

# Providing Emotional Support for Your Loved One with Cancer



Seeing your loved one go through cancer treatment can be very overwhelming. You may feel helpless, but there are many ways you can care for them during this time.

Giving them emotional support is one of the most important things you can do.

Remember, though, that not everyone copes with cancer the same way. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Your loved one may need something different from you. Ask them what works for them and adapt your actions to fit their needs.

## Give them a safe space

Your first priority is giving your loved one a safe space to express their emotions. Let them be themselves and open up about all their feelings as they work through this scary, difficult time.

You can do this by:

- Offering to talk, but not pushing them. There may be days when your loved one doesn't want to talk. That's OK. Let them know that you're there if they want to talk about anything, but there's no pressure. Offer to sit with them in silence or talk about anything else besides their cancer. Just having you there is emotional comfort, even if you don't talk about their feelings.
- Supporting how they feel. Your loved one will have a lot of emotions, including fear, anger, guilt, sadness, hopelessness, and more. Don't tell them how they should feel. Support and listen to them. Tell them you understand why they feel this way. Your loved one needs to voice all the feelings inside them. Being a receptive listener is important and validates how they're feeling.
- Not giving medical advice. Your loved one may want to talk about their treatment with you. Let them explain it. Talking about it may help them cope. But don't give them medical advice. If you or your loved one has questions about the treatment, write them down so you can ask their healthcare team.

## Create some normalcy

Cancer treatments will disrupt your loved one's life. It will be hard for them to feel like there's life outside of their cancer. You can help create some normalcy for them, so they don't feel left out of what's going on in the world.

You can do this by:

- Talking about noncancer topics. Connect with them about their favorite things. Watch movies or TV shows, listen to music, and summarize the news for them.
- Including them in your life. Don't be afraid to talk about your life or ask for their advice. Your loved one cares about you, and knowing that you value their opinion will help them feel less helpless. But if you see your loved one is getting stressed or tired out during your conversation, pause and shift to a less stressful topic. Or wait to talk another time. Still let them into your life as you normally would.

## Be active with them

Staying active can help your loved one mentally, physically, and emotionally. Hobbies, projects, and activities can help distract them from their condition, as well as help you stay bonded.

Some examples are:

- Activities for relaxation. Meditation can help your loved one relax and relieve stress. Joining them in a meditation session can give them support and also help you cope.

- Movement. If your loved one is able to, participating in physical activity can help their mind and body (and yours, too). Choose movement that works for wherever they're at physically.
- Hobbies and projects. Share in your loved one's passions through hobbies such as drawing, painting, or making music.

## Take care of yourself

Your loved one is important, but don't forget about yourself. To give them the best care and support, you need to prevent burnout. Remember that you can't help them adequately if you're emotionally exhausted yourself.

Take time for your own self-care. This can include:

- Building your own emotional support team
- Having an outlet for your stress, such as yoga and physical activity
- Keeping a journal about your emotions
- Getting enough sleep
- Eating healthy

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