



Talking with Someone who has Cancer

Tips from Cancer CAREpoint

- **Say simple things like: “I’m here for you” or “I’m thinking of you”** if you don’t know what to say. It is better to try and connect and be supportive than to let the person feel alone and ignored.
 - Stay in touch throughout treatment and beyond. The person with cancer will continue to need support and will appreciate your willingness to go through this process with them.
- **Be an active listener.** Tune in and pay attention to what the cancer patient is saying; keep eye contact and focus on them. Often the best thing you can do for the patient is to create a safe space to share feelings and experiences.
- **Offer to complete tasks** by being concrete and specific about what you can do.
 - An example would be to say “I would like to bring you dinner this week. I can do this on Wednesday or Thursday. Do either of those days work? And what is your (or your family’s) favorite food?” rather than saying “Let me know if I can bring dinner sometime”.
- **Let the person with cancer guide the conversation.** A cancer patient may want to talk about everyday things, like new movies or great books, rather than talk about their cancer or treatment. Honor your relationship with that person by doing things you have always done. Don’t ask questions you wouldn’t have asked before and don’t assume they want to share details about their treatment.

Other things to consider:

- Avoid comparisons – everyone has their own experience with cancer. It’s generally not helpful for you to share other experiences you’ve heard about or your own experiences, unless specifically asked.
- If they want your input or suggestions they will ask – keep it about them and not about you
- Their caregiver(s) will need support too, it is okay to ask caregivers how you can support them

Some helpful resources:

www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/talking-with-family-and-friends/talking-about-cancer/talking-with-someone-who-has-cancer

There is no Good Card for This: What to Say and Do when Life is Scary, Awful and Unfair to People You Love - Kelsey Crowe PhD and Emily McDowell

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