



How to Help a Friend With Cancer

What to do. What to say. How to show up.

Just found out your friend has cancer?

You're likely feeling overwhelmed and unsure what to say, worried about doing the wrong thing, and wondering how best to support them. You're not alone.

Hearing "I have cancer" from someone you care about can shake you. The good news? You don't need the perfect words or grand gestures to make a difference. The team of survivors, caregivers, and Peer Mentors at Cancer Hope Network has shared a few meaningful ways to show up with compassion and care.

Choose your words thoughtfully. Or simply be present.

When we're uncomfortable, we often fill the silence with stories or solutions. But sometimes, the best response is quiet understanding. Listen. Let the conversation follow their lead. Talk about something besides cancer. Two-time survivor Dale puts it this way, "You don't need to say 'It's going to be okay.' Just keep it real. Keep it normal. That's what helped me most."

And if you're still unsure what to say? That's okay. Sitting beside them, showing up on a video call, or simply sending a kind message can be enough.

Don't ask—do.

"Let me know if you need anything" is well-intentioned, but vague. Specific offers are better. Can you walk the dog? Drive them to treatment? Drop off coffee?

Survivor Ed never forgot the brother-in-law who drove him to every appointment. Peer Mentor Mona remembers friends who took her dancing after chemo. "They gave me strength when I was weak," she says.

Big or small, these gestures speak volumes.

Stay consistent.

Cancer can be incredibly isolating. For many, the hardest part wasn't just the treatment. It was the silence.



"I learned who my real friends were," says cervical cancer survivor Ellen. "People were scared and didn't know what to say, so they disappeared. But the ones who stayed? Who showed up with kindness? That made all the difference."

You don't need long conversations. A funny meme. A quick "thinking of you" text. A scheduled check-in on your calendar. These small acts build a steady presence that reminds your friend they're not alone.

Think practical. Think small.

A few meals, spaced out. A cozy pair of pajamas. A favorite audiobook. Cleaning services. These may seem small, but in the middle of treatment or caregiving, they're invaluable. Jenn recalls weekly meal drop-offs that fed her family for days. Marlys still remembers the freezer-ready dishes that sustained her during hospice care for her husband. It's not about doing everything. It's about doing something.

Don't forget the caregivers.

Cancer doesn't just affect the patient. Spouses, partners, children, and friends caring behind the scenes need support, too.

"You can't do it alone," says Anne, a survivor and longtime caregiver. "You're human. You need rest. You need help. That doesn't make you weak. It makes you wise." Offer to sit with their loved one. Run errands. Encourage breaks. And if you're the caregiver yourself, reach out. We can match you with someone who's been there.

You're not alone.

Visit www.cancerhopenetwork.org to request a confidential match with someone who understands.