

# HOW TO SUPPORT A LOVED ONE OR FRIEND WITH CANCER

Showing someone who has cancer how much you care can be difficult. It's not always easy to know what to say or do, when to check in or how to continue offering support after treatment ends. We asked our mind-body counselors at [Goshen Center for Cancer Care](#) to share their best suggestions on how to express care and support for someone who has cancer. Here's what Rita Gingrich and Bethany Swope recommend.

## 10 ways to show you care

### 1. Find the right fit

Be flexible when it comes to showing you care. Supportive actions that feel right one day may change the next. "It's not one-size-fits-all," according to Gingrich, a licensed clinical social worker. Your best approach is to take cues from your friend or loved one every step of the way. Be aware of where they are in the treatment process, what the treatment is like and how they feel day-to-day.

### 2. Listen without fixing

You don't need to say all the right words, or even any words, to show you care, reminds Gingrich. Just be present. Let your friend or coworker know you are ready to share a quiet moment or give them time to be heard. Your calm presence and willingness to listen send a message of acceptance.

### 3. Cope with the unknowns

Forced optimism can ring hollow for someone with cancer. Instead of saying, "Everything will be OK," recognize that your friend or loved one will experience many emotions as they learn to live with a cancer diagnosis. Listen to how they describe their feelings and abilities to cope. It's their body, their disease, their take on the whole experience.

### 4. Hear to help

It's hard for someone going through cancer treatment to think about what others can do to help. Instead of waiting to be asked, make an offer. Suggest cleaning their kitchen while they are in treatment. Or offer a playdate at the park with kids or pets. Be specific and be ready to hear, "yes, that would be helpful," or "no thanks, not right now."

### 5. Save the advice

Cancer is different in each person. No matter how many people with cancer you know, every journey is unique. Listen to how your loved one or friend describes the journey. And save the comparisons or oversharing for a different conversation.

### 6. Stop the search

You may think a quick look online about a type of cancer or treatment can help. Don't do it. Or if you do, resist temptation to give advice. "If what you want to say has the word 'should' in it, it's probably not going to be helpful," says Swope, a licensed marriage and family therapist. Instead, focus on listening to your friend or loved one and respecting their treatment choices.

## 7. Say something

You may be at a loss for words. That's understandable. It's OK to say, "I don't know what to say." Or instead of asking, "How are you," say, "It's nice to see you" or "I've been thinking about you." Questions about how someone is feeling can be tricky to answer when they are in the midst of cancer treatment. A simple greeting lets your friend or loved one know you care.

## 8. Support beyond treatment

It takes time for the body to adjust after cancer treatment. For many, it's a new normal. That may mean living with side effects or anxiety about recurrence. It may take time to regain energy or adjust to a new body image. Let your loved one or friend know you care by continuing to listen. It's the best way to understand the role a cancer journey will play in life beyond treatment.

## 9. Continue the journey

Every milestone is important in life. Be aware of big and small landmarks, like follow-up appointment dates and survivor anniversaries, suggests Swope. Offer support based on what you know. That may mean being on hand after scans or tests as your loved one or friend processes challenging news or celebrates good results.

## 10. Reach out for help

Resources are available to help cope with stress and anxiety related to a cancer diagnosis and treatment. Patients who continue their follow-up care at Goshen Center for Cancer Care can take advantage of integrative therapies throughout survivorship. Family members or caregivers also are welcome in the Goshen Cancer Survivor Network and support groups. These programs link survivors together for strength, encouragement, support and hope throughout every step of the cancer journey.

# Holistic services available to patients

**Mind-body healing** teaches how to better cope with the rigors of a cancer diagnosis and treatment.

**Naturopathic medicine** stimulates the body's natural healing process, supports the immune system and identifies and removes obstacles that hinder recovery.

**Acupuncture therapy** offers a relatively painless way to reduce the side effects of traditional cancer treatment and maximize the body's response to treatment.

**Nutrition therapy** helps develop a nutrition plan specifically for each person's condition.

**Supportive services** offer ways to cope with the effects of cancer on patients and caregivers.



For more information about how to care for someone you know with cancer, call (888) 492-HOPE.