



GOC Discussions – Suggested Language for Challenging Questions

Illness Understanding/ Prognosis: “I am healthy. Now you’re saying I need chemo and surgery. What will this do to my body?”

- **(Observation)** I can see how shocked you are considering how healthy you feel.
- **(Normalization)** Many people with cancer feel overwhelmed by these decisions.
- **(Validation)** It makes sense that you are feeling worried.
- **(Explore Emotions)** Help me understand what side effects from treatment worry you.
- **(Elicit Meaning)** What functions and abilities are essential for you to have a good quality of life?

Illness Understanding/ Prognosis: “I am a fighter, and I am going to be fine.”

- **(Validation)** This fighting spirit will help you in the times ahead.
- **(Hope)** I hope we can stop or slow down the growth of your cancer.
- **(Worry)** However, I worry about how quickly it is growing.
- **(Wonder)** I wonder if there are other things you could fight for if you can’t beat the cancer.

Illness Understanding/ Prognosis: “What will my quality of life be?”

- **(Hope)** I am hopeful we can help you get some of your strength back.
- **(Worry)** However, I am worried you may not get much stronger than you are now.
- **(Elicit Meaning)** Tell me about some things you might still enjoy doing even if you do not get stronger than you are now.

Mismatched Expectations/ Intense Emotions: “What happens next? Am I going to die from this?”

- **(Wish)** I wish I could tell you that we could stop this cancer and you have many years left to live.
- **(Worry)** However, I worry you may only have weeks or months left to live.
- **(Observation)** I can see you did not expect to get so sick so quickly.
- **(Wonder)** Knowing you don’t have as much time as we hoped, can we talk about your goals for the next few weeks.

Mismatched Expectations/ Intense Emotion: “I don’t want to die! There must be another option”

- **(Validation)** This must be very scary for you.
- **(Explore Emotion)** Help me understand what you’re most afraid of.
- **(Reassurance/Support)** Even though we don’t have more options, you will always be cared for.
- **(Wonder)** I wonder if we can talk about what this means for you. What is most important to you given how things have changed?

Mismatched Expectations/ Intense Emotion: “I was promised a surgery. That’s why I did chemo!”

- **(Validation)** I’m sorry as this must feel like we let you down. This must be so hard for you.
- **(Wish)** I wish things were different. I wish your cancer had responded to the chemo.
- **(Hope)** Even though we can’t do surgery or more chemotherapy, we can do other things to help you feel better.

Mismatched Expectations / Intense Emotion: “This can’t be happening. I need to be at home for my kids.”

- **(Reassurance/Support)** We will do everything we can to help you live in a way that honours your wishes.
- **(Prepare)** I also want to be honest. It may be better for you to be in hospital because unexpected things can happen.
- **(Wonder)** Can we talk a bit more about this? I know this is a hard conversation, but it’s important we have a back-up plan in case we need it.

Reluctance to Stop Treatment: “If you just gave me the treatment, everything would be fine”

- **(Elicit Meaning)** Tell me what you hope treatment will do for you.
- **(Wish)** I wish I could tell you that more treatment would help you.
- **(Prepare)** We are in a different place now and treatment will not help you like it did before.
- **(Normalization)** For many people stopping treatment can feel like giving up. Many people feel better and live longer than expected after stopping treatment. This is because they don’t suffer the side effects and complications from treatment.
- **(Reassurance/Support)** There are other things we can do to help you feel better.

Avoidance/Resistance: “Are you giving up on me?”

- **(Reassurance/Support)** No matter what decisions we make, we are never giving up. We may choose to focus on different things that are important for your best quality of life.
- **(Elicit Meaning)** Can you tell me what in your life is most important to you?

Avoidance/Resistance: “Things seem to be going so well. Why do we have to talk about the future?”

- **(Validation)** I’m happy you are feeling so well.
- **(Hope)** I hope things stay this way for a while.
- **(Prepare)** I do worry that as your cancer grows, you may not feel as well as you do now.
- **(Reassurance/Support)** It’s a good idea for us to plan together so that we are prepared in case things don’t go as well as we hope.

Avoidance/Resistance: “I know I will beat my cancer. What’s the point in talking about Plan B?”

- **(Hope)** We talked about plan A today, and I hope it works as well as expected.
- **(Prepare)** However, not all cancers respond to these treatments.
- **(Reassurance/Support)** Even if Plan A does not work as we hope it will, we will look for other options that can help you. That is why I want us to talk about Plan B.

Avoidance/Resistance: “Why do we have to be negative? Can’t we focus on the positive?”

- **(Validation)** You’re right, it is important to focus on the good things in life.
- **(Prepare)** I want to be prepared to help you in the best possible way I can when you are not feeling well.
- **(Wonder)** I wonder if we can talk about what’s important to you, so we are prepared for when you are not feeling well.

Avoidance/Resistance: “I don’t really want to talk about it.”

- **(Observation)** I can see this is difficult for you.
- **(Explore Emotion)** Help me understand why you don’t want to talk about it.
- **(Validation)** It must be stressful to think about your illness/what lies ahead/test results.
- **(Reassurance/Support)** I’d like to talk about this with you so we can plan how best to help you.

Avoidance/Resistance: “It was awful to see my mom in pain from treatments. I don’t want that.”

- **(Validation)** Thank you for sharing that with me. It must have been very difficult for you.
- **(Explore Emotion)** Help me understand what your concerns are.
- **(Normalization)** When most people hear of a serious illness, they often think about what their loved ones went through, but this is your journey.
- **(Reassurance/Support)** I’d like to talk about this with you so we can plan how best to care for you.

Protection: “I can’t tell my family how I sick I am.”

- **(Explore Emotions)** Tell me what worries you most about telling your family.
- **(Validation)** I appreciate how important it is for you to be strong for them.
- **(Support)** I know this is difficult to talk about, because you care so deeply for your family. However, it may be a good time for us to talk with them.

Protection: “Don’t tell my mother how sick she is. She couldn’t handle it.”

- **(Explore Emotions)** Help me understand why you think your mother couldn’t handle this.
- **(Validation)** I respect your concerns.
- **(Inform)** At the same time, I have a professional responsibility to share information with her if she wants me to. I will ask her how much she wants to know and take her lead.
- **(Reframe)** It would be great if you could join us for this discussion. This will allow us to better understand what your mother wants to know.

Family Involvement: “My family will decide how to proceed”

- **(Explore)** What if your family wants your care to look different from what you might want? How can we include them in these conversations to make sure your care is based on what is important to you?

Family Grief: “I know she is going to get better.”

- **(Explore Emotions)** Help me understand what getting better means for your mom.
- **(Validation)** It must be difficult to imagine that she may not survive.
- **(Reframe)** It would help us to know more about your mom as we care for her.
- **(Elicit Meaning)** Can you tell me what about her life is most important to her?

Honoring individual perspectives, religion, culture, and spirituality

- **(Observation)** I can see your faith/beliefs is very important to you.
- **(Elicit Meaning)** What role does your faith/ beliefs have in how you make decisions about your care?
- **(Reassurance)** I will do everything I can to honour what is important to you as I care for you.