

Balancing hope and realism when facing a serious illness

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Overview

- Types
- Benefits
- Difficult issues
- Hope and realism
- Strategies



“Hope is the feeling that the feeling you
have isn’t permanent.”

Jean Kerr



“Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.”

Vaclav Havel



Types of hope

- Recovery
- Decrease symptoms
- Live more fully
- Learn from challenges
- Let go of fear
- Discover more meaning in life
- Develop acceptance
- Increase happiness
- Find optimal quality of life



“Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better we can bear a hardship today.”

Thich Nhat Hanh



“Hope is the power that gives us the
power to step out and try.”

Unknown



Benefits

- Reduced distress
- Improved coping ability
- Increased goal directedness
- Belief in the ability to find solutions
- Increased energy to pursue solutions

(Taylor, 2000)



Further benefits

- Improves adaptation to stage of illness
- Increases feelings of well-being
- Provides a reason for living

(Saleh & Brokopp, 2001)



Further benefits

- Helps medical professionals and relatives feel more favourable
- May lead to more attentive care

(McGrath et al., 2006)



Further benefits

- Helps focus on the positive
- Connects people
- Improves engagement with life

(Elliot & Olver, 2007)



Challenges

- False hope
- Pressure to be positive



“Where there is life there is hope.”

Cicero



Being realistic

- Survival rates improving
- Remarkable recoveries
- Statistics versus independent events



“When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don’t adjust the goals, adjust the action steps.”

Confucius



Strategies

- Concentrate on aspects of life not affected by illness
- Draw attention to personal strengths
- Induce positive emotions
- Focus on what is important
- Set realistic goals

(Greer, 2008)



Further strategies

- Be committed and active in treatment
- Allow for support
- Avoid social isolation
- Meet others with similar conditions
- Read personal accounts
- Face the reality of the situation
- Deal with fears and unresolved issues
- Develop emotionally and/or spiritually
- Find more meaning in life



Conclusion

- Hope is beneficial but should not be used to deny the reality of the situation
- Hope might focus on recovery but also
 - Living more fully
 - Learning from challenges
 - Letting go of fear
 - Finding meaning
 - Increasing happiness and quality of life



“The important thing is not that we can live on hope alone, but that life is not worth living without it.”

Harvey Milk



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