

People with cancer and their families face worry and stress about the diagnosis, treatment, and side effects. Feeling emotionally supported by others can be very important. Many family members and friends want to show their support. However, sometimes it can be hard to find the right words or gestures.

## PROVIDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- **Acknowledge the situation.** Many people are afraid to talk about cancer. It is especially hard right after a loved one is diagnosed. It may also be hard following difficult news about disease changes. Often, people fear that this news is too upsetting to talk about. However, avoiding the topic entirely can make people with cancer feel isolated. Let your loved one know that you can talk as much or as little about their cancer as they want. Understand that this amount of talking may change over time.
- **Listen.** Many people with cancer swing between hope and fear. Letting your loved one have a safe, non-judgmental space to talk about their stress and worries can be helpful. Don't interrupt, and don't be afraid to let there be times of silence. Asking open-ended questions can be more helpful than feeling like you have to give advice or fix the situation.
- **Avoid telling people how they should feel.** Some people use clichés to try to help people with cancer feel better ("*Everything happens for a reason*"). This often has the opposite effect. Don't minimize their experience ("*Don't worry, you'll be fine*," "*You should feel lucky just to be alive.*") Let them know that you are here to support them in whatever way you can. Often, simply saying, "*I'm here for you*" can be most supportive.
- **Don't only talk about cancer.** Taking some breaks from thinking and talking about cancer can be a healthy and helpful way to cope. Let your loved one know that you are here for them when they want to or don't want to talk about cancer. Even if your loved one is not physically up to going somewhere, doing something fun together (e.g., laughing about a funny memory) can be helpful.



[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org)  
1-888-793-9355



- **Guard their privacy.** Physical privacy is often lost when being treated for cancer. There is very little privacy between hospital visits, doctor check-ups, and constant calls. Also, having family members or friends involved in physical care is difficult. To help your loved one's sense of control, ask him or her what information is okay to share, and with whom. Avoid talking about situations with others (even family) unless your loved one agrees that they want this information shared.
- **Respect and honor your loved one's dignity.** Cancer and its treatment can make some people feel like they've lost dignity. You can remind your loved one that they are a valued patient, daughter, son, friend, etc. Use their name, not "he" or "she," when talking with others when your loved one is in the room.
- **Show support with small gestures.** If you don't see the person with cancer every day, consider sending a quick email, hello text, leave a warm voice message, or drop a funny card in the mail.
- **Use professional resources when needed.** Those with serious changes in mood, worry, or irritability may benefit from mental health support and perhaps medication. Encourage your loved one to consult with the health care team about whether professional referrals might be appropriate. These referrals may be for counseling, support, or medication.
- **Take care of yourself.** Supporting your loved one can cause stress for you too. Remember to take breaks and reach out to others for support and assistance. Know your limits. Some people are more comfortable showing love and support through gestures rather than words.

# General Cancer Information, Survivorship & Support

**Cancer Support Community** • 888-793-9355 • [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org)

**American Cancer Society** • 800-227-2345 • [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**CancerCare** • 800-813-4673 • [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)

**Cancer.net** • 888-651-3038 • [www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net)

**Caregiver Action Network** • 855-227-3640 • [www.caregiveraction.org](http://www.caregiveraction.org)

**Healthcare.gov** • [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov)

**Livestrong Foundation** • 866-673-7205 • [www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)

**National Cancer Institute** • 800-422-6237 • [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

**National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine** • 888-644-6226 • [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)

**Patient Advocate Foundation** • 800-532-5274 • [www.patientadvocate.org](http://www.patientadvocate.org)

## Cancer Support Community Resources

**Cancer Support Community's** (CSC) resources and programs are available free of charge. Call 888-793-9355 or visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org) for more info.

**Cancer Support Helpline**® — Have questions, concerns or looking for resources? Call CSC's toll-free Cancer Support Helpline (888-793-9355), available in 200 languages Mon–Fri, 9 am–9 pm ET.

**Open to Options**® — Preparing for your next appointment? Our trained specialists can help you create a list of questions to share with your doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

**Frankly Speaking About Cancer**® — Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs. [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FranklySpeakingAboutCancer](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FranklySpeakingAboutCancer).

**Services at Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs** — With the help of 170 locations, CSC and Gilda's Club affiliates provide services free of charge to people touched by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more at a location near you. [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation).

**MyLifeLine** — CSC's private, online community allows patients and caregivers to easily connect with friends and family to receive social, emotional, and practical support throughout the cancer journey and beyond. Connect with other caregivers by joining the Caregiver Support online discussion board. Sign up at [www.MyLifeLine.org](http://www.MyLifeLine.org).

**Grassroots Network** — Make sure your voice is heard by federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Network at [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate).

**Cancer Experience Registry**® — Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at [www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org](http://www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org).

The Cancer Support Community provides this information as a service. This publication is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. We strongly suggest consulting your doctor or other health care professionals to answer questions and learn more.

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