

Offering Support

How can I be supportive?

Remember that the person you know with cancer may find it hard to ask for help or seem weak or vulnerable. Telling a person, “You’re so brave,” or “You’re so strong,” can put pressure on them to act strong when they may not feel up to it. Families can put subtle pressure on people with cancer by expecting or needing them to be strong all the time. In that case, you might play an important role for a friend who has cancer. They may know you well and trust you enough to confide in you, yet you don’t have the emotional attachment and expectations of a family member. This kind of relationship can be a great gift for a person facing cancer.

It’s human nature to distance yourself from someone when they become ill. Cancer can force us to look at our own fears about illness, weakness, or death. This may make us reluctant to interact with the affected person. But isolation can be a problem for people with cancer. Make an extra effort to reach out.

If your friend needs medical equipment or money for treatment, you can look into getting something donated or organize a raffle to help raise money. Or you can simply take up a collection to buy something that might not be covered by insurance.

The person with cancer may look to you for advice regarding financial worries, work issues, or other concerns. Be honest. Help if you can, but if you feel uncomfortable, say so. There are many places a person can get help and support, and you might suggest seeking the advice of a professional who is best suited to give that kind of guidance.

Keep in mind too that those close to the person with cancer will also need help and support. A family member who is responsible for the care of the cancer patient can become isolated and stressed. If you know that person, you may want to check in to see how they are doing, too. They might also be able to share ideas about how you can best help the person with cancer.

What are some concrete ways I can help?

Communication is the key. Continue to treat your friend as normally as possible. Talk about how they’re managing and what they need. But don’t feel that you always have to talk about cancer. Include them in activities and social events. If they aren’t up to doing something, let them be the one to decide to say no. Keep inviting them unless they tell you otherwise.

Ask what they could use; let them tell you what would be most helpful. Offer to help in specific ways, rather than saying, “Call me if I can help.” Here are some ideas:

- Send or prepare a meal. Arrange a schedule of meal delivery.
- Offer to help with child care. Arrange a schedule of day care pick-ups.
- Offer a ride to and from treatment appointments.

- Help run errands.
- Offer to take phone calls if your friend is feeling tired and needs to rest.
- Coordinate visits by groups, or coordinate sending cards, flowers, or gifts.
- Honor your friend by making contributions to related charities, organizing blood drives, or making special efforts in their name.
- Offer to do some research on their unanswered questions about cancer, or refer them to the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345.
- If the person agrees, plan a party when treatment is finished or on anniversary dates. Always check with the person with cancer before making party plans, including showing them the list of those to be invited.



Because Everyone's Journey IS Different

NOTE: This document is from the American Cancer Society and is taken from www.cancer.org