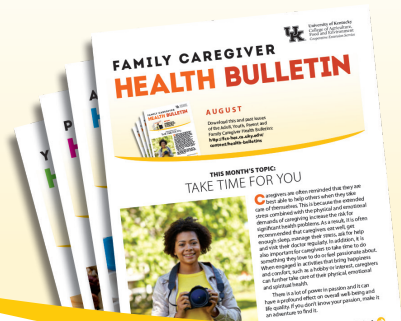




University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service

FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



APRIL 2022

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: CANCER ETIQUETTE



Many of us have been touched by cancer. Some of us may be a cancer survivor, or we may know someone who is battling it or has even been lost to this terrible disease. We may be a caregiver to someone living with cancer. Knowing what to say to someone who has been diagnosed with cancer can be hard. Talking to someone with cancer often creates fears of saying something inappropriate or making the person upset. As a result, people often talk in whispers or say nothing at all. Based on feedback from people living with cancer, the Cancer Treatment Centers of America encourages people to do and say things because

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Disabilities
accommodated
with prior notification.

Before you speak, think about what language is appropriate for the person to whom you are speaking.

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to remain silent can cause further isolation. They developed the following “cancer etiquette” or rules of conduct for communicating with the cancer community to help you talk to someone who has cancer. It is important to remember that each person’s experience with cancer is unique, even those with the same type of cancer. Therefore, the same words or approach may not work for everyone. The American Cancer Society emphasizes that it is important for you to talk and act in a way that feels most comfortable to you so that you can sincerely express care, concern, encouragement, and support.

- **Stay connected.** Be there. Be available. When someone has cancer, they need you. Turn any awkward or uncomfortable feelings into support through words AND actions.
- **Choose words wisely.** Sometimes to inspire, we use cliches that might unwind emotions, morale, or attitude. Before you speak, think about language you would want to hear, and what language is appropriate for the person to whom you are speaking as they might not be comforted by the same words as you.
- **Avoid talking about yourself too much.** Remember that the person living with cancer needs their energy to fight cancer, not worry or comfort you.
- **Laugh, but use humor carefully.** Laughter is a healthy form of stress relief and can be welcomed in tough situations. But laughter is not everyone’s approach to coping. Let the person with cancer take the lead. It’s better to join them in laughter than joke about a situation that is not well-received.
- **Act normal.** Share stories, talk about the cancer, if you hugged or joked before the cancer, then keep doing so if this does not cause pain.
- **Listen.** Hear what the person is saying. Concentrate and process their words. Do not interrupt. Be empathic. You do not have to have answers.
- **Do not minimize a person’s experience.** Every cancer and cancer experience are unique. Do not downplay what someone is going

through or compare. Encourage the person to talk about their experience. Instead of telling them they will be fine, say you are “sorry” or that you “hope” or “pray” it will be OK.

- **Follow their lead and respect privacy.** Some people will want to talk, others will remain private. Some people need a break from cancer and want to talk about something other than the disease. It is not your job to talk about their cancer journey unless you are asked to share.
- **Be considerate.** Be sure the person knows you care and are interested, but let them tell you certain details versus asking invasive questions about the stage of cancer or number of tumors.
- **Make someone living with cancer feel needed and/or important.** Just because someone has cancer does not mean that they cannot do anything or provide advice. Help them find purpose and meaning.
- **Share encouraging stories.** Connect people to positive stories that can be inspiring. Avoid stories with unhappy endings.
- **Mean what you say.** Only say what you mean. If you mean it, tell a person that they look beautiful or stronger, for example.
- **Be honest.** You may not be an expert in cancer. It is OK to tell the person that you do not have experience with this ... or that you are scared.
- **Show respect.** Even if you disagree, it is important to respect a person’s wishes and decisions.

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HEALTH BULLETIN

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