

Breaking Bad News: Delivery Techniques that Help Students Make Good Alternative Choices

Webinar Handout

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Pre-Webcast Activity Suggestions

Ask participants to keep in mind the population(s) of students to whom they have to deliver bad news. Ask them to write these populations down and put them somewhere where they can refer to them during the webinar. They will be asked to think about these populations at certain points during the webinar.

Post-Webcast Activity Suggestions

The following vignettes can be used for small group (or large group) discussion. Ask participants to read through the vignettes and answer the questions as they were addressed during the vignettes in the webinar.

The Happily Unrealistic

Shana knows she is going to be a doctor. Her grades in Biology and Chemistry are not great – in fact, you know she will have trouble finding any medical school that will consider her as a candidate. You've tried nicely letting her down. You've tried showing her typical medical school entry requirements. You've told her point-blank that she will not be able to get into medical school. She's acknowledged what you've said – but then immediately follows this with, "But I am going to be a doctor." She no longer meets the qualifications for progression in the PreMed program but remains in good standing for the institution. She does not want to change her major and just smiles when you tell her that she has to make a change.

Keeping DECAF in mind - how do you proceed to get her to understand the situation?

D – Decide – what can you decide prior to your meeting with Shana?

E – Emotional Development – Where is Shana in her emotional development? How can you help her emotional development growth during your meeting?

C – Connections – What connections could Shana see jeopardized by this news?

A – Alternate Paths – What are her alternate path possibilities? How can you help her to understand them?

F – Follow Up – What are three concrete follow-ups that you can provide for Shana? What do you need to do to ensure that she follows through?

Going to Law school...or is he?

Carlos is a 1st year undeclared (exploratory) student. He has expressed a strong interest in going to law school (mentioning frequently his parents' desire for him to attend law school); however, he is still very much unsure as to what will be his major. His degree audit shows that his first semester he took Art, Philosophy, College Algebra, Latin American History, and Sociology. His GPA for the semester was 2.28, but this was only because he received an A in Art. His second semester he took Art II, Art History, Music Appreciation, and Introduction to Acting, and this time his semester GPA was 3.78. Carlos comes to your office for summer school advising, and says he plans to take Introduction to Logic, Political Science, Advanced Drawing, and Photography.

- How can you supportively confront Carlos? What are the discrepancies in what Carlos says he wants and how he is behaving?
- What kinds of questions could tap into the meaning of why Carlos is in college and what he is hoping to accomplish?
- Where do you think Carlos may lie on Perry's continuum? Is he ready for alternatives? If not, then what should be focused on?

Suggested Questions for Post-Webinar Discussion

- What is communication? How do the three codes of meaning change the way you view your interchanges with students?
- Which of the three codes do you think is most important? Why?
- What combination of the three codes do you think facilitates meaning making when you can't have all three?
- What is the purpose of using questions that tap into students' meaning?
- Why is it important to understand a student's intellectual development? How does that influence your ability to help the student see the changes that need to be made?
- How could you use supportive confrontation in your daily advising activities? Give specific examples.
- What challenges do you think you'll encounter as you try to use these delivery techniques?
- What do you see is the role of self-monitoring in your own interactions with students? Do you see yourself as being high or low and why? How has it changed over time?

Communication Theory- Additional Information

In addition to the three codes of meaning, communication theory also discusses the idea of the transactional model. That is, communication itself is a back-and-forth behavior, not uni-linear. Below is a brief illustration of the transactional model. For more details, see DeFleur, et al. below or any other introduction to communication theory text book.

Transactional Model:

1. **Speaker or source:** This is where the message originates. The primary function in this stage is that of encoding, putting things in such a way that others will be able to make sense of it. Encoding refers to translating ideas and messages into verbal and nonverbal symbols that a receiver can recognize and then decode. It means to make things understandable.
2. **Message:** the message includes the words that were chosen and the way in which those words were spoken, if an auditory medium was used to transmit the message. Remember, messages are construed via the three codes: visual, vocal and verbal
3. **Channels:** Many people get this confused with the message. A channel is the medium by which a message is transmitted...nothing more. It can be visual, auditory, or both. Channels are things like email, text messages, websites, videos, face-to-face, etc.
4. **Listener or receiver:** this is the person for whom the message is intended and it's the person's role to attempt to understand the message in the way that the source intended. Decoding is the process of making sense of what was transmitted. Hopefully it is deciphered in the way that was intended...there is always that small room for error in communication. This can be exacerbated if the wrong channel is selected to deliver the message. In both encoding and decoding, the idea of the three codes of meaning still hold true. How we look and what we sound like will influence the meaning of the message just as much as the words that were chosen.
5. **Noise:** Message interference can occur at any point in this model. Noise refers to this interference; it can be both internal and external. Internal noise is psychological, daydreaming, being preoccupied and not listening to the other

person. Having too many things on your mind can interfere with the way in which we pay attention to what is being said. External noise is anything in the environment that will interrupt message creation, dissemination, etc. a loud sound down the hall, slow internet connection, etc.

6. Feedback: how does the source know that the receiver, well, received the message? Via feedback. How does the receiver give feedback? It can be either verbal or nonverbal. The model is transactional and not unidirectional because of the feedback loop that keeps things going back and forth.

Additional Notes on Perry's Theory of Intellectual Development

Development does not always happen in a linear fashion. Perry identified three ways in which we deflect cognitive growth:

1. Temporizing or time out period may be necessary for lateral growth.
2. Escaping involves abandonment of responsibility.
3. Retreating is a temporary return to dualism.

Knefelkamp provides a developmental instruction model that helps to operationalize Perry's theory. It is based on four variables of challenge and support for students.

1. Structure: This refers to the framework and direction provided to students (high to low degree of structure). Students in more dualistic positions will value structure as support; however, those further along may prefer a more open-ended approach.
2. Diversity: Is about how alternatives and perspectives are presented and encouraged. How much and how complex is the question.
3. Experiential Learning: concreteness, directness, and involvement in learning activities. Ranges from direct involvement to vicarious learning. Students in dualistic positions may need more experiential, direct learning.
4. Personalism: represents the creation of a safe environment where risk taking is encouraged. It is manifested as an interactive environment that demonstrates enthusiasm for the material, instructor availability, and comprehensive feedback. It is especially important for students in the dualistic positions.

References and Resources

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OnLine:

MEDICAL ONCOLOGY COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING LEARNING MODULES: Giving Bad News
http://depts.washington.edu/oncotalk/learn/modules/Modules_02.pdf


The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal, *When Students Get Bad News: How Understanding the Grieving Process Can Help Advisors Handle Difficult Situations*. <http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentor/010806mf.htm>

Rensselaer Academic Advising Manual <http://www.rpi.edu/dept/advising/TrMatl.pdf>

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presents




Reaching and Retaining Students:
Breaking Bad News: Delivery Techniques that Help Students Make Good Alternative Choices

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Scenario








Am I a good Communicator?

Today's Focus

1. Foundational Concepts
2. Defining Bad News
3. Delivery Techniques

Communication

from the Latin *communicare*
to share, to make common

- Verbal (language) 
- Vocal (paralanguage) 
- Visual (nonverbal) 



Language



Paralanguage



- Volume – loud or soft
- Pitch – high or low
- Inflection – rise and fall
- Rate – fast or slow
- Pauses – filled or unfilled
- Emphasis - combination



Nonverbal

All intentional or unintentional messages that are not written, spoken or sounded



The majority of meaning is found in visual and vocal codes



Bad news delivery requires high self-monitoring

Good communication requires deliberate behavior




Perry's Theory of Intellectual Development

Cognitive structures are shaped by how people view their experiences




Perry's Theory of Intellectual Development

- Basic duality
- Multiplicity pre-legitimate
- Multiplicity legitimate but subordinate
- Multiplicity coordinate
- Relativism subordinate
- Relativism
- Commitment foreseen
- Evolving commitments




Perry Simplified



Dualism

- dichotomous view
- knowledge is quantitative
- authority figures have the answers
- learning is receiving information
 - transition initiated by cognitive dissonance

Perry Simplified



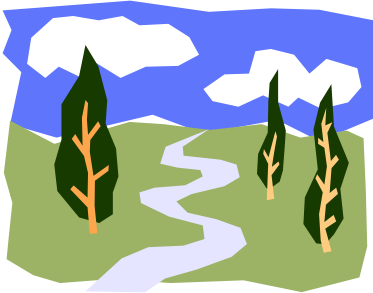
Multiplicity

- accept diversity of view
- all opinions are valid
- analytical thinking improves
 - transition initiated by the need to support opinions

Perry Simplified

Relativism

- opinions are not all equally valid
- knowledge is viewed qualitatively and contextually
- based in evidence and supporting arguments
- able to accept reality and focus on possibilities



Development is often not linear

Medical Model

Setup
Perception
Invitation
Knowledge
Empathize
Summarize & Strategize



SPIKES for Advisors

Setup
Perception
Invitation
Knowledge
Empathize
Summarize & Strategize



Defining Bad News

Bad: having undesirable or negative qualities

News: any new information about specific and timely events


-Wordnet at Princeton.com



Bad News

Any information which adversely alters one's expectations for the future

Medical Oncology Communication Skills Training,
Learning Modules
Chapter 2 – Giving Bad News





DECAF



Decide

- What you need to communicate
- How you're going to communicate
- Where you're going to communicate
- When you will stop

E
C
A
F



Decide

Emotional Development

- Integral to College Development
- Teachable Moments
- Flow
 - Skill Level v. Situation
 - Relief
 - Next Steps

C
A
F




Decide

Emotional Development

Connections

- Real or perceived
- Alternate Paths

A
F




Decide
Emoional Development
Connections
Active Listening
F




Decide
Emoional Development
Connections
Active Listening
Follow-up

- Do-able
- Assignments



Delivery Techniques
 (The Art of Communication)



- Active listening
- Reflection of meaning
- Supportive confrontation

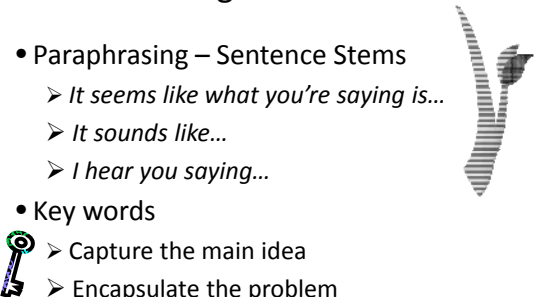
Active Listening

- Engaged
- Attentive to verbal and nonverbal
- Giving Feedback
 - Paraphrasing
 - Summarizing
 - Checking for accuracy



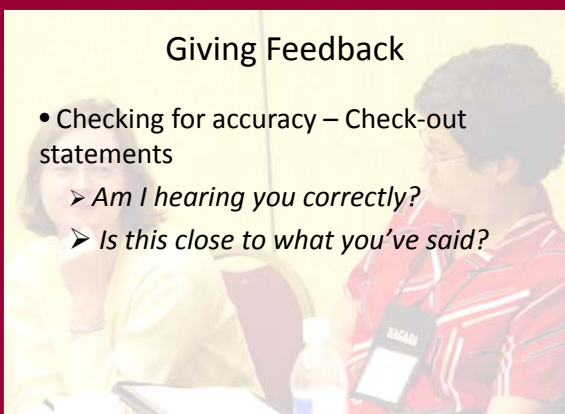
Giving Feedback

- Paraphrasing – Sentence Stems
 - *It seems like what you're saying is...*
 - *It sounds like...*
 - *I hear you saying...*
- Key words
 - Capture the main idea
 - Encapsulate the problem



Giving Feedback

- Checking for accuracy – Check-out statements
 - *Am I hearing you correctly?*
 - *Is this close to what you've said?*



Reflection of Meaning and Feeling

- *What does this mean to you?*
- *What was the lesson in that experience?*
- *What have you always wanted to do? Why?*
- *Who is influential in your life?*



Supportive Confrontation

1. Identify any discrepancy / incongruency



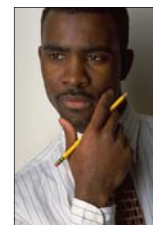
Supportive Confrontation

1. Identify any discrepancy / incongruency
2. Point it out



Supportive Confrontation

1. Identify any discrepancy / incongruency
2. Point it out
3. Evaluate



Supportive Confrontation

1. Identify any discrepancy / incongruency
2. Point it out
3. Evaluate
4. Reframe





Vignette 1
Unexpected News




- Exceptional Student
- Studying Behavior Neuroscience
- Pharmacy Intern/Assistant
- 3.87 GPA

➤ **Triple Step Set-Up**


Vignette 2
Pre-Med

- 3rd Year Biology Major
- Struggles with Science & Math
- 16-hour semester
- No Research

➤ **Frank discussion re Academic Reality (direct supportive confrontation)**



Vignette 3
The Salesman



- Grades do not represent ability
- Denied transfer
- Must select new major
- Unmovable

➤ **DECAF / Tough Love**

Vignette 4
Limited Enrollment Major

- 2nd Year Student
- Aiming for Public Relations major
- GPA benchmarks
- “Clueless” about requirements

➤ **Reflection and Questions related to meaning**



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