

Living Well with a Serious Illness:

Four steps for talking with family and friends

This guide can help you talk with your loved ones about the future of your illness and about how you are coping now to live as well as possible. It is based on what you have already talked about with your clinician.

Talking about your illness with family and friends may not be easy, but it will help them understand what is important to you. It will also help them support you now and in the future.

Before you talk to your loved ones, think about when and where you want to talk. Choose a time and place when you feel relaxed. Be sure you have time to talk for a while. You can use the words in this guide or use your own words — whatever is easier for you.

Step 1: Start the conversation

I am doing OK right now, and even though there is no rush, my clinicians think we need to begin talking about my future care.

They believe in being prepared and want to know my goals and wishes for medical care.

Since you are important to me, I'd also like you to be part of the conversation.

If at some point I can't speak for myself, I want you to be able to make decisions for me.

Step 2: Check in with your loved one

UNDERSTANDING

What is your understanding now of where I am with my illness?

INFORMATION

I know that it may not be easy, but I would like to share information about my illness with you. Is that okay?

My clinician and I talked about the outlook for my illness — can I share that with you?

Step 3: Talk about what matters most

HOPES

I hope that in the days ahead that I will continue to... EXAMPLE: feel well for a long time, or that I can get stronger.

WORRIES

I am worried that in the days ahead I...EXAMPLE: may get weaker, or that time may be shorter than we hope.

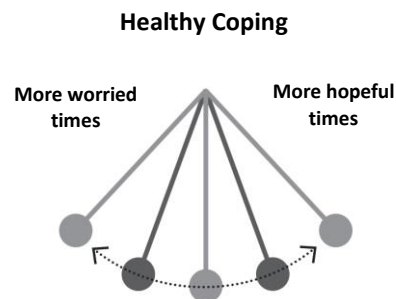
WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT

I'd like to share what is most important to me if my health were to worsen...EXAMPLE: spend time with family, maintain independence, be comfortable, live as long as possible, fight the illness, die a natural death, not be a burden, be mentally aware, etc.

Step 4: Talk about how you are coping

Most people with serious illness swing back and forth between times when they are more worried and times when they are more hopeful. Being worried and hopeful is a healthy, natural part of coping.

Talking about your coping helps loved ones know how to best support you. You can use the list below to identify some of your coping strategies.



Everyone is different and there are lots of healthy ways to cope.

Coping Strategy	Example
Distraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engaging in hobbies, puzzles, games, work
Problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brainstorming solutions and create a plan• Making plans for family financial security
Seek social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calling upon friends and family who can support you
Mind-body strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practicing relaxation techniques• Maintaining good sleep and exercise when possible• Pacing activities and conserve energy
Positive psychology strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hoping for good things• Helping others laugh• Expressing thankfulness• Continuing the activities I enjoy
Religious or spiritual strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Praying• Helping others/accepting help• Joining a community for a common purpose
Reflect on life experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Considering my life in a bigger context• Reconciling relationships
Reframe in a helpful way	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thinking about good things that have come from the illness• Considering friendships that have deepened

For online tools to help you make medical decisions, please visit:
www.prepareforyourcare.org | www.joincake.com