

Talking with Friends and Family About Cancer

A cancer diagnosis is an emotional event for you and for those who care about you. Talking about it can help you and your loved ones adjust. This sheet offers some tips.



Why talk about cancer?

Cancer brings changes and uncertainty. This can include physical changes and emotional stress. There is no way to know what will happen.

Cancer care experts suggest involving family and friends early in the process. Cancer treatment and recovery can take years. Sharing with those closest to you can help you cope. They can also help you make decisions along the way.

Sharing with your support system

Here are some things to keep in mind when talking about cancer with your family.

Be honest and open with your spouse or partner. Everyone reacts differently and needs time to adjust. The two of you may not feel the same way at the same time. This is normal. Try to work as a team when making decisions about care and treatment.

Let your care team help. Your care team can help you decide what to say to different people in your life, and when.

My cancer counselor's name and phone number or e-mail address:

Talk to your children about your cancer. They may be upset, fearful, or curious. Let them talk about their feelings, and be honest about yours. Tell them what they can do to help you.



Tips for talking with young children.

- Use the word “cancer” and other simple terms.
- Tell them they did not cause it in any way.




Tips for talking with teens.

- Teens may need time to absorb information. Share information with them gradually.
- For tips on talking with teens go to **Cancer.net**.

Let your friends know what you need and what you are comfortable with. Ask them to be flexible. Your energy level, mood, and interest in activities may change.

Friends may not be sure what is OK to talk with you about. You can guide them:

- Let them know if it is OK to talk about cancer and your treatment.
- Tell them if you would rather talk about other things.

 Write down things you want to say to family or friends.



Getting help and support

Use your support system when you need help. Check the boxes next to all the ways you would like people to help you.

Help with daily or weekly tasks

- Examples: preparing meals, childcare, housework, or transportation.
- Let people sign up to help on a website like www.carecalendar.org or www.mealtrain.com

Keeping people informed


- Ask someone close to you to provide updates to extended family and friends.
- Update many people with one post on a website like www.caringbridge.org or www.posthope.org.

Help with medical issues

- Ask a friend or family member to go with you to appointments or tests.
- Get help keeping medical records, receipts, and schedules organized.

Emotional comfort

- Plan an activity that brings you joy.
- Spend time outdoors or attend religious services together.

 Write down any suggestions from your care team.
