

# Supporting Cancer Caregivers

Community Health Workers (CHWs) can play an essential role in supporting individuals and families impacted by cancer, including caregivers. This Quick Guide is designed to help CHWs:

**1** Provide high-quality navigation and resources to cancer caregivers.

**2** Empower caregivers to care for both themselves and their loved one.

“ People talk about a caregiver, but you don’t really know what a caregiver is until you’re really in that role...I learned that a caregiver wears many hats: listener, observer, protector, planner, anticipator, the backup brain to the patient, the organizer, the strong one, the levelheaded one...I quickly realized that I could not do it all and that I needed help.”

***Sheri, Former cancer caregiver for a close friend***

Cancer affects not only the person diagnosed, but also those who love and care for them. On average, caregivers spend 8 hours per day providing care [1]. Caregiving for a loved one with cancer is a responsibility shaped by many factors, including:

- The type of cancer
- Stage of disease
- Side effects
- Relationship with the patient

A caregiver’s physical, emotional, and social well-being is just as important as the patient’s. Supporting caregivers strengthens the entire cancer care team.

## A NOTE ON LANGUAGE:

Some people say caregiver, others say care partner or support person. There’s no right or wrong word.

Use the term that feels best to you or the person you're helping.



For caregiver information and support, visit CSC’s [webpage for cancer caregivers](#) and use the resources at the back of this guide.

[1] Reinhard SC, Given B, Petlick NH, et al. Supporting Family Caregivers in Providing Care. In: Hughes RG, editor. Patient Safety and Quality: An Evidence-Based Handbook for Nurses. Rockville (MD): Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (US); 2008 Apr. Chapter 14. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK2665/>

## COMMON QUESTIONS FROM NEW CAREGIVERS

Caregivers stepping into this role often ask:

- **What should I do now? Where do I start?**
- **How can I help?**
- **Can I manage this with my other responsibilities?**
- **Will I find time for myself?**
- **Why us? Why is this happening?**

CHWs can play a vital role in listening to the patients and caregivers' concerns and helping to address these questions and provide reassurance.

“Caring for caregivers starts with listening. Often, they carry invisible burdens while pouring everything into their loved one's care. As CHWs, we can offer not just resources, but reassurance that their well-being matters too.”

**Shanika Frazier,**  
**CHW at CSC Central Ohio**



## HERE ARE 9 TIPS YOU CAN USE TO BETTER HELP CANCER CAREGIVERS IN FINDING BALANCE, SUPPORT, AND CONNECTION:

### 1 Help caregivers find support.

Caregivers can often feel alone. It can be difficult for them to talk to their loved ones about their feelings when they both are going through this shared and challenging experience. A support system can be key for a cancer caregiver's well-being. Encourage cancer caregivers to:

- Talk with other caregivers who are going through the same thing
- Join a caregiver support group
- Visit a CSC or Gilda's Club location for free programs and resources

#### DID YOU KNOW?

We have 200 support locations worldwide that offer professionally led programs like support groups, yoga classes, and educational workshops, all free of charge for cancer patients, survivors, caregivers, and family members. Find a support location near you. [Find a CSC or Gilda's Club location near you](#)



## 2 Help caregivers access and organize information.

Knowledge is power. Having the right knowledge and information can help caregivers support their loved one's needs and help them know what to expect. CHWs can help empower cancer caregivers by:

- Sharing trusted resources, like **CSC's educational materials**
- Telling them about CSC's free Cancer Support Helpline: Call 888-793-9355 or use **the live chat online**
- Sharing helpful videos on the basics of cancer caregiving, like this one, **Cancer Caregiving 101**



## 3 Help caregivers normalize the change in everyday life.

Cancer changes daily life for everyone. Help caregivers to acknowledge that their home life, finances, and friendships may change for a period of time. Sometimes the laundry might not get done, or maybe takeout will replace home cooking. Encourage cancer caregivers to try to manage each day's priority as it comes.

CHWs can help caregivers:

- **Create new routines**
- **Focus on what they can control**
- **Know that it's okay if things feel different**



## 4 Help cancer caregivers find a balance.

Caregivers still need to take time for themselves. Remind them to:



Talk to friends or other cancer caregivers



Do things that spark joy



Take breaks from caregiving with movement or self-care activities



## 5 Support practical planning.

Uncertainty is a common feeling among caregivers and people with cancer. It's hard to know what the future holds, but planning where it's possible can help. CHWs can:

- Help caregivers plan transportation to and from appointments
- Talk about paperwork, like wills and healthcare decisions
- Encourage caregivers and their loved one to celebrate small wins

## 6 Encourage asking for and accepting help.

Let caregivers know that it's okay to ask for help. Caregivers don't have to do it all, or alone. CHWs can suggest:

- Making a list of things others can help with (meals, rides, errands)
- Using an online tool to organize help, like [CSC's digital support community MyLifeLine](#)

**Tip:** Help a caregiver make a list of all the patient's doctors and their contact information.



# 7

## Remind caregivers to take care of their own health.

In order to be strong for your loved one, caregivers need to take care of themselves, too. Caregivers often forget to care for themselves. It's easy for them to lose sight of their own health while focused on their loved one. CHWs can remind caregivers to:

- See their own doctor for annual check-ups
- Eat healthy foods and drink water
- Get enough sleep
- Stay on top of their own **cancer screenings**

*Taking care of yourself is not selfish. It keeps you strong.*



# 8

## Teach caregivers simple ways to promote self-care and manage stress.

It can be easy to feel overwhelmed by the tasks of caregiving. CHWs can help caregivers notice how they handle stress and teach them small ways to cope. Activities like meditation, guided imagery, and healing therapies such as art, music, or dance can all help reduce stress. Small breaks are another easy way to replenish energy and lower stress. Even 10 minutes to breathe, walk, or sit quietly can help.



Visit CSC's [Virtual Home](#) and discover healthy recipes, ways to relax the mind and body, and educational videos specific to cancer caregivers.

# 9

## Encourage realistic goals.

Remind caregivers that no one can do everything. Let them know:

- **It's okay to acknowledge what you can and cannot handle on your own**
- **It's okay to feel overwhelmed**
- **It's okay to ask for help**

“We're all human, and at some point, you've got to find your own outlet, something that you lean on.”

**CSC blog: "This Pageant Queen Is Shedding a Light on Cancer Caregiving"**

**Cassie,  
Long-distance caregiver**





In using these tips, CHWs can play a critical role in preventing caregiver burnout, enhancing well-being, and ultimately improving outcomes for both caregivers and the cancer patients they support.

CSC's **CHW Oncology-focused Training Program** is for community health workers who are interested in gaining skills and knowledge to better assist members of their community impacted by cancer. The program provides free cancer-specific educational resources and intentional opportunities for CHWs to share best practices and build peer connections.



Visit our **[CHW website](#)** to learn more about the program and to access free CHW resources.

**CANCER SUPPORT COMMUNITY CAREGIVER RESOURCES****Navigating Cancer: Caregivers**

[www.cancersupportcommunity.org/caregivers](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/caregivers)

**10 Tips for Caregivers**

[www.cancersupportcommunity.org/blog/10-tips-caregivers](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/blog/10-tips-caregivers)

**Coping With Caregiving Demands**

[www.cancersupportcommunity.org/coping-caregiving-demands](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/coping-caregiving-demands)

**Voices of Caregiving**

[www.cancersupportcommunity.org/voices-our-community#voices-of-caregiving](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/voices-our-community#voices-of-caregiving)

**Remember Your Needs as Caregiver**

[www.cancersupportcommunity.org/article/remember-your-needs-caregiver](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/article/remember-your-needs-caregiver)

**Coping with Mental Health Concerns**

[www.cancersupportcommunity.org/coping-mental-health-concerns](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/coping-mental-health-concerns)

**Cancer Screenings**

[www.cancersupportcommunity.org/screening-prevention](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/screening-prevention)

**CAREGIVER RESOURCES**

**Caregiver Action Network** - 855.227.3640 | [www.CaregiverAction.org](http://www.CaregiverAction.org)

**National Alliance for Caregiving** - 202.918.1013 | [www.Caregiving.org](http://www.Caregiving.org)

**Family Caregiver Alliance** - 800.445.8106 | [www.Caregiver.org](http://www.Caregiver.org)

**American Cancer Society** - 800.227.2345 | [www.Cancer.org](http://www.Cancer.org)

**The Caregiver Cup Podcast** - [thecaregivercup.buzzsprout.com/1403230](http://thecaregivercup.buzzsprout.com/1403230)

**Confessions of a Reluctant Caregiver Podcast** - [www.confessionsofareluctantcaregiver.com/](http://www.confessionsofareluctantcaregiver.com/)

**MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES**

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** - 1.800.950.NAMI (6264) | [www.NAMI.org/Help](http://www.NAMI.org/Help)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

- **Mental Health Resources** - [www.SAMHSA.gov/find-support](http://www.SAMHSA.gov/find-support)
- **Helpline** - 1.800.662.HELP (4357) (call; English & Spanish)

**National Suicide Prevention Hotline (U.S)** - 800.273.8255 or 988 (text or call)

**Suicide Prevention Service (Canada)** - 833.456.4566 or text 45645



## Cancer Support Community Resources

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### Cancer Support Community

1-888-793-9355

[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org)

### 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, or visit our website to chat.

[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/cancer-support-helpline](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/cancer-support-helpline)

### Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs

With the help of nearly 200 locations, CSC and Gilda's Club affiliates provide services free of charge to people impacted by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more:

[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation-Near-You](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation-Near-You)

### Frankly Speaking about Cancer®

Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs. <https://orders.cancersupportcommunity.org/>

### MyLifeLine®

CSC's online community welcomes anyone impact by cancer to easily connect with others. Create a personal network site and invite friends & family to follow your journey. Participate in our discussion forums to meet others who understand what you are experiencing.

[www.MyLifeLine.org](http://www.MyLifeLine.org)

### Open to Options®

Helping a patient prepare for their next appointment? Our trained specialists can help create a list of questions to share with a doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

### Cancer Experience Registry®

Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey. [www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org](http://www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org)

### Grassroots Network

Share your voice with federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Grassroots Network.

[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Become-Advocate](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Become-Advocate)

### Other Professional Organizations

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**Academy of Oncology Nurse and Patient Navigators (AONN+)** <https://aonnonline.org/>

**National Comprehensive Cancer Network**  
[www.nccn.org](http://www.nccn.org)

**National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship**  
[www.canceradvocacy.org](http://www.canceradvocacy.org)

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