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1) Ground yourself first

I will slow down now. I am aware and clear on what I must tell the family

Grounding immediately connects you with the present moment and enables you to meet the needs of a stressful situation by slowing down and focusing.

- Stop and take ten conscious breaths before you enter the room.
- Review the patient's chart – be prepared.
- Consult with other staff.
- Release any tension through stretching or taking a walk.

2) Cultivate presence of mind

Even if I feel helpless I can still be present to support the family

- In acute care, dying and death are part of our daily work, but for a family, the death of someone is a life changing event and possibly the most significant event of their life. In order to provide compassionate care, you need to be fully present (both physically and mentally) as you speak with the family.
- Let other staff know what you are doing and that you should not to be disturbed unless necessary.
- Become aware of your thoughts and emotions. Are you feeling fear or concern that you need to talk through with someone first? Are you feeling rushed/preoccupied by tasks you could assign or delegate to others? What does this event bring up emotionally for you, if anything?
- Remind yourself this is a life changing event for this family.

3) Create an emotional space for grief

This is not about me but about the griever. I will not judge how they respond to the news

Creating space for grief is more than finding a private place to speak with the family. Be prepared for various grief reactions - crying, wailing, keening, stoicism, shock, fainting, accusing/blaming, anger, frenzy, fragmentation, disbelief. People do not know how they will react to hearing that their loved one is going to die, or has died, until it happens. As a health care provider you are creating an appropriate physical space for this news, but also an emotional/mental space where you are able to support reactions in a professional, compassionate, and non-judgemental way.

- Remind yourself that witnessing someone's grief is a privilege.
- Prepare yourself for the family to grieve and respond to their needs by offering them your presence and support.



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4) Activate your deep listening skills

I will hear what they need. Listening will make a difference

Deep listening is about listening on a deeper level which means we remove the need to judge or fix the situation.

- Remind yourself not to interrupt, even during silences.
- The challenge is to sit with suffering and not try to take the pain away.
- Be engaged in an open minded way.
- Focus completely on the family.

5) What TO say

"I am so sorry this has happened and I am here to support you..."

This is a time to honour and acknowledge the family's feelings. Remember to keep responses supportive and brief. For example:

- *"I don't know what to say but I am here for you..."*
- *"This must be difficult..."*
- *"You have been through a lot...."*
- *"Take your time..."*

6) What NOT to say

"I know how you feel..."

When people are upset, it can seem natural to say something to lessen the stress of the situation. However, such statements can have the opposite effect when someone has lost a loved one. Remind yourself that your role is to provide presence and support. Avoid making assumptions/platitudes like the following...

- *"I know how you feel..."*
- *"It was likely for the best..."*
- *"It's God's will..."*
- *"It was his/her time to go..."*
- *"I had another patient/family with the same circumstances..."*
- *"When my ____ died, I"*
- *"You need to be strong for the family..."*
- *"Crying will make it worse..."*
- *"You will soon be over it..."*
- *"He/She is in a better place now..."*
- *"He/She lived a good life..."*



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7) What to do - responding to grief

My role is to validate the griever's feelings and experience

You might hear someone say *"I shouldn't be so emotional; my father was 96 years old. He lived a good life."* A validating statement would be *"He was your father, you have lost someone very significant in your life"* or *"Grieving for your father is very natural. I can see you loved him very much."*

- Give the permission for griever to take his/her time. Then be present and open to listening.
- Let people know it's OK to cry and know it is OK if you get a bit teary yourself.
- Don't Interrupt. Keep comments brief.
- If they wish to be alone, remember to tell them where they can find you or someone else when they need them.
- Expect possible denial *"this can't be happening"*
- Recognize that every person will react differently in their grief (sadness, laughter)

Source: Modified from the Grief Support Centre's
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