

Managing grief by reflecting on mental states

When a patient dies, we are faced with the family's feelings, as well as our own.

This can be stressful, and using reflective skills can help. By reflection, we mean consideration of our own (and others') mental states, including *thoughts, emotions, wishes, and intentions*. Our patient care (and self-care) improves when we can be mindful about how mental states arise, how they impact behavior, and how they interact within relationships. The questions below may make it easier to intuit how to communicate during difficult times.

Reflecting on our own mental states

- What was that like for me?
- What is running through my mind?
- Can I describe what I'm feeling?
- Did my feelings have an impact on what I did in that situation?
- What do I think I needed in that moment?
- What was I wishing for in that moment?

Reflecting on patients' and families' mental states

- What might their feelings be?
- How are they making sense of things?
- What might be running through their minds?
- What were they needing in that moment?
- Am I triggering other times when they've felt like this?
- What might they be wishing for?

Reflecting on the interaction between our own and others' mental states

- Did the family's feelings impact the way I was feeling?
- Did that interaction make me feel frustrated? Anxious? Unsure?
- Is the family picking up on my feelings? Would it be helpful to share my feelings transparently?
- Are there other times when I've felt like this? Does that match the reality of this situation?
- What is my behavior communicating to the family? To my colleagues?
- What was that interaction possibly like for them?
- How is the care that I am providing to the family impacting the way they feel and behave?