

**Module: Visual Conditions and Functional Vision:
Early Intervention Issues**

**Session 1: Working With Families and
Eye Care Professionals**

Video Transcript: Assisting Families to Understand the Diagnosis VCM 1-03

Institute for Families of Blind Children. (1991). *Breaking the news* [Video]. (Available from Institute for Families, P.O. Box 54700, Mail Stop 111, Los Angeles, CA 90054-0700)

Narrator

A pediatric ophthalmologist discusses her feelings as she communicates diagnoses to families.

Pediatric Ophthalmologist

When I go in to give catastrophic news, I always sort of say to myself, now remember, Laurie, or now remember, the patient is more afraid than you are. But it's a, it's a very fearful thing. It's, you go in the room, you're a physician, you're in the job because you care about people. You want them to like you. You want to do something right for them. And you know that you're going to tell them, for instance, in the case of childhood eye cancer, that number one, you're going to have to tell them that their child has had, their child has cancer and secondly that you may have to remove an eye. And both of those things, that they hear those words, and it's just the end of the world for their perfect baby.

And, you enter the room and, you, you, your immediate instinct is to want to flee, and your second instinct is to kind of want to lie, not 'cause you want to lie to them, but because you just don't want it to be so awful. But both of those are the wrong things to do. You, you have a quiet time with them. You make sure that you don't look rushed. You make sure that you aren't rushed. It's just how it's got to be. You close the door. You don't have spectators, and you sit down with them. And, I generally like to sit within a reasonable proximity of them, and I make sure that there's some Kleenex around, believe it or not, little details like that. People need to feel free to express emotion. It's catastrophic to hear that your baby has cancer and that maybe an eye's going to be removed. So, you sit down, you look them in the eye, you have all the time in the world, and you tell them. You remember they're not going to hear much, and you let them grieve.

After you give someone extremely bad news, they will have only heard a portion of it. They're going to need to hear from you again. They're going to need to ask you the same question five or six times, and it's not because they're dull, and it's not because they're abnormal. It's because they only hear so much each time they have access to you.