

# Finding Meaning and Purpose after Cancer

A diagnosis of cancer brings many changes. While some of these changes are physical, questions related to making sense out of the cancer experience, faith and spirituality can emerge. You might find yourself wondering about the meaning of your life and what really matters most to you. Questions about faith, healing and the after-life may also come up. These questions are normal following such a life-changing event. Finding value or purpose in life is an essential element of our emotional well-being. Spending some time thinking about this topic may help you to discover new goals, priorities and possibilities.

Having the opportunity to re-visit long-held beliefs and values provides an opportunity to think about what truly matters most to you. People with cancer often find that this chance to focus on what really matters can impact the quality of their lives in very positive ways. The cancer experience can be a time to reconnect with how you define a meaningful life and to make the changes that are important to you.

Some people choose to focus on spending time with family and friends. For others it can be a chance to complete a project such as finishing a scrapbook or remodeling a room. For some, meaning comes from spending time with loved ones or a beloved pet. Still others decide to act on something they have always wanted to do such as take up a new hobby or travel. There is no single answer for what is right for every person. What we choose to take away from the cancer experience and any changes we choose to make (or not!) can transform a scary and difficult experience into one of personal growth.

## Ways to Find New Meaning and Purpose in Your Life After Cancer

- **Assess your life:** Some survivors say their cancer gave them a wake-up call and a second chance to make life what they want it to be. Ask yourself those tough questions. Am I really a happy? Have I postponed things that are important to me? You may notice that answers to these questions and others will help to define what is most meaningful to you.
- **Give Back:** For some, reaching out and helping others helps them and you find meaning in their cancer experience. Some people focus on leaving a legacy or just living more in the moment.
- **Seek support:** Attending a support group or prayer circle, talking with other survivors or reading inspirational messages can help you connect with others who share ways that they have found meaning in life after cancer. If you find you are struggling or depressed about making sense of the experience, a trusted clergy member or professional counselor may also be able to help you think through some of your questions about the meaning of life and the meaning of the cancer experience.
- **Keep a journal:** Write down your thoughts about what gives meaning to your life now.
- **Life Review:** Thinking about or writing your life's history can clarify what has been accomplished and what remains to be done.
- **Meditate or pray:** Allowing yourself to sit quietly may be helpful in creating the mental space and perspective that will allow you to answer your questions about the meaning of life, the impact of cancer on you as a person and how you may be changing as a result of the experience.