

COVID-19 CONVERSATIONS

How to Discuss Goals of Care with Residents and Caregivers in Long Term Care



During these unprecedented times, we're facing conversations we never expected to have. Adapted from [VitalTalk](#), here is a condensed playbook highlighting practical advice on how to talk with your residents in long term care and caregivers about difficult topics related to COVID-19.

When they say _____, you can respond with...

I am worried about this new virus. What should I be doing?

I understand your concerns. Many people have gotten sick and although many recover, it is good to be prepared. One step that might be of help is to think of a person who knows you well enough to talk to doctors on your behalf. This person will serve as your proxy and will share your wishes if you were to get sick. If, for example, your wish is not to go to the hospital, you will tell us and your proxy.

I realize that I'm not doing well medically even without this new virus. I want to stay in this nursing home.

Thank you for telling me that. What I am hearing is that you would rather not go to the hospital if we suspected you have the virus. Did I get that right?

I want every intervention possible. I want to live.

We are doing everything we can. This is a tough situation. Could we step back for a moment so I can learn more about you? What do I need to know about you to do a better job taking care of you?

I don't want to be kept alive by a machine.

I respect that and understand how you feel scared. Here's what I'd like to propose. We will continue to take care of you. The best case is that you don't get the virus. The worst case is that you get the virus despite our precautions. If that happens, we will keep you here and make sure you are comfortable.

I'm losing hope.

Tell me about the things you are hoping for. I want to understand more. We will remain hopeful all along, it's just that we may need to hope for different things as circumstances change.

I'm scared.

This is such a tough situation. I think anyone would be scared. Could you share more with me?

I want my mother/father to go to the hospital for treatment for the virus.

I understand you may feel scared. Because she already has complex medical problems, I'm worried that the hospital may not be the place for her at this time. We can keep her here with caregivers she's familiar with and continue to provide her with the treatment that she needs.

I am this person's proxy/ health care agent. I know their medical condition is bad and that they likely won't survive the virus. Do you have to take them to the hospital?

It is so helpful for you to speak for them. Thank you. If their medical condition did get worse, we could arrange for comfort medications and to have hospice (or palliative care) see them where they are (pending visitor restrictions). We can hope for the best and plan for the worst.

I am not sure what my wife would have wanted—we never spoke about it.

You know, many people find themselves in the same situation. It is so hard. Given her overall condition now, if she needs to be put on a breathing machine or get CPR, it is likely that she will not make it. My recommendation is that we accept that she will not live much longer and that we keep her comfortable. I suspect that may be hard to hear. What are your thoughts?

I don't think my husband would have wanted this.

Well, let's pause and talk about what he would have wanted. Can you tell me what he considered most important in his life? What meant the most to him, gave his life meaning? If he was sitting here with us, what would he say?