

# Serious Illness Conversation Guide

Conversation Flow	Patient-tested Language
1. Set up the conversation Introduce the idea and benefits Ask permission	<b>SET UP</b> “I’m hoping we can talk about where things are with your illness and where they might be going – <b>is this okay?</b> ”
2. Assess illness understanding and information preferences.	<b>ASSESS</b> “What is your <b>understanding</b> now of where you are with your illness?” “How much <b>information</b> about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?”
3. Share prognosis Tailor information to patient preference Allow silence, explore emotion	<b>SHARE</b> <b>Prognosis:</b> “I’m worried that time may be short.” or “This may be as strong as you feel.”
4. Explore key topics Goals Fears and worries Sources of strength Critical abilities Tradeoffs Family	<b>EXPLORE</b> “What are your most important <b>goals</b> if your health situation worsens?” “What are your biggest <b>fears and worries</b> about the future with your health?” “What gives you <b>strength</b> as you think about the future with your illness?” “What <b>abilities</b> are so critical to your life that you can’t imagine living without them?”
5. Close the conversation Summarize what you’ve heard Make a recommendation Affirm your commitment to the patient	<b>SHARE</b> “If you become sicker, <b>how much are you willing to go through</b> for the possibility of gaining more time?” “How much does your <b>family</b> know about your priorities”
6. Document your conversation	<b>SHARE</b> “ <b>It sounds like</b> _____ is very important to you.” “Given your goals and priorities and what we know about your illness at this stage, <b>I recommend...</b> ” “ <b>We’re in this together.</b> ”

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## 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



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## 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?"

**SHARE** "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.**"