

# HELPING A COLLEAGUE COPE WITH CANCER IN THE WORKPLACE

**When a colleague is diagnosed with cancer, your support can make a meaningful difference. But how can you help while respecting your colleague's wishes and personal boundaries?**

## HOW TO BE SUPPORTIVE IN THE WORKPLACE

**Listen.** Rather than avoiding conversations, be open to hearing your colleague's medical news and feelings. Take the time to listen without judgment and take your cues from them about which topics are okay to discuss.

### **Keep your conversations confidential.**

After a colleague living with cancer opens up to you, be sure to keep that conversation private. This will build and maintain trust. If your colleague wants to share information about their diagnosis with others, remember this is their decision.

**Strive to maintain a normal relationship.** While continuing to offer understanding and support to your colleague, aim to treat them as you normally would and avoid giving them special treatment.

## WHAT TO SAY AND WHAT NOT TO SAY

Be mindful about what you say to your colleague. Here are a few tips:

### **Try to Avoid the Following:**

- **"Everything will be fine."** Try to avoid giving the person a sense of false hope.
- **"I know what you're going through."** While this sounds sympathetic, keep in mind that everyone's cancer experience is different.
- **Saying nothing.** It is difficult to watch someone you care about cope with a cancer diagnosis. It's okay to tell the person that you're thinking about them and wishing them well.

### **Do Say the Following:**

- **"How are you doing today?"** This is a simple but great way to engage your colleague.
- **"Count me in to help out."** Helping out with practical concerns can be a meaningful and impactful way to support a colleague.
- **"I'm here for you."** Reassuring your colleague that you will be there for them when they need you is comforting.

## HELPING YOUR COLLEAGUE WITH PRACTICAL CONCERNS

**Show support while respecting your colleague's boundaries.** If your colleague is taking time off work for treatment, send them a thoughtful card. With their permission, consider visiting your colleague in the hospital. Having a sense of community can go a long way for a person coping with cancer.



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**Ask how you can help and be specific with tasks.** Some of the easiest routines in daily life become much more difficult after a cancer diagnosis. Offering to take over a routine task such as making an extra lunch or picking up their laundry can help relieve stress and let your colleague get much-needed rest.

**Show support while respecting your colleague's boundaries.** It can be helpful to make your colleague aware of local resources. One way to find local resources in your area is through CancerCare's Online Helping Hand Database or by calling our Hopeline at 1-800-813-HOPE to speak with an oncology social worker.

## WORKPLACE RESOURCES

### Cancer and Careers

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

### Cancer Legal Resource Center

866-843-2572

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

### LawHelp.org

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



## 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 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 professional 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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*Edited by Caroline Edlund, MSW, LCSW-R*



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National Office • 275 Seventh Avenue • New York, NY 10001

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