



CANCERcare®

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# fact sheet

## WHAT CAN I SAY TO A NEWLY DIAGNOSED LOVED ONE?

**Studies show that people do better emotionally in a crisis when they have strong support from family members and friends. However, if one of your friends or loved ones has been diagnosed with cancer, you might be having a difficult time knowing what to say or how best to help.**

### HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR BEING AS SUPPORTIVE AS POSSIBLE WHEN A LOVED ONE IS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER:

**Listen.** This is often a challenge when a loved one faces a life-threatening illness. Try to listen without judging and without “cheerleading.” It might be tempting to say, “You will be fine,” if your loved one expresses scary or sad thoughts. But, your ability to sit with the person as he or she shares those feelings is probably one of the most significant contributions you can make to his or her well-being.

**Give advice only when you are asked.** Friends and loved ones often take on the task of researching the diagnosis, treatment options, or clinical trials. This can be very helpful, as the information is often overwhelming. What is not helpful is saying, “You ought to try this,” or “You should do that.”

**Educate yourself about cancer.** CancerCare and other reputable organizations have helpful literature and user-friendly websites that provide detailed information about cancer treatments, side effects, and other related concerns.

**Support your loved one’s treatment decisions.** While you may be in a position to share decision-making, ultimately it is your loved one’s body and spirit that bear the impact of cancer.



**Remember the caregiver.** This is usually the spouse, partner, parent or adult child of the person with cancer. Caregivers take on necessary tasks such as driving to treatment, arranging medical appointments, and providing needed care and emotional support. In many cases, they also take on many of the roles formerly handled by the person who has been diagnosed.

**Be specific about the help you can offer.** Saying, “Call me if you need something,” may put your loved one in an uncomfortable position. It is better to offer to help with specific tasks, such as walking the dog every morning, shopping for groceries, or driving the person to treatment on a particular day.

**Stay connected.** Cancer treatment can be lengthy. People with cancer often note that friends and family “don’t call anymore” after the initial crisis of diagnosis. Checking in regularly can be tremendously helpful.

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### CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/cancercares](https://facebook.com/cancercares)

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**Keep things normal.** Often, we try to make life easier for the person going through cancer by doing things he or she would normally take care of. It is a way of feeling useful at a time when we would otherwise feel helpless. However, it's just as important to respect your loved one's wishes to do normal "pre-cancer" tasks. For some people, being able to do things like cook dinner or continue working can lessen the sense that cancer is taking over their lives.

**Be receptive to your loved one's needs when treatment is over.** Often this is the time when people realize the enormity of what they have been through. Prior to this, they were deeply involved in, and distracted by, all the medical concerns, like getting to treatment and coping with side effects. While your loved one may no longer need help getting through treatment, he or she may still need your emotional support.

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