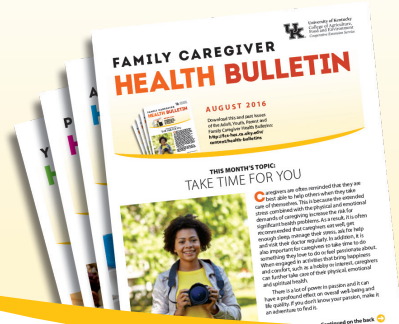




# FAMILY CAREGIVER

# HEALTH BULLETIN



**FEBRUARY 2019**

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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# WHEN SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS CANCER



**L**earning of a cancer diagnosis can cause a whirl of emotions and questions. What should I say? How should I act? How did this happen? What will happen next? When someone you know has cancer, it can be a worrisome and stressful time for family, friends, and caregivers. One thing you can do, according to the American Cancer Society (2018) is to learn about the disease and talk about it.

### People with cancer might change physically and emotionally

According to the American Cancer Society (2018), cancer is unpredictable. As a result, it is important to be prepared for people to have good days and bad days. Rule one for living with or being around someone with cancer is learning

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# Showing concern and expressing encouragement comes in all shapes and sizes, including being a good listener.

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to live with the roller coaster of changes. Some changes are caused by the cancer and others might be the result of side effects from medications or treatments (American Cancer Society, 2018).

Adjusting to life with loss, which can include what was lost to the cancer such as health, energy and time, can be challenging. The American Cancer Society (2018) stresses that you will adjust and be able to find a new normal. Support groups and mental health professionals can also help you deal with change.

### What to do or say when someone you love has cancer

Showing concern and expressing encouragement comes in all shapes and sizes, including being a good listener. It is best when sentiments and actions come from the heart. Do not provide false optimism, and do not discount a person's true concerns and feelings, like fear, sadness, and anger. (American Cancer Society, 2018).

Some appropriate things to say include (The American Cancer Society, 2018):

- "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care."
- "I'm sorry to hear that you are going through this."
- "How are you doing?"
- "If you would like to talk about it, I'm here."
- "I'll keep you in my thoughts."

Consider using humor to help relieve some of the tension and stress, but when doing so, let the person with cancer set the stage, and be sure he or she can handle and appreciate it. When the person looks good, tell them! Compliments make us feel good.

Treat the person as normally as possible. Don't feel like you always have to talk about the cancer. Instead, continue activities and social events as much as the person feels like it or until they tell you otherwise (American Cancer Society, 2018).

Rather than asking if someone needs help (because most people won't ask for it), offer to help in specific ways (American Cancer Society, 2018):

- **Send or prepare a meal.** Arrange a meal delivery schedule.
- **Offer to help with child care.** Arrange a schedule of day care pickups.
- **Offer a ride** to and from treatment appointments.
- Help run errands.
- **Offer to take their phone calls** if they are tired and need to rest.
- **Coordinate visits** by groups, or coordinate sending cards, flowers, or gifts.
- **Honor them** by making contributions to related charities, organizing blood drives, or making special efforts in their name.
- **Welcome them back to work** with something on their desk to show that people missed them. Invite them to out lunch.
- **Offer to do some research** on their unanswered questions about cancer, or refer them to the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345.
- **Plan a party** when treatment is finished or on anniversary dates. Always check with them first before making party plans, including showing them the list of guests.

It is normal to feel sorry for someone with cancer or to feel guilty that you are healthy. When people you care about are sick or suffering, we don't like to see it because it might remind us of our own mortality and make us uncomfortable or anxious. But rather than avoid it or distance yourself from a person with cancer (which many people do), turn your feelings into support and encouragement and treat the person as normally as possible (American Cancer Society, 2018). If you need help, seek a mental health counselor or support group for yourself.

#### REFERENCE:

American Cancer Society. (2018). When someone you know has cancer. Retrieved 12/5/18 from <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/talking-about-cancer/when-someone-you-know-has-cancer.html>

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Written by: Amy F. Kostelic, Ph.D.  
Edited by: Alyssa Simms  
Designed by: Rusty Manseau  
Stock images: 123RF.com

