

# ‘Never Words’ and Their Possible Alternatives

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"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."

- Ludwig Wittgenstein



## Breakout Activity #2: Never-Words and Their Possible Alternatives

1. In pairs, consider the following phrases:
  - a. 'There is nothing else we can do'
  - b. 'She will not get better'
  - c. 'Withdrawing care'
  - d. 'Circling the drain'
  - e. 'Do you want us to do everything?'
  - f. 'Everything will be fine'
  - g. 'Fight' or 'battle'
  - h. 'What would he want?'
  - i. 'I don't know why you waited so long to come in'
  - j. 'What were your other doctors doing/thinking?'
2. Consider alternative Language that is more respectful, offers compassion, acceptance and partnership with the patient. Write down alternative language for each example.
  - a. E.g. 'There is nothing else we can do'
  - b. Alternative Language 'Therapy X has been ineffective in controlling the cancer, but we still have the chance to focus on treatments that will improve your symptoms and, hopefully, your quality of life'
  - c. Rationale: Even with no prospect for cure, the clinician can still convey an ability to treat the patient as best they can
3. Ten minutes total for this activity