

Avoid

- giving advice that hasn't been asked for
- pushing your own beliefs
- saying “don't worry”, “stay positive”, “you'll be fine” or “stay strong”
- sharing details of the situation with others
- using words like victim, battler or survivor.

Further information and support

Cancer Council Helpline: 13 11 20

www.cancercouncil.com.au

www.cancer.net

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Supporting Someone With Cancer

What Might They Be Experiencing?



When someone you know has cancer

Finding out that someone you know has cancer can be difficult. You might want to talk to them about what they are experiencing and/or offer support, but are unsure about what to say. You might feel worried about saying the wrong thing. This is normal.

What can happen

Everyone is different, but there are common physical and emotional changes that people with cancer experience. Some changes are due to the cancer itself, other changes may be the result of cancer treatment.

Possible physical changes

- appetite loss or increase
- weight loss or gain
- poor concentration
- loss or change in sense of smell and/or taste
- nausea and vomiting
- fatigue
- sleep problems
- loss or change in skin and lip colour.

Possible emotional changes

- anger
- resentment
- sadness
- a sense of a lack of control
- guilt
- fear
- loneliness
- mood swings.

Ways to help

Ask if it is ok before visiting or asking questions and let them know it is fine to say “no”.

Be **available** to listen. Sometimes being a good listener is all that is needed.

Don't be **afraid** to talk. It's better to say “I don't know what to say” than to stop phoning or visiting because you feel awkward.

Talk about **everyday** topics. It's often refreshing NOT to talk about the disease.

Stay **connected**. Continue social event invitations giving the option of declining or cancelling, even at the last minute.

Allow for sadness. Don't ignore uncomfortable topics or feelings.

Treat them as **normally** as you can. The illness hasn't changed who they are.

Send a card, flowers, or a gift at any time (eg. But not just immediately after diagnosis or treatment) to show your thoughts and that you care.

Practical help

Rather than saying “ring me if you need help”, offer to help with specific tasks. Ask what would be the most useful assistance. For example:

- walking the dog
- grocery shopping
- looking after/picking up the kids
- transport to appointments
- providing meals.

