



## UNHELPFUL LANGUAGE

Based in part on the work of Sherri Weiser, PhD



### WHAT YOU SAY



### WHAT THE PATIENT HEARS

Your MRI shows degenerative disc disease/ disc bulge/ arthritis/ bone spurs/ spondylosis, etc

I will never get better

Your MRI shows wear and tear

My spine is worn out

Your MRI shows a disc tear

I have a severe injury to my spine

You have damage

I have a severe injury to my spine

You have a chronic condition

I will never get better

There's nothing wrong with your back

He/she thinks it's all in my head

Stop when you feel pain

Activity will harm my back

Let pain be your guide

The pain is in charge; I'm not

Take it easy and rest

I should avoid all activity

You should be able to work

He/she thinks I'm faking

You need pain medication and injections

Making the pain go away is my only hope

Pain is normal for someone your age

I am going to get steadily worse as I get older

You need pain control

The pain is a vicious monster that has to be controlled

If you have pain when you go back to work (or exercise) stop working (or exercising)

Any pain I feel when I go back to work or exercise means I have re-injured myself

The goal of treatment is for you to be pain-free

Anything short of that goal means failure

Your pain is psychogenic or psychosomatic

He/she thinks my pain is not real

Your test findings are negative

Negative? That must be bad

Don't worry

There must be something to worry about

You are going to have to live with this

My life is ruined

I cannot prescribe opioid medications

I am being denied the treatment that will make me feel better



## HELPFUL LANGUAGE



### WHAT YOU SAY

Your MRI doesn't show anything to worry about

Your MRI shows normal things that come with aging, like gray hair

The cause of your pain may not show up on an MRI

Increasing activity as tolerated will help

Your back problem should respond to nonsurgical care

Self-treatments and exercises are the most important aspects of spine care

Medication and injections are sometimes helpful so you can get more out of the self-treatments and exercises

Having pain at times is a normal part of life but it can almost always be managed

I'm confident in your ability to overcome this

Working (or exercising) will not cause damage to your back, even if you have some pain while working (or exercising)

Together we can help you overcome the pain

Some pain on getting back to work is normal and usually fades as your body adapts

The goal of treatment is for you to learn to manage and overcome your pain

Stress might increase your experience of pain

Your pain is persistent, but you can overcome it

If you make some changes, you can enjoy life despite any pain you may have

Opioid medications are not going to help your pain in the long run and will cause you more problems



### WHAT THE PATIENT HEARS

There's nothing seriously wrong with my back

Those scary-sounding words are nothing to be afraid of

My pain is real

Activity is good for me

I probably won't need surgery

I can take charge of this

Self-treatment and exercises are the keys to recovery

The pain doesn't *have* to go away; I can learn to take charge of it

I have a better chance of recovery than I thought

I will be able to return to work/ exercise

Pain is not a vicious monster; it is something I can move beyond; I am not alone in this

Pain doesn't necessarily indicate re-injury

I may or may not be pain-free, but I can cope with it and get on with my life

My emotional experience may impact my physical symptoms

The pain does not have to go away for me to get better

I can get my life back

These are not good medications for me