



# DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE IN HEALTHCARE



**ASHA CE**  
**APPROVED PROVIDER**

Pennsylvania  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association

Introductory Level

.1 ASHA CEUs

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## **Learning Objectives:**

- Recognize what makes conversations “difficult” in healthcare.
- Identify communication strategies that promote clarity and empathy.
- Understand the role of emotional resilience in sustaining compassionate care.

## Course Abstract

Speech-Language Pathologists regularly face emotionally charged conversations with patients, families, and colleagues that test both communication skills and personal resilience. This session explores strategies for navigating these high-stakes moments with clarity, empathy, and professionalism. Attendees will learn evidence-based approaches to managing their own emotional responses, maintaining compassion under pressure, and fostering connection even in the most difficult dialogues.

**Summary:**

1. Introduction
2. Learning objectives
3. Understanding “Difficult Conversations”
4. Frameworks for Effective Communication
  - The SPIKES model
  - NURSE statements
  - Ask-Tell-Ask approach: ensures shared understanding and pacing.
  - PEARLS framework
5. Emotional Responses: Both Sides of the Conversation
  - Fight/flight/freeze responses in clinicians.
  - Impact of emotional flooding on communication quality.
6. Emotional Resilience in Clinical Practice
  - Definition: ability to adapt, recover, and maintain effective functioning amid stress.
  - Components of resilience
7. Building Emotional Resilience
  - A. Individual Practices
    - Grounding or breathing before patient interactions.
    - Reflective journaling or debriefs after tough cases.
    - Recognizing early signs of emotional overload.
    - Reframing mistakes as learning opportunities.
  - B. Team & Institutional Practices
    - Debrief sessions or “resilience rounds.”
    - Psychological safety in supervision and team culture.
    - Mentorship and modeling vulnerability.
    - Integrating wellbeing into competency frameworks.
8. Integrating Both Concepts
  - Emotional resilience and communication skills are interdependent.
9. Reflection or Discussion Activity
10. Summary and Takeaways
  - Difficult conversations are inevitable, but trainable.
  - Resilience is a skill, not a personality trait.
  - Compassionate care requires attending to both patient emotions and clinician wellbeing.
  - Key takeaway: “You can’t pour from an empty cup — emotional resilience sustains empathy.”

## **Speaker Bio**

Eleanor Smyser is an SLP at St. Luke's University Health Network and holds both SLP and A-EMT licenses. Eleanor has worked in various settings as an SLP including skilled nursing, acute rehab, and acute care. She has also completed numerous volunteer hours on ambulances for 9-1-1 services. Eleanor is a multiple ASHA ACE award recipient, Stop the Bleed Trainer, a mentor for ASHA's Student to Empowered Professional Mentoring Program, a member of the Medical Reserve Corp, a lecturer for TIMS University, and was a guest on the podcast Swallow Your Pride. Eleanor is passionate about medical speech pathology, multidisciplinary care, and lifelong learning.

## **Speaker Disclosures**

Eleanor Smyser has no relevant relationships to disclose.