

Seeking support

If the person affected by cancer is someone close to you, it may be a very upsetting time. If you are not sure what to do, it can help to talk about how you are feeling. Your partner, family members and friends can be a good source of support, or you may prefer to talk to a counsellor or psychologist.

Cancer Council has a range of free resources designed to help people affected by cancer cope with the emotions that a diagnosis may bring.

Cancer Council 13 11 20

Experienced cancer nurses can assist you with information and support. Anyone affected by cancer can contact them. Call **13 11 20** Monday to Friday, 8.30 am to 5.30 pm.

Cancer Counselling Service

Professional counsellors can help you talk through and manage the challenges of knowing someone with cancer.

Some useful websites to be added

Cancer Council SA	cancersa.org.au
Cancer Council Online Community	onlinecommunity.cancercouncil.com.au
Gather My Crew	gathermycrew.org
Carers SA	carers-sa.asn.au
Palliative Care Australia	palliativecare.org.au
CanTeen	canteen.org.au



For free* and confidential information and support about cancer, Monday to Friday 8.30 am – 5.30 pm:

- call Cancer Council **13 11 20**
- chat online at cancersa.org.au
- email askanurse@cancersa.org.au

Free* interpreting service is available on **13 14 50**

*Cost of a local call

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When cancer has been diagnosed in a relative, friend or work colleague.

I want to help

Information and support
13 11 20
cancersa.org.au

When a person you know has cancer, you may be wondering about the best way to support them. It can be hard to know what to say or do.

It is important to know that there are no rules and that every relationship is different. Remember that often the little things mean the most.

What can I say?

Making the first contact may be the hardest part.

- It's alright to start with *"I don't know what to say"*. You could follow up with *"but thank you for sharing your news"* or *"I'm pleased you told me"*.
- *"How are you today?"* can be a good opening that will allow the other person to then take the lead.
- Tell the person you have had them in your thoughts.
- Let the other person dictate when and where they want to talk and what they want to talk about.
- You do not always have to be cheerful. Allow them to express their feelings of anger, fear and sadness. Simply listening and allowing the person to talk about their distress may help to relieve those feelings.
- Although some people need to talk about what they are going through, equally they may want to hear about the outside world and be distracted or entertained for a while.

Some helpful ideas

Although everyone is different, here are some general suggestions for showing support:

- Ask before visiting. Your friend may be feeling tired or unwell. Let them know that saying no is okay.
- Keep the visit short if your friend is tired.
- Sometimes just sitting and spending time with your friend can be all that's needed.
- Always ask if your children are welcome to come with you. If your children are unwell, think about leaving them at home.

- If they have a carer, time your visit so their carer can do something for themselves even if it is only going out to get a coffee
- One of the best ways to help your friend is to actively listen when they are talking to you. Give them the opportunity to talk about their cancer if they want to. Take your cue from them. They may welcome the opportunity to talk about the things you usually do.
- Respect their confidences.
- Invite your friend out to things you have always done together but reassure them that it's okay if they don't feel up to it on the day.
- Offer to go for a brief walk with them.
- If your offer of help is refused, don't be offended. Ask again at another time.

Just saying "Can I help?" may not be enough. Many people find it difficult to ask for help or mention tasks they need help with.

When considering how you can help, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the person want my help?
- Have I asked them what they would like assistance with?
- What can I do?
- What do I have time to do?

The things you may do to help will change over time, so be flexible and responsive to their needs.

If you agree to help or do a specific task, make sure you can see it through.



If you have any concerns, discuss them with your health professional or call **Cancer Council 13 11 20** for more information.

Practical ways to help

Sometimes the most valuable support you can give is to continue to invite your friend to activities you have both enjoyed together, such as a film club or regular meals out. Even if they don't feel well enough to attend, they can still be included in the invitation.

Think about what you are good at and would like to offer. Here are some examples:

- Feed pets or walk the dog.
- Prepare a meal.
- Help around the house e.g. make the bed, hang out the washing or help with the ironing.
- Look after the children, arrange school pick-up and drop-off, or arrange a roster of friends to provide support.
- Provide transport to appointments or for shopping.
- Help to set up online shopping.
- Help in the garden.
- Go for a walk with them or offer to pick them up to catch up for coffee or a meal.
- Offer to coordinate any sharing of information to family and friends.

What not to do:

- Avoid your friend because you don't know what to say.
- Share information on social media without consent.
- Get embarrassed or worried if either of you gets upset.
- Tell them not to worry and that things will be fine.
- Assume that the person can't continue to work or do their usual activities.
- Assume all is well as soon as treatment is finished.
- Tell them about cancer stories you have been told.
- Offer advice about diet or lifestyle, the latest cure or treatment you have heard about.