



Tips for Supporting a Loved One with Cancer (or Other Serious Illness)

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- **Just ask.** If you aren't sure how your loved one wants to deal with his/her illness, just ask. Don't assume they can't handle an open, honest discussion. While your loved one may want to be treated as normally as possible, they may still want to keep things simple. Communicating with your loved one can help everyone feel better.
- **Include your loved one.** Your loved one likely wants to feel as independent and in control as possible. Allow your loved one to decide what they can and will do. Avoid making decisions without them. Instead, work together with your loved one to make decisions and everyone will feel more comfortable.
- **Be a good listener.** Don't try to tell your loved one what to think, feel, or how to act. Sometimes just being there to listen, without judgment, is the best thing you can do. They might not want to talk at all, and would rather sit quietly instead. They might even feel like crying - and letting your emotions out can be a very good thing. Remember, you don't always have to find solutions or fix everything. Just follow your loved one's cues and acknowledge their feelings.
- **Accept your loved one's bad days.** Even as you try to be hopeful and cheerful, your loved one may feel different inside. That is okay. Your loved one can't be expected to be upbeat and positive at all times. And, putting these demands on them will only cause more frustration, guilt and stress. Give your loved one space if they need it and try not to take things too personally.
- **Communicate sensitively.** Since it is impossible to know what your loved one is going through right now, it is important not to act like you do. Avoid saying things like: "I know how you feel," "Stay positive," or "Don't worry, you'll be fine." Instead, you can say things that help like: "You are not alone in this, I'm here for you," or "I love you and we will get through this together."
- **Be aware of side effects.** Your loved one may be dealing with side effects from cancer treatment, such as weight loss, hair loss, nausea, and fatigue. They may be worried about how others will react to seeing them. Aside from feeling self-conscious, they may worry about having the strength and energy to get through the day. Ask your loved one what you can do to make them feel better and more confident.
- **Remind your loved one that you care.** Your loved one may need extra reassurance that they are still needed and loved. Find gifts that reflect who they are apart from their illness (e.g., books, art, music, or tickets to the museum, theater, sporting events, etc). Also, human touch goes a long way. Give them **lots of hugs** or a pat on the back. Show your loved one that you still see them as a person, not just as a patient.

The diagnosis and treatment of cancer and any other serious illness can be scary, but drawing near to those whom you love can help to ease your fear. Your family can provide an incredible network of support in many ways, big and small, as you battle this disease together.

*This information is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical guidance.
Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider prior to making decisions about your medical care.*