

## Discussion of Unwelcome News during Covid-19 Pandemic: a framework for health and social care professionals

### **The Real Talk Framework: an overview**

#### **PREPARE YOURSELF**

1. Clarify in your own mind the purpose of the conversation you are about to have:
  - What do you need to find out from the other person?
  - What new understanding do you need the other person to reach?
2. Know that you are doing this from a place of compassion
  - Remember the skills you already have
  - Remember that bad news is not your fault
  - Remember that your feelings are important and valid

#### **FIND OUT ABOUT THE PERSON YOU ARE TALKING TO**

3. First, find out who you are talking to and (if it's a phone call) where they are. Is it safe for them to talk?
  - Make sure they are not driving; not cooking/supervising bathing children/etc.
4. Tell them the name of the person you are talking/calling about, and ask their relationship to that person (check you are speaking to the right family).
5. Find out what the person you are talking to already knows and/or expects, and how they feel about that.
  - Listen for what they understand; for worries and concerns; for gaps in their understanding. Notice the words they use: check you understand what they mean if they use medical words, they may be repeating something they were told but didn't fully understand.
  - Use silence to encourage them to talk to you.
  - If they stray off the subject, interrupt to bring them back. 'You were telling me about X's heart problems/chest trouble/etc'
6. Summarise what the person has told you.
  - 'You've told me you know that you have/X has problems with heart trouble/ breathlessness/ being forgetful...'
7. Because you are asking the person about their situation, if it's a phone call it would work to ask here if they have someone with them (whereas if you ask this at the very beginning, this could be heard very early as bad news) – many self-isolating people may, however, be alone.

#### **BRING THE PERSON TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SITUATION**

8. Describe some of the things that are wrong with the unwell person, in such a way that you are forecasting that a discussion of bad news is going to come
  - 'You told me you already know you have/ X has problems with ..... (try to use their words). Over the last few hours/today things have become more difficult because...'
  - Summarise the new developments, checking for understanding.
  - Ask whether they have any questions. Many people will ask 'So are you telling me that things are getting worse?' or similar.
9. Prepare them to hear bad news by expressing your compassion
  - I am so sorry.../ I wish this weren't the case but.../ I'm sorry to have bad news for you
  - If they interrupt to ask questions, let them do so but don't deflect the conversation from the news to be discussed.
  - 'We can talk about that question later, but first I have to tell you what's happening here at the moment...'

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10. Tell them **clearly** what you know and/or expect to happen.
  - Keep the message simple and clear: use non-medical words. Pause to let them take in each part of your message.
  - 'X's lungs are getting worse. It looks unlikely that s/he will survive...' 'I'm talking to you now because we think X is likely to die.' 'We are concerned that he is getting worse and we may not be able to save his life.'
  - Communicate that somebody is so sick that death is a possibility, or is very likely, or is imminent
  - 'In normal times, we would use a ventilator for X, but at the moment we can't offer that. They are all in use. I am so sorry.'
  - 'Since someone last updated you, X has become very much less well...' 'I am so sorry to tell you that X died a few minutes ago...'
11. Wait and allow silence after giving the information.

### CLOSURE

12. If possible, try to deliver something that is something of comfort if you can say it truthfully
  - 'Although your family couldn't be here, your Mum was talking about you while she was awake and she slipped into a coma before she died.'
  - 'Your brother is breathless but calm, and he understands what is happening. I'll keep you up to date if anything changes.'
  - 'I'm so sorry you can't be with X, but we will arrange a video call for you later today.'
13. Express compassion again
  - I am very sorry... We all send our condolences... I am sorry to leave you with that awful news...
14. Discuss future arrangements
  - Who will call them, what happens next, advice on who they can call for support, encourage them to seek help
  - This will vary according to conversation
  - When informing of a death, death cert info will need to be included at the end of the call, and how to contact the department that deals with death certificates, return of property etc
15. Goodbyes
  - Help to orientate the person to their next steps. What are they going to do now? Do they have anyone to talk to? Are there people they need to inform? Who will help them to do this?
  - Remind them of your name, and say goodbye
  - Stand up and leave the room, or hang up the phone
16. After the conversation
  - Write the conversation up straight away. The next person to call will need to build on the conversation you have just finished.
  - If the conversation causes you distress, there should be time for you to take a break afterwards; someone in your organisation designated to listen if you wish to talk; regular supervision sessions for you to debrief and reflect.

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**Telephone Call checklist – Unwelcome News**

Framework	Remember:
<b>PREPARE YOURSELF</b>	<p>Clarify in your own mind the purpose of the conversation you are about to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you need to find out from the other person?</li> <li>• What new understanding do you need the other person to reach?</li> </ul> <p>Know that you are doing this from a place of compassion.</p>
<b>FIND OUT ABOUT THE PERSON YOU ARE TALKING TO</b>	<p>Find out who you are talking to and (if it's a phone call) where they are. Is it safe for them to talk?</p> <p>Tell them the name of the person you are talking/ calling about, and ask their relationship to that person (check you are speaking to the right family).</p> <p>Find out what the person you are talking to already knows and/or expects, and how they feel about that.</p> <p>Summarise what the person has told you.</p> <p>Are they alone? Is someone else around to support them? (This will probably suggest bad news is coming)</p>
<b>BRING THE PERSON TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SITUATION</b>	<p>Describe some of the things that are wrong with the unwell person, in such a way that you are forecasting that a discussion of bad news is going to come.</p> <p>Summarise the new developments, checking for understanding. Ask whether they have any questions.</p> <p>Prepare them to hear bad news by expressing your compassion.</p> <p>Tell them clearly what you know and/or expect to happen Keep the message simple and clear: use non-medical words.</p> <p>Pause to let them take in each part of your message.</p> <p>Wait and allow silence after giving the information.</p>
<b>CLOSURE</b>	<p>If possible, try to deliver something that is something of comfort if you can say it truthfully.</p> <p>Express compassion again.</p> <p>Discuss future arrangements. FU phone call? Messages to pass to patient? Death Certificate &amp; belongings.</p>

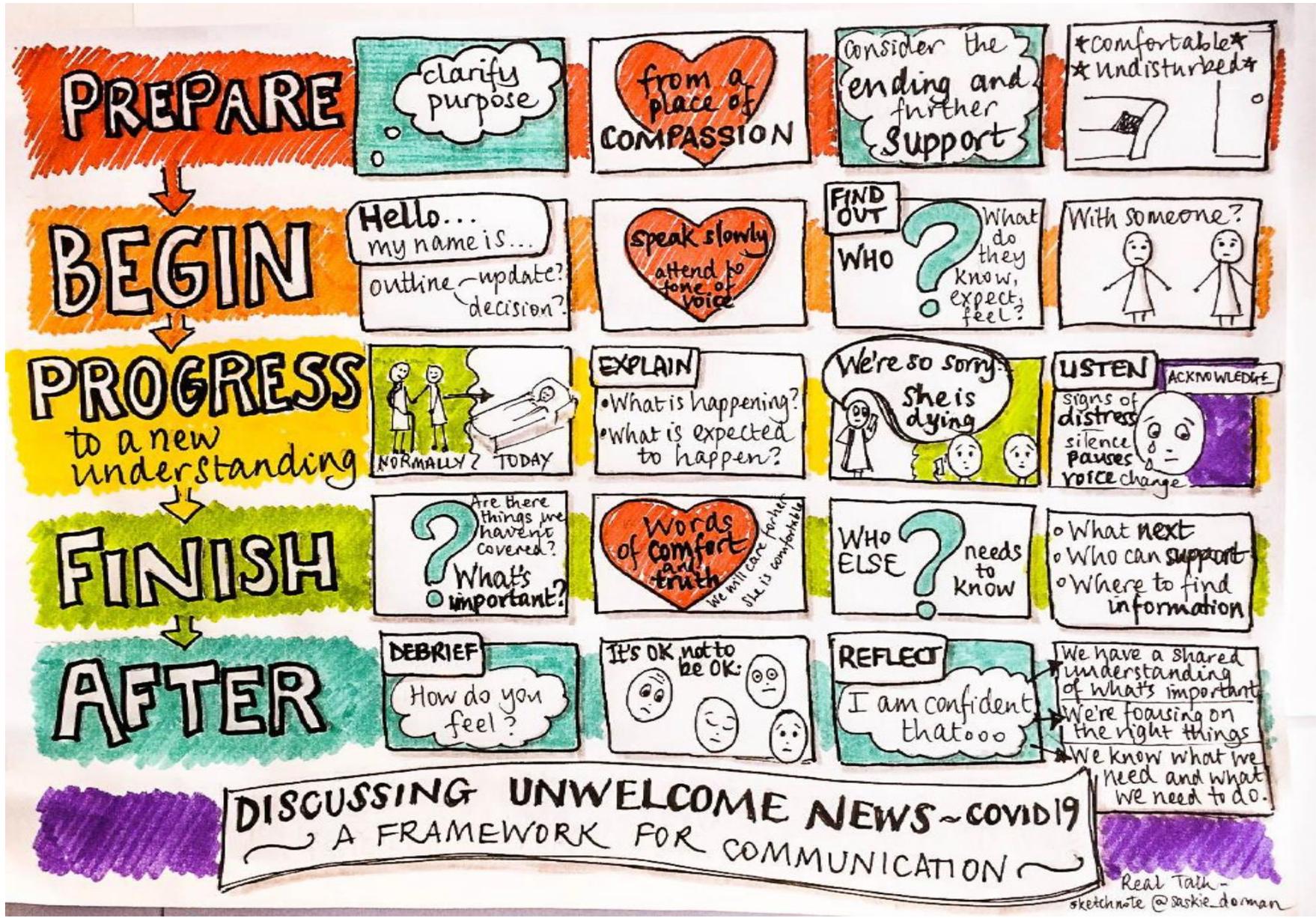
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	<p>Goodbyes.</p> <p>Help to orientate the person to their next steps. What are they going to do now? Do they have anyone to talk to? Are there people they need to inform? Who will help them to do this?</p> <p>Remind them of your name, and say goodbye.</p> <p>Write the conversation up straight away. The next person to call will need to build on the conversation you have just finished.</p>
<b>SELF CARE</b>	<p>If the conversation causes you distress, there should be time for you to take a break afterwards; someone in your organisation designated to listen if you wish to talk; regular supervision sessions for you to debrief and reflect.</p>

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