

How to Help Someone Diagnosed With Cancer

No two people who get cancer ever react identically, nor do their family and friends. Each person must be allowed to cope with cancer in his own way. Your role should be to support the person in whatever way necessary.

Step One

Lighten a cancer patient's emotional burden by just being there.

Step Two

Avoid the "everything will be all right" attitude. He understands that everything may not turn out all right, and false cheeriness is not what is needed.

Step Three

Emphasize any "good news" portions of the diagnosis. It's OK to dwell on a positive test result, or a promising treatment option mentioned by the doctor.

Step Four

Prepare to change roles or play new ones. If a husband has been diagnosed with cancer, he may not be up to continuing all of his usual duties. Allow him to be vulnerable, and not always feel the need to be in control and strong.

Step Five

Be a patient's advocate, if he so desires. Do research about the cancer; scout out cancer specialists; learn everything there is to know about the type of cancer he has and its treatments.

Step Six

Access your local library for medical reference books. Go online, searching sites such as Johns Hopkins Medical Center, the Cleveland Clinic and the Mayo Clinic.

Step Seven

Write down his questions and bring them to the attention of the oncologist at the next appointment. If the doctor is too busy, ask a nurse. The nurse has constant access to the doctor, and will be sure to follow up with your questions and concerns.

Step Eight

Help with the mundane, everyday tasks of life or contact **Continuum** to help. Meals and evenings can be especially lonely and anxiety-provoking. Be there or have someone be there to wash dishes, sort laundry, and help pay bills.

Step Nine

Know when to seek extra help. Sometimes your presence and support won't be enough. You may want to ask the patient's minister or rabbi, the hospital's social worker, or a cancer survivor to stop by the home and offer counsel. You may also want to schedule some in-home assistance from an agency. **Continuum** can provide assistance from a few hours to 24 hours a day should extra help be needed.

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12882 Manchester Rd • Ste. 201 • St. Louis, MO 63131
(314) 863-9912 • (636) 861-3336
info@ContinuumCare.com
ContinuumCare.com