

Some Ice Breakers: Having Difficult Conversations

Setting the stage: get the facts; choose a private environment; allow adequate time; avoid interruptions and demonstrate full attention; sit at eye level with the person; have tissues available.

When having conversations with an individual about advance care planning, it is important to:

- ✓ Develop trust
- ✓ Listen closely
- ✓ Leverage the moment
- ✓ Involve the individual's family when possible

When assisting an individual with completing an Advance Directive, it is also important to:

- ✓ Ensure that any documents completed are person-centered and person-driven
- ✓ Be certain that the individual comprehends the nature and consequences of their choices
- ✓ Be certain the individual understands the designated health care agent's role in decision-making

There is no "right" way to start. Nor is there a "right" time. Nor does the discussion necessarily have to be somber and mournful. Here are some suggestions for getting started.

Start with a story of someone else's experience:

- We all know of someone who was seriously ill or at the end of life and had a terrible experience that made us think: I never want to go through that. That's why it's good to talk about this now, while we can ahead of the crisis so people can know your wishes when something happens to you.

OR use something in the news that lends itself to considering the importance of advance care planning.

Some phrases to consider:

- Talking about the future can be a little scary. If you're not sure, maybe you could tell me how you see the pros and cons of discussing this.

- (If health is fragile or deteriorating) From what I know of you, talking about this information might affect some decisions you are thinking about.

- If it is too overwhelming for you right now, I do understand. Are there any questions I could help you with today? When you are more comfortable thinking about this, let's make an appointment to sit down together and talk about the importance of advance care planning. All right?

- What represents a good quality of life to you? Who should make your health care decisions if you can't speak for yourself?

- If you were seriously ill, incapacitated or at the end of your life, how would you want to spend that part of your life. What would you like to have in terms of care you prefer? Where would you be? Some people want everything possible done to delay death. Others want the focus to be on goals of care and quality of life. What are your thoughts about this stage of life? Where do you draw the line?

Source: A compilation of suggestions and phrases adapted from: ACP Communication Guide, InterAct; "Quality Assurance & Performance (QAPI) Toolkit for POLST in Skilled Nursing Facilities", CCCC Pilot Test Draft October, 2015; Vital Talk: "Discussing Prognosis – Adapt"; ABA Commission on Law and Aging "Conversation Scripts"; and *Finding Your Way* booklet, CCCC.