

How to support someone with cancer



When someone you care for tells you that they have cancer you are likely to experience many different emotions. Your relationship with the person affected by cancer will have some bearing on your feelings and response. You may feel unsure as to what to say or do to help them. It is important to be aware that you and the person with cancer may react differently and need to deal with situations in your own ways. Dealing with cancer can put stress on a relationship. Finding ways to talk and listen to

each other openly can help you to understand and deal with what you are each finding difficult.

You may wish to offer emotional or practical support to your family member or friend. Asking the person with cancer what they would like and need will help them to feel that they still have some control in their life. This may involve offering emotional support by being with them and offering a listening ear. Or, they may need practical help such as getting to and from appointments,

help with household jobs or childcare.

Even when you feel uncertain about what to say or how to reassure them, simply being there will help. Offering your company can help your friend or family member to feel less alone or isolated. Whether it is doing an activity together, or sitting quietly together, your presence can be a comfort. Equally, you may need to be sensitive to their needs which may change depending on how they are feeling. Being able

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to talk openly will help you to know when your friend or family member may prefer to be alone. You can always remind them that you are thinking of them with a text message or card during those times when they prefer solitude.

It may be that you are able to offer support to their carer. Allowing them to talk, offering to give them a short break, popping in for a cup of tea, or offering to do simple tasks, such as preparing a meal, can provide some important relief. Even when practical support is not wanted, just knowing that you are concerned and willing to give practical support can be as valuable as the help itself. Your help may still be appreciated at another time.

It's normal to want to offer reassurance to a friend or loved one who is facing a life threatening condition. However, be wary of saying things that seem to offer hope or reassurance that you can't provide. If you aren't sure of what to say, it is better to share that with them than to say something that you don't mean. Try to simply be present for your friend or loved one and allow them to express their feelings, whatever they are.

When you are caring for someone with cancer it is important to remember to take care of yourself too. Some people find it helpful to talk with friends and to share their experience with others in a similar situation. Eating well,

staying active, trying to get enough sleep and taking short breaks are also good for your physical and emotional wellbeing. There are also professionals and organisations that can help if your feelings or concerns are overwhelming for you.

- **Macmillan's online community – for people affected by cancer** (<https://community.macmillan.org.uk/>)
- **Carers UK online forum** (<https://www.carersuk.org/forum>)
- **Cancer Chat forum** (<https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-chat/>)

We rely entirely on voluntary donations from our clients, local businesses, individuals, community groups and grant making trusts.

If you would like to support our work or find out more about the emotional support we provide please do get in touch.

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Cancer
Counselling

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