



Delivering bad news. Coping with the news...

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Communication

Social workers in health care are often faced with delivering bad news to patients and families. Bad news could be a new onset diagnosis, a change in disease progression, an inability to return to home, or any news that alters one's perception or plans for the future.

This presentation will share communication skills, techniques, and approaches to working with patients and families during difficult life changing events. The social work values, ethics, and boundaries relative to the importance of communication will be discussed.

The objectives for this lecture are to:

- 1) Provide examples of communication skills to develop rapport with patients and families.
- 2) Offer techniques to foster communication that is empathetic, honest, and understandable when delivering bad news.
- 3) Review social work values, ethics, and boundaries relative to effective and empathetic communication.
- 4) Discuss how to respond to a variety of emotional reactions and questions.
- 5) Group discussion of communication experiences, techniques, and suggestions.

Social Work Profession Description..



Social work is the profession of offering disappointing news to already vulnerable people who have minimal access to resources.

If the major was described this way who is still signing up?

Primary Mission of Social Work



The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.

A defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society.

The Family is Here...



What is bad news?

“Bad news is any information which adversely alters one’s expectations for the future.”



(medical oncology communication skills training learning module #7, 2002)



Research Study

“Social worker assessment of bad news delivery by emergency medicine residents: a novel direct-observation milestone assessment.”

published in Intern Emergency Medicine, February 2016.

The study found the following conclusions:

- 1) The skill of delivering bad news is difficult to teach and evaluate.
- 2) Simulated practice does not always correlate to real experiences.
- 3) ER residents valued the advice from social workers in delivering bad news.
- 4) Social workers should have more direct involvement in delivery of bad news and teaching this skill.

Examples of news

- ~ You don't qualify for help.
- ~ There is a waiting list.
- ~ Insurance will not cover that.
- ~ That is not acute criteria.
- ~ You are not safe at home alone.
- ~ You will be discharged. You are not ready for discharge.
- ~ There is no shelter bed. All the shelters are full.
- ~ I will need to report this to CPS
- ~ It is time to consider hospice.
- ~ That is not a covered benefit.
- ~ The future is now.
- ~ You will have to go back... to the group home, nursing home, facility.
- ~ There are no resources for that.
- ~ She is dying.
- ~ There is nothing more we can do.
- ~ There is nothing we can offer to save him.
- ~ There is no quick fix for this.
- ~ You would be responsible to pay for that.
- ~ You will need to self-advocate.

- ~ This is reportable.
- ~ Your insurance benefit ran out.
- ~ I am mandated to report this to APS.
- ~ She needs a guardian.
- ~ We need to activate his HCPOA.
- ~ We cannot make her/him do that.
- ~ Hospitals do not provide this service.
- ~ Home care does not provide that.
- ~ There are no beds available for detox, mental health treatment.
- ~ That nursing home is full. That facility is not in-network.
- ~ Your family member is at the hospital.
- ~ There's been a car crash. He has been shot.
- ~ It appears he harmed himself. We are concerned she overdosed.
- ~ He is not awake. We don't know what this means for him.
- ~ You are responsible for your own ride home.
- ~ We cannot promise that this will be covered.
- ~ There is a long wait for outpatient follow up.
- ~ As sick as he is, this still would not qualify for disability.
- ~ There is no temporary disability.

Other examples of support and guidance 😊

- We will get you resources.
- I can connect you to a doctor.
- Here is how you can access care.
- I can help you get home.
- I am sorry you are here and this is happening.
- I am here to guide you.
- Remember the nursing home is temporary.
- You can touch him. You can talk to him. We always believe people can hear.
- This is difficult.
- Let me tell you how this happens.
- We will make referrals for you and let you know where you are accepted.
- Lets get on the phone to the woman's shelter.
- Good news, the shelter is accepting you.
- Its confusing, so let me help you understand.
- We can arrange detox if interested.
- Insurance is confusing, let me explain how it works.
- I will call your case manager and advocate this need.
- Let's call your case manager together.
- A mother's love never ends.
- What if we call your sister together.
- You are taking the first step which is not easy.
- We will look for a mental health facility for you.
- The facility has accepted you.
- We will arrange transportation.
- Yes, mental illness is tiring for those who care. She is lucky to have you. Thank you for being here.
- Tell me about your son. Tell me about your husband.
- Lets fill out a HCPOA to assure your wife makes your decisions if needed.
- The purpose of hospice is comfort.
- There are warming rooms on nights this cold; lets get you to one.
- We can help you apply for health insurance.
- I am glad you came for help.

Effective Communication

The ability to communicate is central to effective social work practice.

Involves **verbal** and **non-verbal** communication

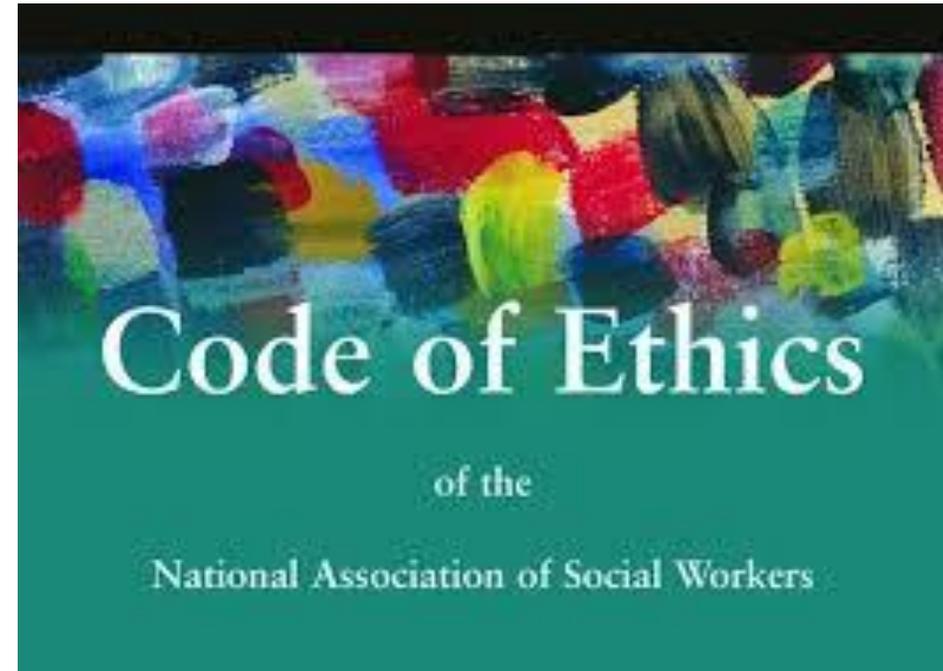
It allows one to obtain information and convey information.

Inability to communicate effectively can have harmful effects on the client and influence facility goals such as length of stay and readmission rate.



Social Work Ethics & Values

- 1.01 Commitment to the client
- 1.02 Self-determination
- 1.04 Competence
- 1.05 Cultural Awareness and Social Diversity
- 1.10 Physical Contact
- 1.06 Conflicts of Interest
- 1.07 Privacy and Confidentiality
- 1.14 Clients who lack decision making capacity
- 2.03 Interdisciplinary Collaboration
- 2.08 Impairment of Colleagues
- 2.09 Incompetence of Colleagues
- 2.10 Unethical Conduct of Colleagues
- 5.01 Integrity
- 6.01 Social Welfare
- 6.04 Social and Political Action



1.01 Commitment to Clients

Social workers' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients. In general, clients' interests are primary.

However, social workers' responsibility to the larger society or specific legal obligations may on limited occasions supersede the loyalty owed clients, and clients should be so advised. (Examples include when a social worker is required by law to report that a client has abused a child or has threatened to harm self or others).

1.02 Self-Determination

Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals. Social workers may limit clients' right to self-determination when, in the social workers' professional judgment, clients' actions or potential actions pose a serious, foreseeable, and imminent risk to themselves or others.

1.04 Competence

- (a) Social workers should provide services and represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license, certification, consultation received, supervised experience, or other relevant professional experience.*
- (b) Social workers should provide services in substantive areas or use intervention techniques or approaches that are new to them only after engaging in appropriate study, training, consultation, and supervision from people who are competent in those interventions or techniques.*
- (c) When generally recognized standards do not exist with respect to an emerging area of practice, social workers should exercise careful judgment and take responsible steps (including appropriate education, research, training, consultation, and supervision) to ensure the competence of their work and to protect clients from harm.*

1.05 Cultural Awareness and Social Diversity

- (a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures.*
- (b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups.*
- (c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability.*
- (d) Social workers who provide electronic social work services should be aware of cultural and socioeconomic differences among clients and how they may use electronic technology. Social workers should assess cultural, environmental, economic, mental or physical ability, linguistic, and other issues that may affect the delivery or use of these services.*

1.10 Physical Contact

Social workers should not engage in physical contact with clients when there is a possibility of psychological harm to the client as a result of the contact (such as cradling or caressing clients). Social workers who engage in appropriate physical contact with clients are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern such physical contact.

1.06 Conflicts of Interest & 1.07 Privacy and Confidentiality

1.06 Conflicts of Interest

(d) When social workers provide services to two or more people who have a relationship with each other (for example, couples, family members), social workers should clarify with all parties which individuals will be considered clients and the nature of social workers' professional obligations to the various individuals who are receiving services. Social workers who anticipate a conflict of interest among the individuals receiving services or who anticipate having to perform in potentially conflicting roles (for example, when a social worker is asked to testify in a child custody dispute or divorce proceedings involving clients) should clarify their role with the parties involved and take appropriate action to minimize any conflict of interest.

1.07 Privacy and Confidentiality

(f) When social workers provide counseling services to families, couples, or groups, social workers should seek agreement among the parties involved concerning each individual's right to confidentiality and obligation to preserve the confidentiality of information shared by others. This agreement should include consideration of whether confidential information may be exchanged in person or electronically, among clients or with others outside of formal counseling sessions. Social workers should inform participants in family, couples, or group counseling that social workers cannot guarantee that all participants will honor such agreements.

(g) Social workers should inform clients involved in family, couples, marital, or group counseling of the social worker's, employer's, and agency's policy concerning the social worker's disclosure of confidential information among the parties involved in the counseling.

1.06 Conflicts of Interest

(a) Social workers should be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment. Social workers should inform clients when a real or potential conflict of interest arises and take reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes the clients' interests primary and protects clients' interests to the greatest extent possible. In some cases, protecting clients' interests may require termination of the professional relationship with proper referral of the client.

(b) Social workers should not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.

(c) Social workers should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, social workers should take steps to protect clients and are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. (Dual or multiple relationships occur when social workers relate to clients in more than one relationship, whether professional, social, or business. Dual or multiple relationships can occur simultaneously or consecutively.)

1.06 Conflicts of Interest

(e) Social workers should avoid communication with clients using technology (such as social networking sites, online chat, e-mail, text messages, telephone, and video) for personal or non-work-related purposes.

(f) Social workers should be aware that posting personal information on professional Web sites or other media might cause boundary confusion, inappropriate dual relationships, or harm to clients.

(g) Social workers should be aware that personal affiliations may increase the likelihood that clients may discover the social worker's presence on Web sites, social media, and other forms of technology. Social workers should be aware that involvement in electronic communication with groups based on race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, mental or physical ability, religion, immigration status, and other personal affiliations may affect their ability to work effectively with particular clients.

(h) Social workers should avoid accepting requests from or engaging in personal relationships with clients on social networking sites or other electronic media to prevent boundary confusion, inappropriate dual relationships, or harm to clients

1.07 Privacy and confidentiality also addresses unnecessary social media searches: *(a) Social workers should avoid searching or gathering client information electronically unless there are compelling professional reasons, and when appropriate, with the client's informed consent.*

1.07 Privacy and Confidentiality

- (a) Social workers should respect clients' right to privacy. Social workers should not solicit private information from or about clients except for compelling professional reasons. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply.*
- (b) Social workers may disclose confidential information when appropriate with valid consent from a client or a person legally authorized to consent on behalf of a client.*
- (c) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service, except for compelling professional reasons. The general expectation that social workers will keep information confidential does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or others. In all instances, social workers should disclose the least amount of confidential information necessary to achieve the desired purpose; only information that is directly relevant to the purpose for which the disclosure is made should be revealed.*
- (d) Social workers should inform clients, to the extent possible, about the disclosure of confidential information and the potential consequences, when feasible before the disclosure is made. This applies whether social workers disclose confidential information on the basis of a legal requirement or client consent.*
- (e) Social workers should discuss with clients and other interested parties the nature of confidentiality and limitations of clients' right to confidentiality. Social workers should review with clients circumstances where confidential information may be requested and where disclosure of confidential information may be legally required. This discussion should occur as soon as possible in the social worker-client relationship and as needed throughout the course of the relationship.*

1.14 Clients Who Lack Decision-Making Capacity

When social workers act on behalf of clients who lack the capacity to make informed decisions, social workers should take reasonable steps to safeguard the interests and rights of those clients.

2.03 Interdisciplinary Collaboration

- (a) Social workers who are members of an interdisciplinary team should participate in and contribute to decisions that affect the well-being of clients by drawing on the perspectives, values, and experiences of the social work profession. Professional and ethical obligations of the interdisciplinary team as a whole and of its individual members should be clearly established.*
- (b) Social workers for whom a team decision raises ethical concerns should attempt to resolve the disagreement through appropriate channels. If the disagreement cannot be resolved, social workers should pursue other avenues to address their concerns consistent with client well-being.*

2.08 Impairment of Colleagues

(a) Social workers who have direct knowledge of a social work colleague's impairment that is due to personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties and that interferes with practice effectiveness should consult with that colleague when feasible and assist the colleague in taking remedial action.

(b) Social workers who believe that a social work colleague's impairment interferes with practice effectiveness and that the colleague has not taken adequate steps to address the impairment should take action through appropriate channels established by employers, agencies, NASW, licensing and regulatory bodies, and other professional organizations.

4.05 Impairment addresses a social worker's responsibility to recognize their own impairment and take steps to help themselves, we will cover this more in Self Care today.

2.09 Incompetence of Colleagues

(a) Social workers who have direct knowledge of a social work colleague's incompetence should consult with that colleague when feasible and assist the colleague in taking remedial action.

(b) Social workers who believe that a social work colleague is incompetent and has not taken adequate steps to address the incompetence should take action through appropriate channels established by employers, agencies, NASW, licensing and regulatory bodies, and other professional organizations.

2.10 Unethical Conduct of Colleagues

- (a) Social workers should take adequate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues, including unethical conduct using technology.*
- (b) Social workers should be knowledgeable about established policies and procedures for handling concerns about colleagues' unethical behavior. Social workers should be familiar with national, state, and local procedures for handling ethics complaints. These include policies and procedures created by NASW, licensing and regulatory bodies, employers, agencies, and other professional organizations.*
- (c) Social workers who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should seek resolution by discussing their concerns with the colleague when feasible and when such discussion is likely to be productive.*
- (d) When necessary, social workers who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should take action through appropriate formal channels (such as contacting a state licensing board or regulatory body, the NASW National Ethics Committee, or other professional ethics committees).*
- (e) Social workers should defend and assist colleagues who are unjustly charged with unethical conduct.*

5.01 Integrity of the Profession

(a) Social workers should work toward the maintenance and promotion of high standards of practice.

(b) Social workers should uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge, and mission of the profession. Social workers should protect, enhance, and improve the integrity of the profession through appropriate study and research, active discussion, and responsible criticism of the profession.

(c) Social workers should contribute time and professional expertise to activities that promote respect for the value, integrity, and competence of the social work profession. These activities may include teaching, research, consultation, service, legislative testimony, presentations in the community, and participation in their professional organizations.

(d) Social workers should contribute to the knowledge base of social work and share with colleagues their knowledge related to practice, research, and ethics. Social workers should seek to contribute to the profession's literature and to share their knowledge at professional meetings and conferences.

(e) Social workers should act to prevent the unauthorized and unqualified practice of social work.

6.01 Social Welfare

Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and their environments. Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.

6.04 Social and Political Action

- (a) Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice.*
- (b) Social workers should act to expand choice and opportunity for all people, with special regard for vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited people and groups.*
- (c) Social workers should promote conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity within the United States and globally. Social workers should promote policies and practices that demonstrate respect for difference, support the expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, advocate for programs and institutions that demonstrate cultural competence, and promote policies that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people.*
- (d) Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability.*

Developing Rapport

Golden Rule

Treat others the way
YOU want to be treated.



Platinum Rule

Treat others the way
THEY want you to treat
them.



Give Warning Shot

Utilize forewarning words to allow the family to brace themselves.

Words like...

“I am sorry..”

“Unfortunately..”

“I’m afraid I have bad news..”

“I’m afraid it looks rather serious..”

“I am concerned because...”

“It is time to....” “I came to talk with you about...”



Give update with general language

Avoid starting with the good news... can be misleading.

Avoid medical jargon.

So important to use words the family or patient understands.

Yes the word “femur” is medical jargon 😊



Give support, silence, answer ?s

Allow silence after news is given.

Use supportive statements to validate.

- “this is difficult” “this is sad” “I am very sorry”
“I am sorry you are here and this is happening.”
“we are here to help you at this time” “tell me what you are thinking”
“what questions do you have?”



Answering questions.

- **Offer realistic hope not false hope.** “I always hope for a miracle (or for the best), but right now my job is to attend to the present, John is very sick and his cancer has spread.”
- **Offer realistic time frames and promises.** If they ask for a promise “promise me he will be ok, promise me you will save him..” Possible response: “I wish I could tell you that, but he is very sick right now. The future is uncertain.” or “we just don’t know what this means for him yet.”
- **Ok to say “I do not know...”**
- **Don’t retract.**
- **Remember families do not always actually hear you... you may need to repeat updates.**



Shared Learning ideas 😊

Share in small group or with colleague...

- The type of news you commonly deliver daily.
- Share the news or updates that you find more difficult to deliver.
Why is it more difficult? Share your thoughts or feelings.
- Please share any tips on scripting or how you deliver news.