

Caring Messages Applicable During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Perhaps there is no greater time than during a crisis that we make a special effort to communicate our caring. Often during a crisis it’s human nature to focus on the facts and necessary actions in an effort to take care of all that is going on. In the process, the behaviors that leave others feeling cared about may diminish or take a backseat. The result is feelings of disconnection, increased anxiety, decreased trust, and lessened partnership.

While we might feel limited power in the face of COVID-19, we do have the power and opportunity to act on our commitment to person-centeredness and people’s well-being by communicating with extraordinary sensitivity, kindness and caring.

Here you will find examples of caring communication in a variety of situations people in healthcare are encountering today. These examples are not intended to be scripts. Instead, they illustrate what it might sound like to deliver your messages in a caring manner while tending to the many tasks that must get done. Hopefully, these examples will help you develop messages that are authentically yours—that show your caring and commitment to creating and maintaining positive relationships even in trying times.

Examples: Caring Communication with Team Members

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
Team member is concerned that she will lose her job if she stays home to care for her children	Team member likely to feel fear, anxiety and/or frustration You feel stress and fatigue	(Name), I hear your concern about needing to stay home with your children. I’m sorry this situation is causing so much angst. Please know our leadership team has discussed this extensively and has updated the staff guidelines to support our staff. Our aim is to support you and your family while still providing the highest quality of care possible. Let’s review it together and work through your concerns and questions.	Our leadership team (or I) recognizes the importance of family and parenting. Also, I want you to hear that we place a high priority on caring for YOU.

Examples: Caring Communication with Team Members Continued

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
You want to express emotional/spiritual care for team members who are working from home	Team member likely to feel sad, concerned and/or afraid You feel worry, stress, compassion and or hope:	Hi, (name), how are you? I'm calling to check in on you. These are such trying times— certainly not business as usual in our work and in our families! I realize working from home is really different for you, perhaps challenging in new ways and making you feel disconnected with our team.	I'd like to hear how you're feeling working at home and consider ways we can make this situation work better for you and our team. I really miss seeing you in person and I want to keep you connected to the team during all of this.
You want to address concerns about taking care of a COVID-19 positive patient	Team member likely to feel fear, stress You feel worried, stressed and compassionate	Hi, I want to check in and see how you're doing. It sounds like you're worried about taking care of the patient with the possible COVID-19 diagnosis.	I want to support you and help alleviate your fears. Talk to me! What are your specific concerns, and what do you need to feel better about this? I'm here for you.
You want your team member to take care of him/herself	Team member likely to feel stressed, nervous, and exhausted You feel concerned, and empathetic	(Name), thank you very much for all of your pitching in and the amazing job you're doing here every day. I'm wondering how you're feeling, and if you are doing alright?	Can we talk about YOU and what you are doing to take care of yourself? I want to support you and do my part to make sure you have what you need for your work and for your personal well-being. I really appreciate you.

Examples: Caring Communications with Volunteers

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
You need to ask volunteers to reduce their services to the hospital and patients	Volunteers likely to feel isolated, frustrated, and angry You feel frustrated, sad, compassionate	(Name), it's hard for me to describe how important our volunteers are to us and to our community—and YOU do so much! Unfortunately, we are in a situation that requires us to take the unprecedented action of temporarily reducing volunteer support here.	Please rest assured that I will update you, and I very much look forward to resuming the exceptional support you provide for our team and organization. What are your questions at this point? I want to answer them for you, and I want you to know how much I appreciate you.
You need to ask volunteers to change where they work or what they do—such as working remotely or putting together materials	Volunteers likely to feel scared, hurt, concerned, frustrated or resistant You feel empathy and worry	Thank you very much for all you do here. You are such a blessing to us. Given the current situation, we are asking volunteers to work differently. This is to protect you from exposure, and to limit the people our patients interact with for their protection.	Knowing you, I'm hoping you want to continue to help us and our patients. Would you be willing to (insert task, describe work)? This would help us greatly and allow you to stay involved and valuable during this time. I want you to feel comfortable in a spot that works for you.
A volunteer is worried that they have been exposed	Volunteer likely to feel scared, worried, or angry You feel empathy, concern, and stress	First, thank you so much for bringing this up to me. I hear your worry, and I'm so sorry this incident occurred. Let me get the details and then I will help you navigate next steps.	We certainly will be here to support you through this.

Examples: Caring Communication with Visitors and Family Members

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
Visitor has screened positive with a slight fever upon coming to the hospital/clinic/long-term facility	Visitor likely to feel worried, angry, victimized, concerned You feel empathetic, cautious and protective	(Name), it sounds like you're very frustrated not being able to see your Mom right now, and I certainly understand that! This is an unusual time for all of us, and we need to be extra careful to protect your loved one, as well as all of our patients and staff. At this time, we don't allow anyone with an elevated temperature to visit, since it may be that they are contagious.	I'm glad to say we can offer you a few options for checking in with your loved one using a phone, iPad or computer. Would you like to hear about these options now? I'm so sorry for any inconvenience and thank you for your understanding.
You need to impose limits on visitors	Visitor likely to feel worried, angry, concerned You feel empathetic, cautious, protective	I am so sorry you're not going to be able to see your friend today. I'm sure she would love to see you. We have to limit the number of visitors, so we can keep our patients and team safe during this unusual time and also help people's friends and family avoid getting sick.	We do have options for virtual visits that may be helpful. These are ways you can check in with your friend/family member using an iPad, phone or computer. Would you like to hear about how you can do that? I'm so sorry for any inconvenience and thank you for your understanding.
You need to limit visitors to maternity patients	Visitor likely to feel worried, angry, concerned You feel empathetic, cautious, protective	I can imagine you're excited to see your friend and ultimately the new addition! Unfortunately, due to the Coronavirus we have had to limit visitors to one per room at a time (state your policy).	If you would like, I can call her room and let her know you're here. Perhaps you can visit for a few minutes, or maybe her current guest might be willing to switch places with you. I want to help make this work for all of you and keep everyone safe. Thank you for understanding!

Examples: Caring Communication with Visitors and Family Members Continued

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
You need to limit visitors to ICU	Visitor likely to feel worried, angry, concerned You feel empathetic, cautious, protective	I'm sorry your family is experiencing this. Having someone you love in ICU is a difficult time. I see how you want to support your mom. Unfortunately, we have had to change policies in the ICU to protect our patients and staff. Currently visits are limited to one person at a time.	If you would like, you may call your mom's room and talk with her current visitor, and maybe you can switch places and get a turn visiting. I want to help make this work for all of you and keep everyone safe. Thank you for understanding!
You need to discourage a person with a chronic disease from visiting	Visitor likely to feel worried, angry, concerned You feel empathetic, cautious, protective	It is so wonderful to see you here supporting your loved one, and I bet they would love to see you. I'm sorry to tell you that visitors with their own chronic health issues can't visit. This is for your own protection. We want to make sure that you don't catch something during the unusual health crisis we're handling.	We do have options for virtual visits that might be helpful to you, like visiting by way of iPad, phone or computer. Would you be interested in me sharing how you can do this now? Again, I'm so sorry for any inconvenience and thank you for your understanding.
A whole family visits—wanting to see their loved one together—a safety issue	Family members likely to feel: worried, angry, concerned and insistent You feel empathetic, cautious, protective	It's wonderful knowing that all of you are here for your dad. I can see he'll have lots of support once he returns home. We would love to keep all of you together, and have you support him while he's here. Unfortunately, because of the current healthcare crisis, we are limiting the number of visitors who can visit at any one time.	We do have a family room. Perhaps you could all stay in there and support each other, while one of you visits your dad at a time. Let me show you where this is and connect you with your dad's primary nurse, so he or she can keep you informed while you support each other. Thanks so much for understanding.

Examples: Caring Communication with Patients and Residents, and Clients

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
You need to communicate restricted visiting hours and numbers to a patient or resident	<p>Person likely to feel concerned, scared, lonely, bored</p> <p>You feel empathy, concern</p>	<p>Hi, (name). How are you today? I need to let you know that we have changed our visitation rules for the time being so we can keep you and everyone we serve safe and healthy. Unfortunately, there is a virus going around and your age/condition makes you more susceptible to catching it. I don't want you to get sick, while at the same time I realize having your family visit is important to you.</p>	<p>I'm glad to say that we have a way to help you connect with your family using a computer. Are you up for me connecting you with your family right now, or do you want me to come back in a bit? I want you to have your family time, and I can help you do that.</p>
<p>A patient needing standard precautions is seated/roomed next to another patient</p> <p>Note: You will need to speak to both patient and family members.</p>	<p>Patient & family members likely to feel concerned, alarmed, and/or fearful</p> <p>You feel empathetic, cautious and protective</p>	<p>Hello, I'm sorry you're not feeling well today. It looks like you might be concerned about the gowns and masks you're seeing our staff use with some patients. Let me explain a bit and then I'd like to answer your questions. As you know, a virus has been spreading, making many people very sick. We use gowns and masks to protect people against the possibility that they might get germs from other people</p>	<p>Our team is taking a proactive approach to ensure the safety of you, your loved ones, all of our patients, their families, and staff. Safety is our top priority. What questions do you have? I want to make sure you feel comfortable and safe.</p>
You need to counsel patients who work with the public.	<p>Patient is likely to feel anxious, worried, nervous</p> <p>You feel empathetic, concerned</p>	<p>Thanks for bringing up your concern about catching the Coronavirus when you're working with the public.</p>	<p>Let's talk about what your work looks like, and then I can suggest ways you can keep yourself as safe as possible. I want you to be safe and to stay healthy.</p>

Examples: Caring Communication with Patients/Residents/Clients Continued

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
You are talking with a patient with possible COVID-19	<p>Patient is likely to feel anxious, worried, nervous</p> <p>You feel cautious, concerned, on edge</p>	<p>First, let me say I'm so sorry you're going through this. I can sense you're worried or a bit nervous. I imagine you have questions. Knowing what to expect as well as having a plan can help with that.</p>	<p>Let's review what happens next, the precautions needed to keep you and others safe, and I'll answer your immediate questions. Then, if you have other questions later you can give us a call. I want you to feel informed, to have a plan, and to know that our whole team is here to support you. Does this sound like a good place to start?</p>
Person wants test because test results are required in order to return to work. However, tests are not available	<p>Employee likely to feel irritated, concerned, apprehensive</p> <p>You feel understanding, frustrated and powerless</p>	<p>(Name), I can only imagine how frustrating and concerning it must be to not be able to be tested right now. Knowing whether you have the Coronavirus, or not, would at least give you some answers. Unfortunately, you don't qualify for testing at this time.</p>	<p>What I can do for you is provide a detailed letter that explains the guidelines and states that you do not qualify for testing. You can share this with your employer. Then, if you have other questions or symptoms, call us. We are here to support you, and our team will make sure you get the care you need.</p>

Examples: Caring Communication during Rounding on Patients and Residents

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
Family caregivers of sick people are anxious	Caregiver likely to feel anxious, stressed, scared You feel concerned, empathetic	First, let me thank you. Your wife is so lucky to have you to take care of her. I can tell you really want to do a good job and are worried about doing it correctly.	I want to help you be successful. Can you tell me what you're worried about so we can discuss and make plans? I'm here for you, and it's important to me that you feel as good as possible about what to do and how to do it!
Family caregiver working hard to support their sick loved one	Caregiver is likely to feel unappreciated, stressed, afraid You feel thankful!	I want to check in with you to see how you're doing and to let you know how important and appreciated you are. Having you here really makes a difference. It gives me confidence knowing what great support your daughter will have when she returns home.	What do you need, and are there questions you have that I can answer? I want you to feel confident going home. Again, thank you for all you're doing!
People knowing they have to maintain social distance and still feel isolated (such as with in-room dining)	Patient or resident likely to feel isolated, anxious, stressed, scared You feel concerned and empathetic	Hi, (name). It sounds like you're worried and missing your friends. I realize this is a very hard time and you might feel lonely.	How are you doing with all of this? I can help you call your family or friends. Would you be interested in that? I want to make this time the best it can be for you. I'm here to help.

Examples: Caring Communication During Rounding on Staff

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
You want to support staff during this difficult time	Recognize the individuals nonverbals and what is behind what is being said. Staff are likely to feel overwhelmed, stressed, frustrated, exhausted... You may be feeling stressed, concerned, and impatient	Hi, (name). First off, let me thank you for all the work you're doing to help the team and provide excellent care to people who are suffering.	I imagine this is taking a toll on you, and I want to help. What's going on for you, and how can I support you? I'm here for you, and I'll do my best to make things happen!
Staff need and deserve emotional support	Team member is likely to feel stressed, worried, overwhelmed... You might be feeling concerned and empathetic	Wow, this has been quite a time lately. I'm worried about how our team and you are holding up. Can you help me understand how you're feeling?	I really care about you and I want to support you and everyone on our team. Tell me what's going on? I will do all I can to make things a bit better for you.
Staff have life concerns –about daycare, food/supplies, etc.	Team member is likely to feel stressed, worried, overwhelmed... You feel concerned, empathetic	You seem worried or stressed, and I'd like to help. You are such a valuable team member, and I'm concerned about you.	What's happening? I want to know, and maybe I'll be able to help or at least listen. I care about you.

Examples: Caring Communication with Providers

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
Providers self-isolating from family members	Provider is likely feeling stressed, fearful, lonely, helpless, exhausted... You may feel empathetic, concerned	This is a difficult time—especially balancing the needs of patients with taking care of yourself and your loved ones at home. I really appreciate all that you are doing. I heard that you’ve chosen to self-isolate away from your family.	I realize that you are trying to do what’s best for everyone, and in that I’m worried about the toll this is taking on you. Can we talk about what is going on and how you are doing? I want to help.
Provider asked to work after expressing not feeling well/possibly infectious	Provider is likely feeling worried, guilt, conflicted, unsupported You may feel empathetic, concerned, frustrated	(Name), I am really sorry that you are not feeling well. I imagine that you might be worried about your own health, what that means to you and your family, and about how we are going to manage here without you.	Let’s talk about what this means for everyone so that you have all the information you need to feel safe and supported. I want to help.
What to say when you see a colleague struggling	Provider is likely feeling overwhelmed, consumed, exhausted... You may feel empathetic, concerned, uneasy	I was listening and watching you this morning and it seems like you are not the (Name) I am used to seeing. I am concerned how this situation might be impacting you.	Perhaps talking about it might help. Would you be open to sitting down sometime? I believe that together we can come up with some ideas about how to get through this. It’s a difficult time, and I want to support you.

Examples: Caring Communication for Senior Leaders

Situation	Recognize	Connect	Support
You are concerned about your team taking care of themselves and others	<p>Team members likely to feel burned out, drained, nervous</p> <p>You: Concerned, empathetic, responsive, responsible, protective</p>	<p>First off, I can't thank you enough for all that you're doing. This morning I witnessed... (tell a positive story of a team in your organization). Seeing this, I felt... (say how you felt such as incredibly thankful to be a part of such an amazing team that comes through in the toughest of times). Then, I found myself wondering how each of you are personally coping and what needs YOU have to help you stay safe and healthy.</p>	<p>With this in mind, I want to create a space for each of you to share when you are feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, or uncertain so that we can work as a team to support one another. In a moment I'll describe some things we have in place to help us take care of you and all our caregivers. YOU are my number one priority and I will do my best to ensure I, and the rest of the team, support you during this time.</p>
Motivating, inspiring, and addressing staff affected by the current situation	<p>Team members likely to feel discouraged, disheartened, tired, overwhelmed</p> <p>You: Hopeful, empathetic, overwhelmed, proud, inspired</p>	<p>I am so inspired and amazed by you. I want to share a story of something I feel honored to have observed yesterday (share a story of something in the organization that inspired you). I couldn't help but feel such (how you felt, perhaps awed, inspired, hopeful, etc.). This team is incredibly talented, resourceful, committed, and caring. You are truly the heart of healthcare. I realize this time is more than likely incredibly stressful—perhaps even overwhelming.</p>	<p>I want you to know that I see you, and I see the struggles. I also see, that in spite of the circumstances, individuals and whole teams are pulling together and coming through for patients and each other. I appreciate you for what you are doing, the manner and circumstances that you are doing it in, and simply for being who you are. From the bottom of my heart—thank you.</p>