

# The Difficult Family Conversation: Communication Between Providers and Patients

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Cardiac Critical Care Medicine

February 20, 2025

# Disclosures

- None

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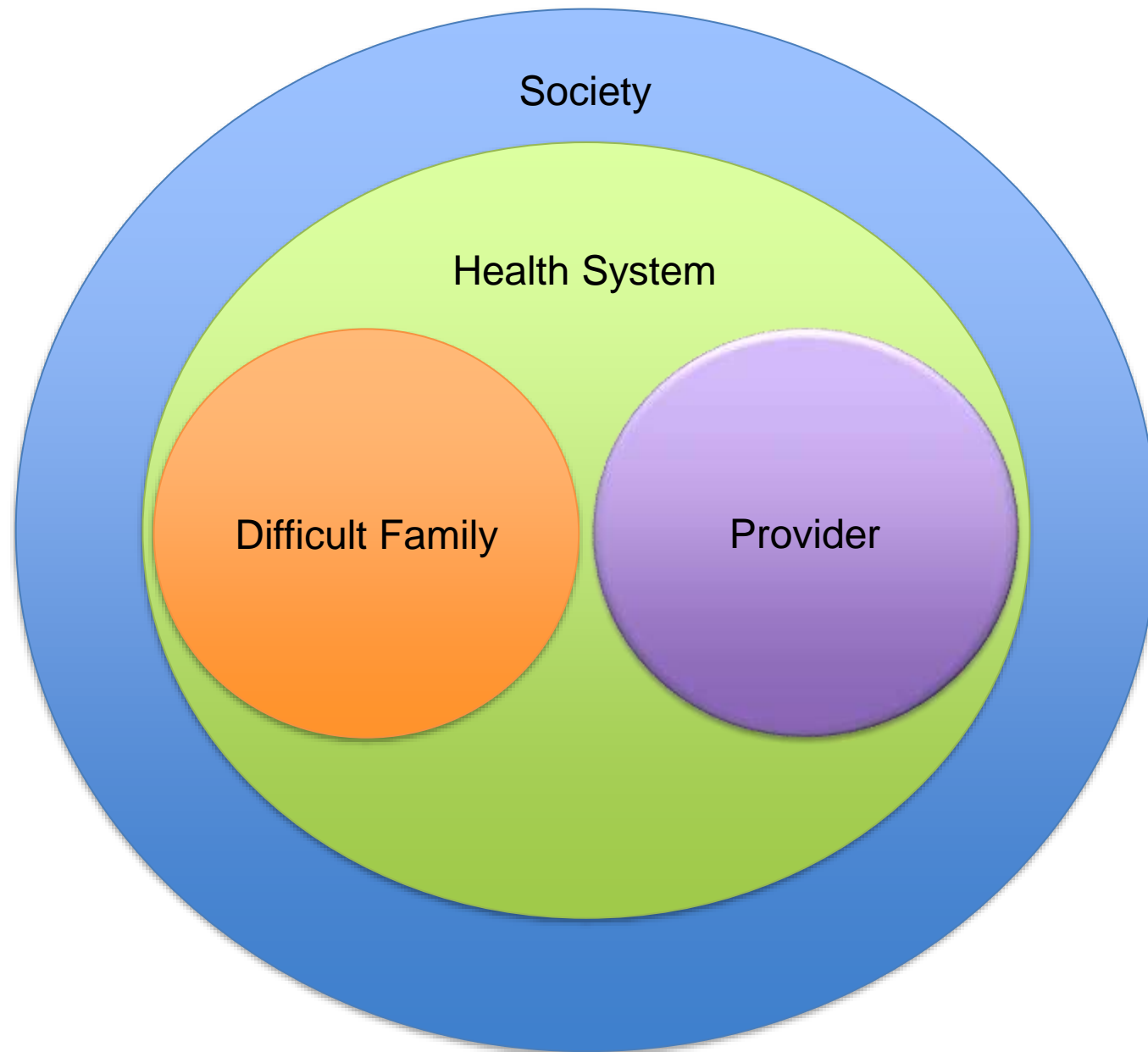
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Haas LJ, Leiser JP, Magill MK, Sanyer ON. Management of the difficult patient. Am Fam Physician. 2005 Nov 15;72(10):2063-8.

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- Plan, but don't go in with a plan
- Develop **your** toolbox
- Show your cards





A nationally-recognized, validated methodology to teach clinicians empathic and patient-centered communication skills.



# Basic Framework – Conveying Information

## Delivering Serious News

Ask – Tell – Ask

- Assessing what the patient understands (Ask)
- Before delivering the information (Tell)
- Checking in for understanding (Ask)

## Late Goals of Care

- Reframe
- Expect Emotion
- Map Values
- Align
- Plan

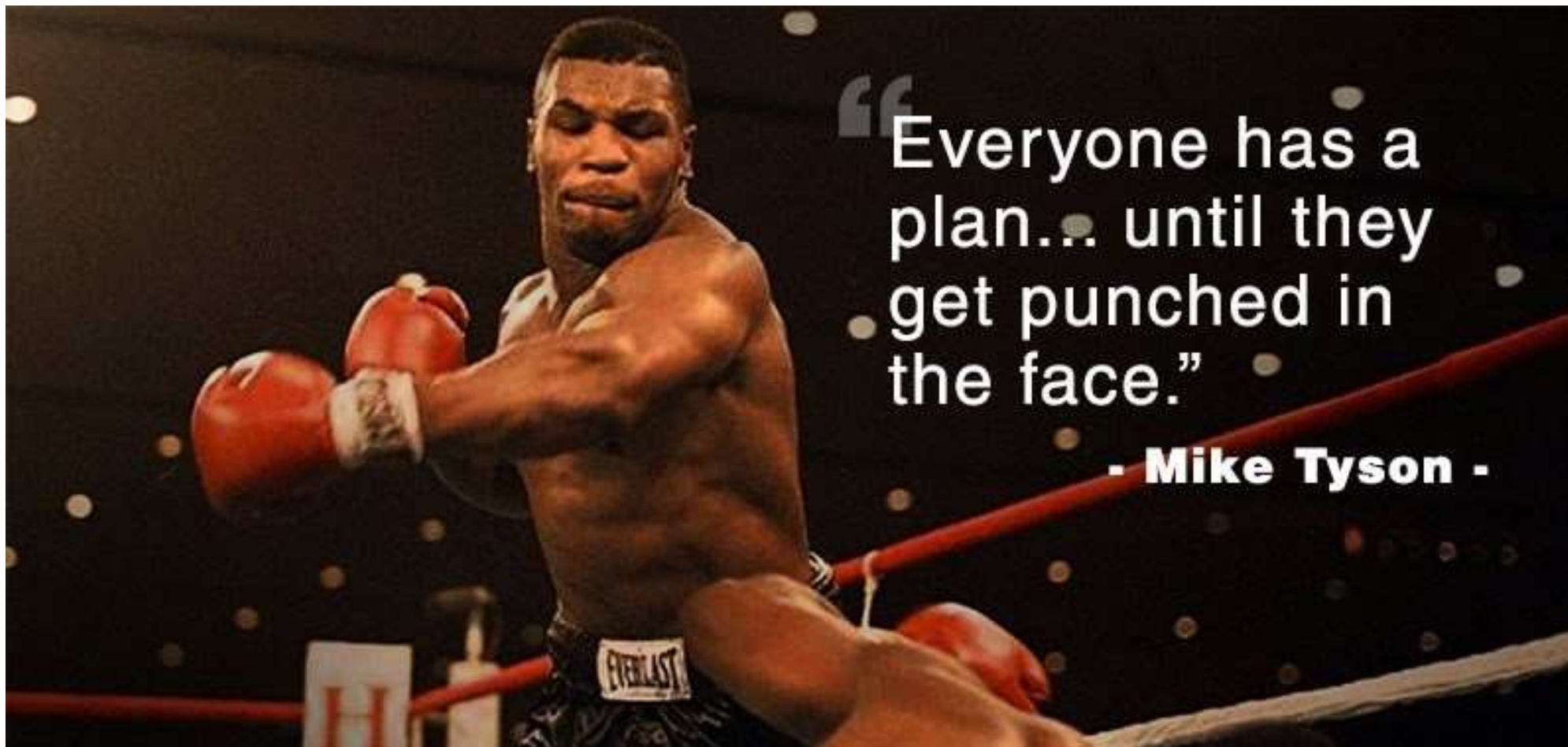
# Conveying Information - Plan

- Ask – Tell – Ask → **Headline**
  - Warning
  - Diagnosis + Consequences (treatment, prognosis, etc.)
  - Can utilize their own words
- REMAP → **Reframe**
  - Disrupts the status quo
  - Two(ish)-word warning
  - Unambiguous & clear statement

# Conveying Information - Plan

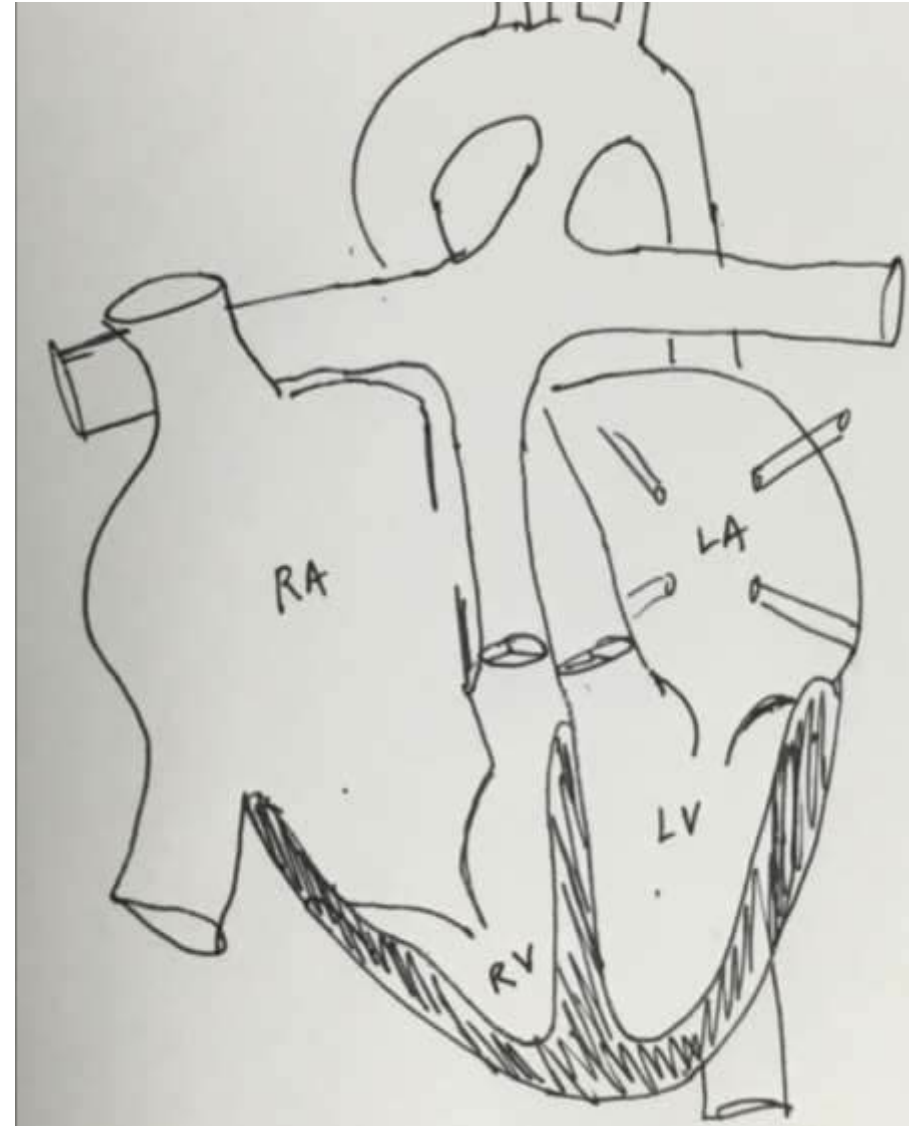
- Ask – Tell – Ask → **Headline**
  - *“I have some serious information to tell you, your son was born with a severe form of heart disease called hypoplastic left heart syndrome and he will need heart surgery to survive”*
- REMAP → **Reframe**
  - *“Unfortunately the medicine has not helped like we had hoped, his heart is even worse now”*



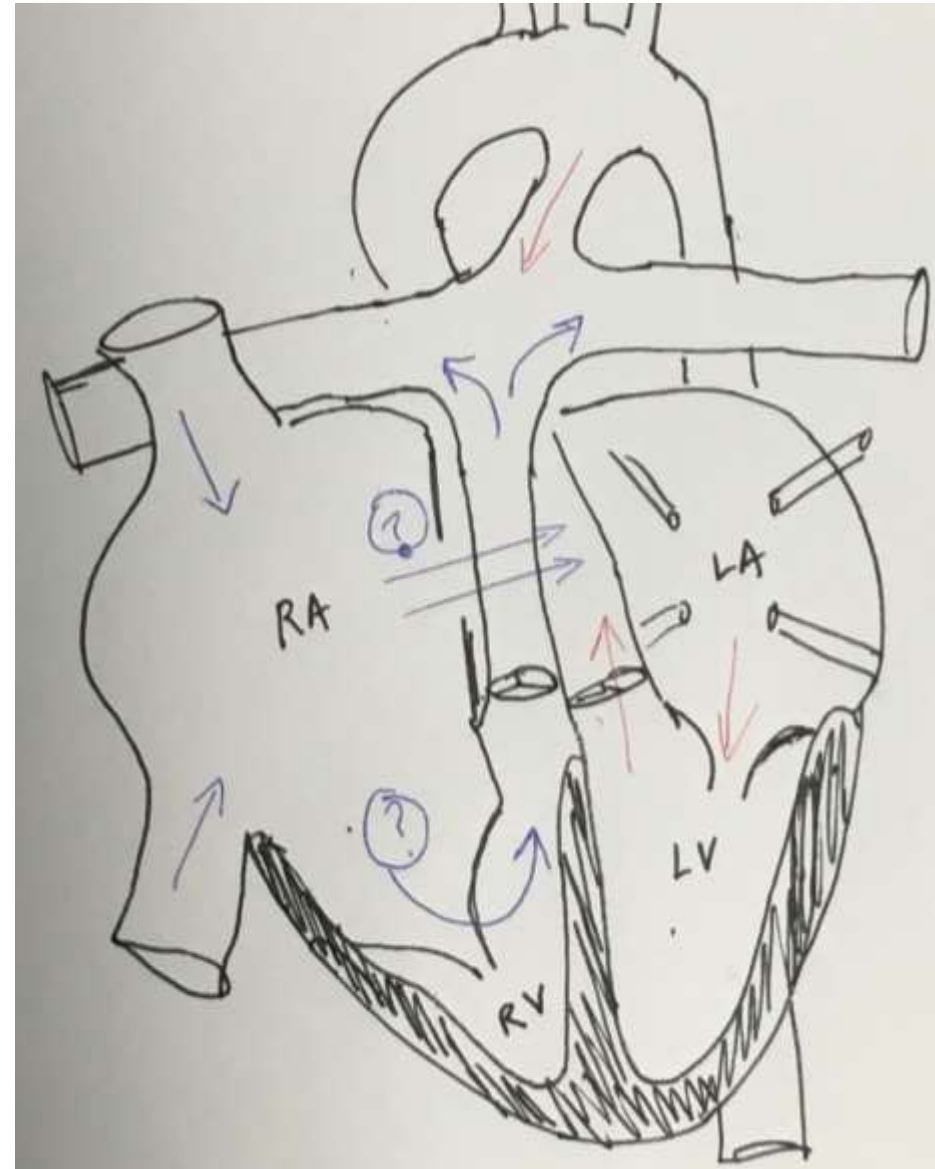




- Your plan is about you
- Listen
  - How do they like information
  - Their values
  - Most important for them
- What to expect next



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# Basic Framework - Emotions

## Recognize Emotion

- Verbal
  - *Oh no...*
  - *I just knew something was wrong!*
- Nonverbal
  - Body language, Tone, Crying, Eye contact
- Questions
  - *How did this happen?*
  - *Are you sure, is the echo wrong?*
  - *We missed a dose, is that why...?*
- Statement
  - *Okay, what should we do next. We're ready to do whatever you say.*

## Respond to Emotion

- ✓ Name
- ✓ Understand
- ✓ Respect
- ✓ Support
- ✓ Explore



# N.U.R.S.E. → Emotional ToolBox

NAME	1) It sounds like you're frustrated 2) You must be really sad
UNDERSTAND	1) I can see why you're frustrated 2) Most parents feel...
RESPECT	1) It's clear how much you love... 2) You've been such a great advocate
SUPPORT	1) I will do my best to make sure... 2) Our job is to help you...
EXPLORE	1) Can you tell me more... 2) What do you mean _____









# N.U.R.S.E. → Emotional ToolBox

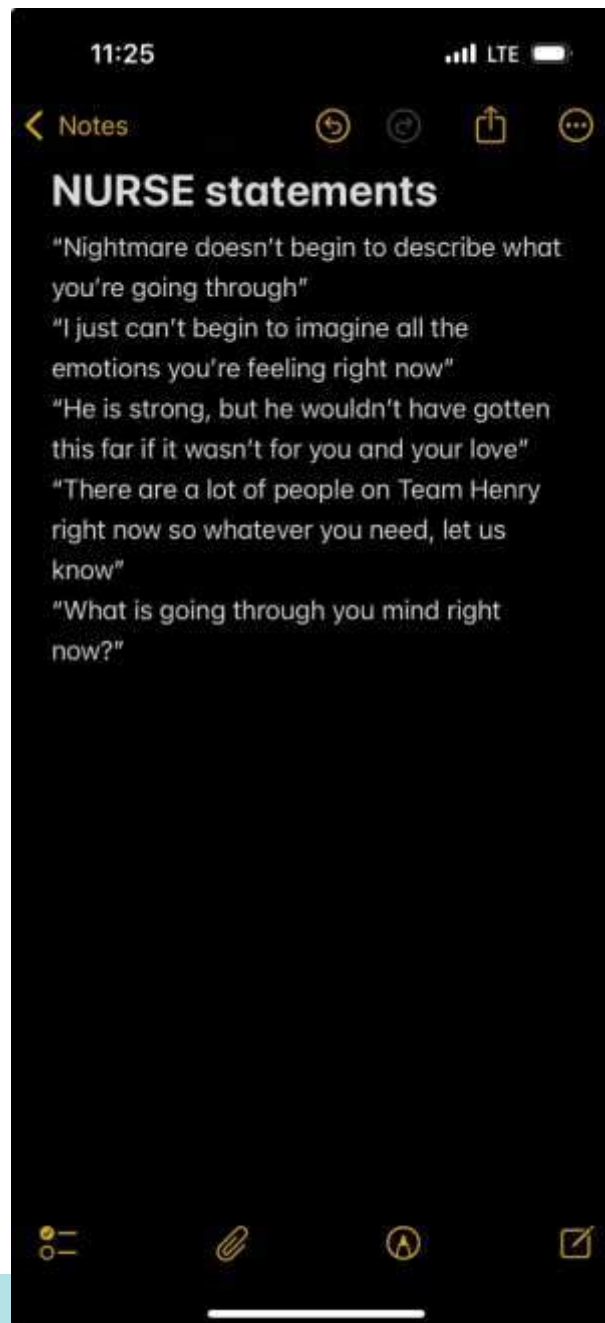
NAME	“Nightmare doesn’t begin to describe what you’re going through”
UNDERSTAND	“I just can’t begin to imagine all of the emotions you’re feeling right now”
RESPECT	“You’re right, he is strong, but he wouldn’t have gotten this far if it wasn’t for you and your love”
SUPPORT	“There are a lot of people on Team Henry right now so whatever you need, let us know”
EXPLORE	“What is going through your mind right now?”



# N.U.R.S.E.S.T. → Emotional ToolBox

- S = silence
- T = touch
- Okay to combine 2
  - *It's clear how much you love him. Our job is to help you get through this (R + S)*
  - *I know how frustrated I am, I can't imagine what you must be going through (N + U)*
  - *I feel like I'd be flooded with emotions if I were in your shoes, what are you feeling right now (N + E)*
- But not too many at once
  - Get credit for your work!











*Almost all challenging family interactions with the medical team can be traced back to diagnostic or therapeutic uncertainty.*

- Andrew Costarino

# Show Your Cards – Admit Uncertainty

*Not knowing what will happen next makes me sick to my stomach, I can't imagine what you must be going through*

*I am really really good at my job, but I work with a team of people who are also really really good at their jobs, and I really value their perspectives.*

*As things get clearer, better or worse, I promise to let you know.*





# Show Your Cards – Be a Guide

*One question I always get is, \_\_\_\_\_. Would it be helpful to talk about that now?*

*If we chose A...*

*...these are the things I'd be hopeful for*

*...these are the things that I'd be worried about*

*Many loving families have made this decision and many loving families have made the other decision. We have to figure out what's right for you as a Mom/Dad*

- Plan, but don't go in with a plan
- Develop **your** toolbox
- Show your cards

I can't begin to imagine the energy it has taken to sit through this talk. You are an amazing audience.

Thank You!  
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