

**The SPIKES Protocol** for delivering difficult news (Developed in oncology; modified for our use)

<p><b>S – SET up the conversation</b></p>	<p><i>Arrange for some privacy.</i> Don't carry out a difficult conversation in the hallway or in the mailroom, by just popping your head in someone's office, or on the way out to the parking lot.</p> <p><i>Involve relevant others.</i> Is there a course or lab director who needs to be there? Someone from HR, depending on the circumstance.</p> <p><i>Sit down.</i> Sitting down is probably a more relaxed way to have difficult conversations. It also conveys that you are taking time for the person and for sharing the information. It's best not to have barriers (like a desk) between the two of you, if possible.</p> <p><i>Make and maintain a connection with the person.</i> Maintaining eye contact might feel difficult, but it is important. It establishes connection, shows regard, etc. That said, you might need to be sensitive to their responses. Don't "stare them down."</p> <p><i>Manage time constraints and interruptions.</i> Plan adequate time for the conversation. You can (and perhaps should) place limits on the time you're together, but you don't want to rush. Saying "I have another appointment in 30 minutes" might be a good way to put a limit on things, providing both of you with a way to move on. Tell the person that you're setting a timer so you'll make that other appointment, or ask someone to come and get you or call in at a specified time.</p>
<p><b>P – Assess the person's PERCEPTIONS</b></p>	<p>It may be helpful to open the conversation with questions regarding what the person knows about the situation. For instance, if you're talking to a part-time or term faculty member about losing a position, you might discuss enrollment patterns. If talking to a student regarding a grade dispute, you might review the steps that have been followed thus far.</p>
<p><b>I – Obtain the person's INVITATION</b></p>	<p>This might be as simple as "I have some information I need to share with you regarding staffing for next year..." or "If the steps you've followed sound accurate, I'm ready to talk with you about my decision on your grade dispute."</p>
<p><b>K – Give KNOWLEDGE and information</b></p>	<p>Use phrases that are more humane such as "Unfortunately I have some difficult news I need to share with you..."</p> <p>When sharing enrollment information, don't get into technical details about FTE, etc., focus on the big picture.</p> <p>In oncology, they recommend that doctors avoid being overly blunt as this makes recipients feel more hopeless, upset and even angry. If there's a procedure to follow, you can share that ("the next step in a grade dispute is...") or could set a future date when that would be necessary ("let me check with HR and I'll find out about when you'd have to vacate your office and turn in your keys.")</p>
<p><b>E – Address EMOTIONS with empathic responses</b></p>	<p>It's okay to let them know that you're disappointed in this news, too, or are at least understanding of their frustration and disappointment.</p>
<p><b>S – SUMMARIZE and STRATEGIZE</b></p>	<p>Summarize the next steps, if any. Thank them for meeting with you. Avoid a prolonged goodbye from that meeting.</p>