

# What Can I Say to a Newly Diagnosed Loved One?

**People do better emotionally in a crisis when they have strong support from friends and family members. However, if one of your friends or loved ones has been diagnosed with cancer, you might be having a difficult time knowing what to say or do. This fact sheet discusses:**

- Advice on how to think about your first thoughts and reactions
- Ways to remain supportive of your loved one
- Thoughts about your loved one's caregivers



## Think About Your First Reactions

You are likely to have your own strong feelings when you first learn about the cancer. Try to balance your own thoughts with ways to be present and helpful to your loved one.

**Listen.** This can be challenging when a loved one faces a life-threatening diagnosis. Try to listen without judging and without “cheerleading.” This means not saying “everything will be alright” or denying your loved one their own reactions. Let them lead the way.

**Educate yourself about cancer.** CancerCare and other organizations have helpful literature and user-friendly websites with up-to-date information about diagnoses, cancer treatments, side effects and other related concerns.

**Give advice only when you are asked.** Even after you learn about the cancer diagnosis, you are not an expert. Your loved one's health care team will give them the information they need to make strong decisions. Try not to say “You ought to try this” or “You should do that.” Help only when needed.

**Support your loved one's treatment decisions.** While you may be in a position to share decision-making, ultimately it is your loved one's body and spirit that bear the impact of the cancer. They may ask for advice, but in the end the decisions are theirs.



## How to Remain Supportive of Your Loved One

**Stay connected.** Cancer treatment can take a long time. People with cancer often say that friends and family “don’t call anymore” after the initial crisis of diagnosis. Checking in regularly over the long haul can be very meaningful for the person living with cancer.

**Be there.** Think about how you’ve helped each other feel better during a difficult time in the past. This could be something as simple as sitting with your loved one during treatments. Do whatever works for you both, and don’t be afraid to try something new.

**Keep things normal.** Often, we try to make life easier by “doing things” for the person who is sick. It is a way of feeling useful when we are unsure what to do. However, some people may want to do normal activities they always would. They may just want to talk about ordinary things.

**Prepare for the end of treatment.** People sometimes process the heaviness of what they have been through only when it is over. While your loved one may no longer need help getting through treatment, they may still feel sadness, guilt or other strong emotions.



## Remember Your Loved One’s Caregivers

Being a caregiver for someone with cancer can be very difficult. This can be their spouse, partner, parent, or adult child. They often take on tasks like taking them to treatment, arranging appointments, and giving care and emotional support.

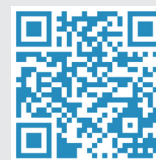
In many cases, they may need to do everyday chores, both for the person who is sick and for themselves. These are things you might be able to do in order to help them, but ask first. They may be grateful, but will let you know if and when you are needed. They may also simply like to talk about their feelings.

### CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include resource navigation, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master’s-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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