



MODULE 3: CHALLENGING CONSULTATIONS

SOS le Wini Summary Talks

3



National Healthcare
Communication
Programme

Module 3

Contents

This document brings together the Module 3 talks from the SOS le Wini reflections. It is intended as a quick reference for staff, showing the Module 3 themes covered across the talks and supporting use in teaching, discussion, and follow-up reflection.

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WEEK 26: SUMMARY

Responding to Strong Emotions: Staying Present When Feelings Rise

LEARN

Responding to strong emotions is a central part of compassionate healthcare communication. When someone is angry, frightened, tearful, shocked, or overwhelmed, the first helpful response is often not to explain, fix, or reassure too quickly, but to notice what is happening and stay present. Strong emotion is usually a signal that something important is happening for the person. They may need to feel heard before they can listen, decide, or move forward. We can support this by noticing the emotion beneath the words, naming it gently, validating that it makes sense, allowing pauses and silence, and then moving carefully toward the next step without losing sight of the person.

DO

In one interaction today, practise staying present when emotion rises. Notice any signs that someone may be upset — a change in tone, a pause, tears, frustration, or words that seem smaller than the feeling underneath them. Before moving into explanation or planning, take one slow breath. Acknowledge the emotion gently and give it a little space. If the person cries or goes quiet, stay present and give the moment space. When the time feels right, check whether they are ready to move on and introduce the next step clearly and kindly.

SAY

- “I can see this is really difficult.”
- “It sounds like this has been a lot to carry.”
- “I can hear how upsetting this is for you.”
- “That sounds frightening.”
- “Take your time.”
- “I’m here with you.”
- “Would it be okay if I explain what happens next?”
- “Before we move on, is there anything else you want to ask or say?”

REFLECT

At the end of the day, think of one interaction where strong emotion was present. What did you notice beneath the words? Did you pause before trying to explain, or move the conversation forward? How did it feel to name or validate the emotion? If there were tears or silence, were you able to give the moment enough space? Did acknowledging the emotion help the person feel more able to continue? What small act of presence helped the conversation feel more human, calm, or connected?

Listen on Spotify
(10 mins approx.)



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WEEK 27: SUMMARY

Delivering Bad News: Being Clear, Gentle, and Human

LEARN

Delivering difficult news is not only about giving information. It is about how we prepare, begin, speak, pause, and stay present. Taking a moment to create privacy, reduce interruptions, check the facts, and settle ourselves, can help us enter the conversation with steadiness and care. Before sharing difficult news, it helps to ask what the person already understands or expects. This lets us meet them where they are. A gentle signpost can then prepare them for what is coming, before we pause and give the news in plain, clear language. After the news is given, the pause matters. The person may cry, become quiet, ask questions, or need time. Our first response is often to stay present, acknowledge emotion, and only then move toward summary, support, and next steps.

DO

In one conversation today, practise one part of delivering difficult news with more intention. Before the conversation, pause for a few seconds. Check the facts, notice your breathing, and decide how you want to enter the room: calm, clear, and present.

If you are sharing difficult information, begin by asking what the person already understands. Use a gentle signpost, pause briefly, and then speak in plain, clear language. After the news, allow space for the person's reaction before moving into explanation or next steps. Before ending, summarise the main points and name the next steps clearly.

SAY

- "What have you been told so far?"
- "What's your understanding of what's happening?"
- "I'm afraid the news is not what we were hoping for."
- "I have something difficult to talk through with you."
- "The scan shows that the treatment hasn't worked as we had hoped."
- "I'm so sorry."
- "I can see this is a lot to take in."
- "Take your time."
- "For now, let's make sure you know what will happen next."
- "The next step is that we'll arrange the follow-up and make sure you know who to contact."
- "We'll take this one step at a time."

REFLECT

At the end of the day, think of one difficult conversation, or one conversation where sensitive information was shared. How did you prepare before entering the conversation? Did you check what the person already understood before giving more information? Did you use a gentle signpost before saying something difficult? Was your language clear, plain, and kind? After the news was shared, did you allow enough space for the person's reaction? Were you able to pause before explaining, reassuring, or moving into next steps? Did the person leave with a clear sense of what would happen next and who they could contact?

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WEEK 28: SUMMARY

Open Disclosure: Clarity, Compassion, and Repair

LEARN

Open disclosure is about openness, respect, responsibility, and repair. When something has gone wrong in care, people need clear information, acknowledgement, apology, an opportunity to respond, and an understanding of what will happen next.

Preparation is important. Gather the facts, clarify what is still being reviewed, agree who should be involved, and plan how to introduce the conversation. Use plain language, explain what is known and what remains uncertain, and outline next steps. A sincere apology acknowledges the impact of what has happened. If distress, anger, or mistrust arise, listen, acknowledge the emotion, and remain calm. Repair continues through follow-up, consistency, and ongoing communication.

DO

When something difficult, unexpected, or concerning needs to be explained:

- Gather the facts and clarify what is still uncertain.
- Decide who should be involved and ensure an appropriate setting.
- Prepare the person with a brief signpost that difficult information is coming.
- Use plain language and separate facts from uncertainty.
- Offer a sincere apology when harm, distress, or concern has occurred.
- Acknowledge emotion before providing more information.
- Make clear what will happen next, who will follow up, and when.

SAY

- "I'd like to talk with you about something that happened during your care."
- "I'm afraid I have some difficult information to share."
- "What we know so far is..."
- "I want to be clear about what we know and what we are still checking."
- "I'm very sorry this has happened."
- "I can see how upsetting this is."
- "I want to hear what this has been like for you."
- "Here is what we'll do next."
- "We'll follow this up and keep you updated."

REFLECT

After a conversation involving open disclosure, consider:

- Did I prepare by gathering the facts and clarifying any uncertainty?
- Did I communicate clearly and compassionately?
- Did I avoid blame, speculation, and jargon?
- Did I acknowledge the impact and emotion involved?
- Did I remain calm and listen when distress arose?
- Did the person leave with a clear understanding of next steps and follow-up?

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WEEK 29: SUMMARY

Staying Steady: After Difficult Emotional Work

LEARN

Communication is emotional work. Difficult conversations can stay with us long after they end. Feeling frustration, guilt, helplessness, or regret shows that the conversation mattered and that the work carries emotional weight.

Noticing and naming these feelings can help us learn from them and prevent them from building up over time. Self-compassion is an important part of sustainable care. By reflecting, seeking support when needed, and being kind to ourselves, we can return to future conversations with greater steadiness and care.

DO

After a difficult conversation:

Notice

- Pause before moving on.
- Ask: What has this conversation left behind for me?

Name

- Identify what you are feeling.
- Recognise that these feelings often arise because you care.

Be kind

- Respond to yourself with compassion.
- Replace self-criticism with a balanced perspective.

Seek support

- Talk with a colleague, supervisor, or debrief if needed.
- Remember: difficult conversations do not have to be carried alone.

Learn and return

- Identify one learning point.
- Let go of what you cannot change.

SAY

- "That was a hard conversation."
- "I'm noticing feelings of frustration, sadness, or guilt."
- "I did my best in a difficult situation."
- "I can learn from this while still being kind to myself."
- "Could I talk that through with you?"
- "I'll carry the learning forward with steadiness and care".

REFLECT

- What stayed with me after the conversation?
- Was I able to name my feelings honestly?
- Was I able to meet myself with kindness afterwards?
- Do I need support from a colleague or supervisor?
- What is one thing I can take forward into future conversations?

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(10 mins approx.)



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