



Meta-LARC ACP Serious Illness Conversation Training Part A Module 3 Anatomy of the SIC Guide

What did you notice in the demonstration video? Did you notice the way the clinician moved the conversation along using the Serious Illness Conversation Guide? Did you notice how the clinician responded to the patient's reactions and questions?

Now we are going to break down the Serious Illness Conversation Guide to better understand each element.




The Serious Illness Conversation Guide

Serious Illness Conversation Guide	
CONVERSATION FLOW	PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE
1. Set up the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce purpose Prepare for future decisions Ask permission 	"I'd like to talk about what is ahead with your illness and do some thinking in advance about what is important to you so that I can make sure we provide you with the care you want — is this okay? "
2. Assess understanding and preferences	"What is your understanding now of where you are with your illness?" "How much information about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?"
3. Share concerns about the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frame as a "wish...worry", "hope...worry" statement Allow silence, explore emotion 	"I want to share with you my understanding of where things are with your illness..." <i>Uncertain:</i> "It can be difficult to predict what will happen with your illness. I hope you will continue to live well for a long time but I'm worried that you could get sick quickly, and I think it is important to prepare for that possibility." OR <i>Time:</i> "I wish we were not in this situation, but I am worried that time may be as short as ____ (express as a range, e.g. days to weeks, weeks to months, months to a year)." OR <i>Function:</i> "I hope that this is not the case, but I'm worried that this may be as strong as you will feel, and things are likely to get more difficult."
4. Explore key topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals Fears and worries Sources of strength Critical abilities Tradeoffs Family 	"What are your most important goals if your health situation worsens?" "What are your biggest fears and worries about the future with your health?" "What gives you strength as you think about the future with your illness?" "What abilities are so critical to your life that you can't imagine living without them?" "If you become sicker, how much are you willing to go through for the possibility of gaining more time?" "How much does your family know about your priorities and wishes?"
5. Close the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize Make a recommendation Check in with patient Affirm commitment 	"I've heard you say that ____ is really important to you. Keeping that in mind, and what we know about your illness, I recommend that we _____. This will help us make sure that your treatment plans reflect what's important to you." "How does this plan seem to you?" "I will do everything I can to help you through this."
6. Document your conversation	
7. Communicate with key clinicians	

We asked you to open the Serious Illness Conversation Guide at the beginning of this step. If you have not, please open the guide now. As you see, the guide has 2 parts: the conversation flow checklist on the left and patient-tested language on the right. Now we will walk through and consider each step.



1. Set up the conversation



CONVERSATION FLOW	PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE
1. Set up the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none">Introduce purposePrepare for future decisionsAsk permission	"I'd like to talk about what is ahead with your illness and do some thinking in advance about what is important to you so that I can make sure we
2. Assess understanding and preferences	
3. Share concerns about the future <ul style="list-style-type: none">Frame as a "wish...worry", "hope...worry" statementAllow silence, explore emotion	
4. Explore key topics <ul style="list-style-type: none">GoalsFears and worriesSources of strengthCritical abilitiesTradeoffsFamily	
5. Close the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none">SummarizeMake a recommendationCheck in with patientAffirm commitment	Help us make sure that your treatment plans reflect what's important to you. "How does this plan seem to you?" "I will do everything I can to help you through this."
6. Document your conversation	
7. Communicate with key clinicians	

Setting up the conversation builds trust

- Introduce purpose
- "Prepare for future decisions"
- Ask permission

First, you are going to set up the conversation by introducing the purpose of the conversation, and ask the patient's permission to continue the discussion.

Examples of things you might say are:

"I'd like to talk about what is ahead with your illness and do some thinking in advance about what is important to you so that I can make sure we provide you with the care you want. Is this okay?"

If patient is not sure, you may offer rationale such as,

"The goal is to make sure that I have all of the information I need about what matters most to you so I can provide you with the care you want, and so I can best support your family if they ever have to make decisions for you."

Or

"We like to discuss these issues when patients are stable, doing well and we are not in a crisis. Talking about it now allows all of us time and space to talk and think these issues through. This is part of the way we care for patients."



2. Assess understanding and preferences

CONVERSATION FLOW	PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE
1. Set up the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Introduce purpose- Prepare for future discussion- Ask permission	
2. Assess understanding and preferences	
3. Share concerns about the future <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Frame as a "wish, hope, worry" state- Allow silence, explore	
4. Explore key topics <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Goals- Fears and worries- Sources of strength- Critical abilities- Tradeoffs- Family	
5. Close the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Summarize- Make a recommendation- Check in with patient- Allire commitment	
6. Document your conversation	
7. Communicate with key clinicians	



- “What is your understanding now of where you are with your illness?”
- “How much information about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?”
- Some people want to know about time, others want to know what to expect, others like to know both

Then you assess the patient’s understanding of their illness and determine how much they want to know.

You may ask,

“What is your understanding now of where you are with your illness?”

Patients may misunderstand their conditions or have incorrect information. The purpose of this question is NOT to correct their understanding or explain a specific illness. It is to understand the patient’s perspective on his/her illness. Patients whose understanding is well-aligned with medical realities are usually more prepared for a serious illness conversation. Patients whose understanding is significantly more optimistic than medical realities are likely to be at risk of future bad outcomes. They may require gentleness and careful titration of the discussion to avoid overwhelming the patient.

It is also important to understand how much a patient wants to know. You might ask:

“How much information about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?”

Some people want to know about time, others may want to know what to expect, others like to know both some would prefer not to be too specific.



3. Share Concerns about the Future

CONVERSATION FLOW	PURPOSE
1. Set up the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Introduce purpose- Prepare for future decisions- Ask permission	"I'd like to talk to you about your illness and how it may affect your future health."
2. Assess understanding and preferences	"What do you understand about your illness?" "How do you feel about the future?"
3. Share concerns about the future <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Frame as a "wish...worry", "hope...worry" statement- Allow silence, explore emotion	"I wish...worry..." "I hope...worry..."
4. Explore key topics <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Goals- Fears and worries- Sources of strength- Critical situations- Tradeoffs- Family	"What are your goals?" "What are your fears and worries?" "What are your sources of strength?" "What are your critical situations?" "What are your tradeoffs?" "What are your family concerns?"
5. Close the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Summarize- Make a recommendation- Check in with patient- Affirm commitment	"I've summarized what we discussed..." "I recommend..." "How do you feel about this?" "I'm committed to supporting you..."
6. Document your conversation	"I will document our conversation..."
7. Communicate with key clinicians	"I will communicate with key clinicians..."

- *"I want to share with you my understanding of where things are with your illness..."*
- Consider what kind of information they want. Consider how uncertain or certain you are
- Share concerns/likely future health status
 - Uncertain/Function/Time
- Frame as a "wish/worry" "hope/worry" statement

The 3rd step is to Share your understanding of their illness with the patient.

When you share, consider what kind of information and how much information they said they wanted during the prior part of the discussion.

Also consider how certain or uncertain you are about the future health of this patient.

If the patient has a chronic condition and you are not certain about the future, the language under UNCERTAIN or FUNCTION in the Guide may be most appropriate.

If you are more certain about the time and if that is what patient wants to know, the language under TIME may be useful.

This conversation is NOT about medical prognosis. Instead, it is clinicians sharing their concerns about patient future health and try to learn what is important for them in preparation for the future. We recommend framing it using "wish/worry" or "hope/worry" wording provided in the Guide.



Expect and Explore Emotion

Serious Illness Conversation Guide	
CONVERSATION FLOW	PATIENT
1. Set up the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Introduce purpose- Prepare for future decisions- Ask permission	"I'd like to talk in advance" or "I'd like to talk in advance"
2. Assess understanding and preferences	"What is your understanding?" "How much would you like to know?"
3. Share concerns about the future <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Frame as a "wish...worry", "hope...worry" statement- Allow silence, explore emotion	"I want to talk about your illness" "I hope you could get it sorted" OR "Time: 'I will' may be an option, or OR "Function: 'I will' may be an option, or"
4. Explore key topics <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Goals- Fears and worries- Sources of strength- Critical abilities- Tradeoffs- Family	"What are your goals?" "What are your fears and worries?" "What gives you strength?" "What are your critical abilities?" "What are your tradeoffs without them?" "If you faced this possibility, how much would you be able to do?"
5. Close the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Summarize- Make a recommendation- Check in with patient- Affirm commitment	"I've heard and what I can do to help us make a plan" "How does that sound?" "I will do my best to help you"
6. Document your conversation	
7. Communicate with key clinicians	

- Allow silence immediately after sharing concerns
 - It is therapeutic to give a patient time to process emotions after hearing difficult news
- Respond to emotion by naming it and exploring
 - “You seem really upset/surprised. Tell me more about what you are feeling/expected”
 - “This is really hard to hear. Tell me what you are thinking about”

Sharing the concerns is often the most difficult part of this conversation for many patients and clinicians.

It is important to allow silence and give patients time to process emotions after discussing concerns about the future.

After allowing silence, respond to their emotions. Helping them to explore their emotions could be therapeutic.

You may say

“You seem really upset/surprised. Tell me more about what you are feeling/expected”

OR

“I know this is really hard to hear. Tell me what you are thinking about”



4. Explore key topics

CONVERSATION FLOW	PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE
1. Set up the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce purpose - Prepare for future decisions - Ask permission 	"I'd like to talk about what is ahead with your illness and do some thinking in advance about what is important to you so that I can make sure we provide you with the care you want... Is this okay?"
2. Assess understanding and preferences	"What is your understanding now of where you are with your illness?" "How much information about what is likely to be ahead would you like from me?"
3. Share concerns about the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frame as a "wish...worry", "hope...worry" statement - Allow silence, explore emotion 	"I want to share with you my understanding of where things are with your illness..." Uncertain: "It can be difficult to predict what will happen with your illness. I hope you will continue to live well for a long time but I'm worried you could get sick quickly, and I think it is important to prepare for that." OR: Time: "I wish we were not in this situation, but I am worried you may be as short as _____ (express as a range, e.g. days to weeks, months, months to a year)." OR: Function: "I hope that this is not the case, but I'm worried that _____ as strong as you will feel, and things are likely to get more difficult."
4. Explore key topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goals - Fears and worries - Sources of strength - Critical abilities - Tradeoffs - Family 	"What are your most important goals if your health situation improves?" "What are your biggest fears and worries about the future with your illness?" "What gives you strength as you think about the future with your illness?" "What abilities are so critical to your life that you can't imagine living without them?" "If you become sicker, how much are you willing to go through to gain more time?" "How much does your family know about your priorities and preferences?"
5. Close the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summarize - Make a recommendation - Check in with patient - Affirm commitment 	"I've heard you say that _____ is really important to you. I agree, and what we know about your illness, I recommend that we _____ help us make sure that your treatment plans reflect what's important to you." "How does this plan seem to you?" "I will do everything I can to help you through this."
6. Document your conversation	
7. Communicate with key clinicians	

- Goals
- Fears and worries
- Sources of strength
- Critical abilities
- Trade offs
- Families

In the next step, you are going to explore some key topics with the patient. These include:

1. What are their most important goals?
2. What are their fears and worries about the future?
3. What gives them strength?
4. What are critical abilities the patient cannot imagine living without?
5. How much they are willing to go through to gain more time? and
6. How much do they want their families know ?



5. Close the conversation

CONVERSATION FLOW	PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE
1. Set up the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce purpose Prepare for future decisions Ask permission 	"I'd like to talk about what is ahead with your illness and do some thinking in advance about what is important to you so that I can make sure we provide you with the care you want — is this okay? "
2. Assess understanding and preferences	"What is your understanding now of where you are with your illness?" "How much information about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?"
3. Share concerns about the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frame as a "wish...worry", "hope...worry" statement Allow silence, explore emotion 	"I want to share with you my understanding of where things are with your illness..." Uncertain: "It can be difficult to predict what will happen with your illness. I hope you will continue to live well for a long time but I'm worried that you could get sick quickly, and I think it is important to prepare for that possibility." OR Hopeful: "I wish we were not in this situation, but I am worried that it may be as short as ____ (express as a range, e.g. days to several months, months to a year)." OR Function: "I hope that this is not the case, but I'm worried if as strong as you will feel, and things are likely to get more difficult."
4. Explore key topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals Fears and worries Sources of strength Critical abilities Tradeoffs Family 	"What are your most important goals if your health situation improves?" "What are your biggest fears and worries about the future with your illness?" "What gives you strength as you think about the future with your illness?" "What abilities are so critical to your life that you can't imagine without them?" "If you become sicker, how much are you willing to go through to avoid the possibility of gaining more time?" "How much does your family know about your priorities and preferences?"
5. Close the conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize Make a recommendation Check in with patient Affirm commitment 	"I've heard you say that ____ is really important to you. Keeping that in mind and what we know about your illness, I recommend that we _____. Help us make sure that your treatment plans reflect what's important to you." "How does this plan seem to you?" "I will do everything I can to help you through this."
6. Document your conversation	
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- Summarize
- Make recommendations
- Check in with patient
- Affirm commitment

You will close the conversation by summarizing what you heard about what is important to the patient.

You may also make recommendations about next steps.

Serious illness conversation recommendations are not necessarily about medical treatment. Rather they are recommendations about how to make a plan for future care. Recommendations could be

- additional discussions to clarify next steps
- a referral to other team members
- engagement with other key people such as family members, or
- nothing more needs to be done now

If it is appropriate, you may suggest the patient name a proxy decision maker, or complete advance directives. You may wish to discuss the POLST, Order for Life Sustaining Treatment, even if these are not appropriate for the patient yet.

Then

Check with patient about what they think about the plan.

Finally, affirm your commitment to the patient.



Using Serious Illness Conversation Guide

- Bridges gap between evidence and “real world” implementation
- Assures adherence to key processes
- Achieves higher level of performance
- Ensures completion of necessary tasks during complex, stressful situations
- Reduces clinician anxiety
- More content and focus
- Allows better listening



Why do we use the Serious Illness Conversation Guide?

The idea of checklists and guides for complex tasks originally gained popularity in the aviation industry, where checklists prevent crashes and increase soft landings.

Similarly in our conversations about serious illness, use of the guide

- Bridges gaps between evidence and “real world” implementation
- Assures adherence to key processes, thus achieving a higher level of performance
- And ensures completion of necessary tasks during a stressful situation such as serious illness conversations with patients by providing a structured approach

Having a guide can also

- Reduces clinician anxiety
- Allows more focus on content, and
- Promote better listening



Tips for using the Serious Illness Conversation Guide and effective conversations

- Follow the SIC Guide while you are learning it
- Acknowledge that you will be using the guide:
“I may refer to this Conversation Guide, just to make sure that I don’t miss anything important”
- Use wish/worry/wonder
- Allow silence, talk less, listen more
- Address emotions

The Conversation Guide is evidence-based, and its flow and language have been tested by many patients and clinicians.

Based on this testing, Ariadne Labs recommendations are that you:

1. Follow the Guide while you are learning to have the serious illness conversations. You may feel awkward using the guide, but you are learning a new skill. Until you feel comfortable and confident having these conversations, following the guide is the best practice.
2. You may acknowledge to your patient that you will be using the guide. It is up to you. Let them know that following the guide help you be sure nothing important is missed.
 1. Use wish/worry/wonder statements. This type of language conveys that you care and identify with the patient’s situation.
 2. Allow silence and be sure to listen.
 3. And finally Address emotions when they come up, rather than ignoring or “talking around” them.



Reference Book for Serious Illness Conversation

- Additional explanations, strategies, & examples
 - Addressing emotion (e.g., anxiety, avoidance, unrealistic expectations, anger)
 - Recommendation, decision making, making a plan
 - Managing the conversation
- Click the link in Step 5 to access the Reference Book

We know that all patients are different, and your patients may not respond like the patient in the video.

In the real conversations, you may follow the Serious Illness Conversation Guide, but still need to respond to additional questions and concerns from patients.

The Reference Book for Serious Illness Conversation is a helpful resource that provides additional explanations, strategies, and examples of language for various situations and patient responses. For example, it includes how to address emotions such as anxiety, anger and unrealistic expectations. It addresses how to make recommendations and making a plan for the next step.

The Reference Book is located immediately after this module in Step 5. Review it to look for answers to your questions. If there are any questions and concerns that are not answered, please ask them in the evaluation form and/or bring it to the Part B session of this training.



Next Steps

- Evaluation - Complete an evaluation form in the next step (Step 6).
- In-person SIC Training Part B
- References and additional resources are available in the Helpful Resources section in the left bar.

THANK YOU

This is the end of Serious Illness Conversation Training Part A.

In Part A, you have learned what the Serious Illness Care Program is, as well as the needs for and the benefits of having serious illness conversations. You watched a video demonstration of a serious illness conversation using the Guide and learned about the flow and elements of the Conversation Guide.

After closing this Voice-over-PowerPoint presentation, please complete an evaluation form in Step 6.

The Next step is to attend Serious Illness Conversation Training Part B. Check when the real time (virtual or in person trainings) are scheduled.

All references used in this presentation and additional resources are listed in the Helpful Resources section in the left side bar.

Thank you for time, attention and commitment to assuring health care supports what matters most to patients and their families.