



---

## DEPARTMENT OF PEDIATRICS

---

### Wellness Corner

#### Rant and Reframe: An exercise in empathy

By Kasey Davis, M.D.

One of my favorite applied improvisation exercises comes from the [Alda Center on Communicating Science](#). The exercise is called “Rant and Reframe.” During my visit to Children’s of Alabama in July for my Grand Rounds presentation, I participated in this exercise with some UAB pediatrics and simulation faculty. The barriers of the current environment make such an exercise difficult to execute. However, given that many currently crave human connection, it may make it all the more valuable.

The premise of the exercise is simple, talk and listen. The exercise itself takes a bit more effort.

**First, the Rant:** One person gets to rant while the other listens. Talk about anything you want, totally uninterrupted, for two minutes. Let’s be honest, when was the last time someone listened to you without interrupting for a solid two minutes? On average, doctors interrupt patients after just 20 seconds. We often listen to respond, rather than to understand. Even worse, we try to offer advice or solutions to someone who just needs to be heard.

**Next, is the Reframe:** This part of the exercise is a little tricky. The person who listened to the rant must determine two things: the positive attributes about the person ranting and the values that are violated. The reframer then introduces their partner to the larger group using that description. For example, if the first person ranted about her elderly mother who insists on driving, going to the grocery store herself, and even climbing on a table to change a lightbulb instead of asking for help, the reframe might look like this: “This is my friend Ashley. She loves her mother and wants her to be safe.” Be careful not to let the rant sneak into the reframe! One safe rule is to avoid the phrase “and that is why...” For example: “Ashley want her mom to be safe and that is why she gets so upset when her mother goes to the grocery store.” Introducing the rant defeats the purpose of the reframe.

This exercise is powerful. People are shocked to hear their rant reframed. It sheds light on what is truly being experienced. The reframe offers no advice, no solutions, and no comparisons. The reframe is simply: “I hear you, and I see the unique and caring individual you are.”

One of the best parts of this exercise is that it is easily accessible. All that is needed is two people and about ten minutes. Video chat will work well if you want (or need) a partner outside of your immediate family. Be certain you can see each other well and observe tone of voice and body language. Set a timer for two minutes and rant away! Listen carefully to understand and to hear the values being represented. Respond back: “I hear you and it sounds like you values xyz and abc are very important to you.” Trade roles. Reflect on what it is like to speak uninterrupted, to listen for understanding, and to hear your values presented and offered back to you.

Each person has unique stressors, many of which are intensified by the uncertainty around us. This exercise does not offer a silver lining, false hope, or superficial solutions. Instead, it offers deeper connection and empathy. And those are things we all desperately need.

Kasey Davis, M.D., is an assistant professor of pediatrics in Division of Critical Care at Texas Children’s Hospital and associate medical director of simulation for The Woodlands campus. She is a graduate of the UAB Pediatric Residency Program and Pediatric Critical Care Fellowship Program. She lives in The Woodlands, TX with her husband, Justin, who is also a UAB alumnus, and their two daughters.