

Talking to relatives

A guide to compassionate phone communication during COVID-19

Introduce yourself

SPEAK SLOWLY

I'm calling to give you an update on your brother, Frank.

OPEN WITH A QUESTION

Are you OK to talk right now?

ESTABLISH WHAT THEY KNOW

Can you tell me what you know about his condition?

Share info in small chunks



PAUSES
SIMPLE LANGUAGE



EUPHEMISMS
JARGON

Helpful concepts

Honesty with uncertainty

There are treatments that might help Frank get better, such as giving him oxygen to help with his breathing. But if his heart stopped, we wouldn't try to restart it, as this wouldn't work.

Hope for the best, plan for the worst

We hope Frank improves with these treatments, but we're worried he may not recover.

Sick enough to die

Frank is very sick and his body is getting tired. Unfortunately he's now so unwell that he could die in the next hours to days.

I'm sorry to tell you this over the phone, but sadly Frank died a few minutes ago.

Comfort and reassure

Is there anything you can tell me about Frank to help us look after him? What matters to him?

We've been looking after him and making sure he's comfortable.

Allow silence

LISTEN

EMPATHIZE

ACKNOWLEDGE

I am so sorry. Please take your time.

It must be very hard to take this in, especially over the phone.

I can hear how upset you are. This is an awful situation.

Ending the call

DON'T RUSH

NEXT STEPS

Before I say goodbye, do you have any other questions about Frank?

Do you need any further information or support?

Afterwards

Chat with a colleague.
These conversations are hard.
#weareallhuman

