



There are many situations and times when we have to deliver bad news.

If I lost my job, if the doctor has told me I have cancer, how do I tell my loved ones?

In many cases, the bad news is related to another person. A friend has just died in a road accident, or a brother: how to break the news to family members, friends? If doctors have found that a 10 year old son has leukemia, how to tell the child and his parents?

Bad news are hard to deliver. We feel an obligation to speak about something that sooner or later will be known to others. But, how do we communicate a situation that has caused us so much pain, and that will be very hard to accept and to get use to by a father, a mother, a child, a wife or a husband, friends?

It is not easy to find the way. If it were, there would be no problem, since everyone would know how, when and with what words to pave the way and transmit, in the least traumatic way possible, a painful fact. But we can at least present some ideas that will hopefully help in these situations.

The first thing is to have the correct information. It is not worth to be stressed when we still have no clear data. If the diagnosis talks about a possible cancer, do not lose your head: it is better to wait some time for more accurate analyses. If someone calls to tell us that the motorcycle of our nephew was found lying in the street, we should not assume that he has died. But we need to find out if it was stolen, or if our nephew fell and is now in the hospital, etc.

A second step is to consider how to adjust the news to the person to whom we will give it, so that he/she may receive it without a great shock. It will not be possible always, especially when it comes to the death of a loved one or of serious mishaps.

But at least we can find a way, a place, words to set the scene. Many, just at our arrival and hearing our greetings, will sense which way the wind is blowing. We will have to see how we are going to say everything, even with those details that will allow us take the drama out of what has happened.

It is not a case of lying. For the person who has the right to know what is going on will be hurt if he/she is deceived. Without saying that what is black is white, without denying the disease which has just begun in a grandparent, we can, with the truth in hand, explain that the diagnosis is still not definitive; that there are new methods of treatment; that the family will support in the expenses...

The third thing is to open prospects: bad news means that doors are closed; that opportunities are lost; that the situations get worse. But there are almost always other doors open to the future that we must not ignore.

Even the most dramatic fact, most "definitive": death, is not a complete goodbye, but oftentimes becomes "to the hereafter." This is how it is remembered in a song from Spain at some funerals for soldiers killed overseas: "death is not the end."

It is fit to say with Nietzsche—and recurrently reminded by the father of Logotherapy, Viktor Frankl— that: "He/she who has a *why* supports almost any *how*." In other words, the many painful events of life cannot suppress the inner strength each man or woman has. We all preserve in our hearts profound reasons to move forward in order to prevent us from losing heart in front of bad news.

How must we, then, communicate bad news? With much empathy, a close heart, with an eye to what life calls us for from this point on—another idea often repeated by Viktor Frankl—with heartfelt words. Bad news are received with greater peace if the giver is not simply a transmitter of facts, but a family member or a good friend. Someone that is ready to comfort and stay close to the person that has to mature and adapt his/her life to a painful event that must be addressed from a hopeful perspective.