advice or referral for support can you offer the person? What professional (doctor, nurse, registrar for death) do you anticipate they will speak to next?
- Support yourself – who can you talk with to debrief?

Start the conversation with ‘signposting’

Show empathy and compassion throughout. Show understanding without claiming you can possibly fully understand. This is a balance

Find out some of what the person you are talking to knows, expects, and feels

At this point and not before, find out if they are with someone, or have someone to talk to afterwards

Bring the person (further) towards an understanding of the situation – how things are, what has happened or is likely to happen

Use clear terms: either die, dying, death OR ‘gentler’ terms that are nevertheless unambiguous

If they cry - acknowledge with soft tone of voice, express sympathy: I’m sorry. If they apologise for crying, reassure them it’s OK, understandable. If you can, avoid giving further information until they’re slightly calmer

Move towards ending the conversation – ‘screening’ understanding and unanswered questions

Offer words of comfort and give information on what happens next

