

CAN WE TALK ABOUT THIS?

Cancer Is Not An Easy Thing To Discuss

Some things are just hard to talk about. In the Harry Potter books, the villain is so bad, many of the wizards won't mention him. If they do, they are nervous and can't say his name, Voldemort. Instead, they call him *You-Know-Who* or *He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named*.

The villainous disease of cancer can also be very difficult to talk about, especially for someone who is suffering from such an illness. At first, it may be difficult to even say the word. It just doesn't come out freely or naturally. Eventually, you have to get past the emotional barriers to communication and open up a dialog about your illness, the options, your plan of action and the anticipated changes in your lives.

By keeping family members and friends informed of how you feel and what you are going through, they will be better equipped to understand your challenges and provide the support you need (and want).



A person who is diagnosed with cancer needs someone to talk to about their illness their options and their feelings...and about things other than their illness, too.

LETTING PEOPLE KNOW

Breaking bad news can be difficult, especially when you know it will upset someone. Here are some pointers for letting people know that you or someone else has been diagnosed with cancer.

- ◆ **Choose “your” words.** There is no right way to say it. Choose the words that you feel most comfortable with.
- ◆ It's helpful (and kind) to **prepare people with a buffer**, something to let them know that shocking news is coming next. *“I have something to say that is going to upset you.”*
- ◆ **Be ready for questions.** People will be curious about the cause, treatment and cure. You should be the one to decide how much you want to divulge and to whom.
- ◆ **Be calm**, especially with children.
- ◆ **Enlist help.** You don't have to do all the talking. Let family and friends help. They can utilize the above pointers, too.

ONCE YOU KNOW

Here are some suggestions for communicating with and being a comfort to a person who is battling cancer.

- ◆ **Do not give advice**, unless they ask. Be there to listen and ask questions.
- ◆ **Be a good listener.** Hear what is said and how they say it. Let the person with the cancer take the lead. Also, pay close attention to what is not being said.
- ◆ **Silence can be comforting.** Yes, it can be very difficult not to talk when you are nervous. However, the person with cancer may need time to formulate their thoughts, or may just appreciate your presence.
- ◆ **Back up your words.** The communication of concern, care and affection is also emitted through eye contact, touch, voice inflection and body language.
- ◆ **Please do not say “I know how you feel.”**

(Source: American Cancer Society)

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