

A cancer diagnosis can challenge even solid relationships. People with cancer often feel alone or that no one understands what they are going through. While their loved ones can feel helpless and unsure of what to say or do. It is common for relationships to be stressed as a result of cancer and treatment. However, you and your loved one can take steps to help with stressed relationships.

TAKE STEPS TO HELP WITH RELATIONSHIPS

- **Communication.** Pay attention to how you are communicating with each other. We often think that those who love us can anticipate our needs and wants. In reality, understanding comes from sharing our thoughts and feelings and listening to each other. Be honest with your loved one and ask them to do the same. Let them know if something is making you feel more isolated or adding to your stress. If you need to communicate a concern, try to avoid generalizations like “*You never...*” Instead, focus on using “I” statements that explain how the situation makes you feel. For example, “*When I see all the things that have to get done this week, I feel overwhelmed.*”
- **Shared expectations about roles and responsibilities.** People may experience changes in their relationship as a result of a cancer diagnosis. As a caregiver, it can be hard to anticipate when and how your loved would like support. Changes in roles may include housework, childcare, paying bills, working outside the home, or providing physical care. These changes can feel overwhelming. They can also cause feelings of sadness and loss for everyone involved. These changes can be especially difficult for people who are used to doing things independently. Many people with cancer feel guilty about not being able to do the things they used to do. When possible, try to find creative ways to keep your loved one involved. Talking about these changes and how they make you feel can help you to feel connected and less isolated.



www.CancerSupportCommunity.org

1-888-793-9355



- **Emotional wellness.** Emotional concerns can occur during the cancer experience and affect relationships with others. Some depression, anxiety, irritability, or worry are common with cancer treatment. Often these feelings resolve by themselves. Take note if these feelings interfere with daily life and relationships or if they last for a majority of your days. Talk to a health care team, counselor, or other trusted professional to find support options.
- **For spouses/partners.** If you are caring for your spouse or partner, try to make time to be together and do something fun as a couple. Spending time together doesn't have to mean spending money or leaving the house. Physical closeness with your partner can be a meaningful part of intimate relationships. Touch, holding hands, or a hug can create feelings of connection. Physical contact can help lessen

your sense of isolation and improve your sense of well-being. A cancer diagnosis and its treatment can also affect sexuality. Concerns about physical appearance, depression, fatigue, and other side effects can lower sex drive or make sex difficult. Both partners may worry about their sexual relationship but may be reluctant to talk about their feelings. Tell your partner how you feel and try to find ways to maintain intimacy. You can maintain intimacy through gentle touching, kissing, and physical closeness.

Please know that many people and their loved ones are able to navigate cancer and its treatment well. As in any relationship, there will be ups and downs. If you'd like to seek counseling for you and your partner, talk with your health care team for help finding support.

General Cancer Information, Survivorship & Support

Cancer Support Community • 888-793-9355 • www.CancerSupportCommunity.org

American Cancer Society • 800-227-2345 • www.cancer.org

CancerCare • 800-813-4673 • www.cancercare.org

Cancer.net • 888-651-3038 • www.cancer.net

Caregiver Action Network • 855-227-3640 • www.caregiveraction.org

Healthcare.gov • www.healthcare.gov

Livestrong Foundation • 866-673-7205 • www.livestrong.org

National Cancer Institute • 800-422-6237 • www.cancer.gov

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine • 888-644-6226 • www.nccam.nih.gov

Patient Advocate Foundation • 800-532-5274 • 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 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.

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.

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.

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.

Cancer Experience Registry® — Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at 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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