Article Series Mental Health

Owning Your Feelings

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Living with cancer can bring a range of emotions – from fear and anxiety to hope and gratitude. And while everyone's cancer journey is different, owning these feelings can help you to find peace and strength along the way.

What does it mean to "own" your feelings? Owning your feelings starts with simply acknowledging them. For example, allowing yourself to admit that you feel anger, sadness, loneliness, grief, or hope.

Then, it might mean giving yourself permission to experience and express your feelings without judgment or guilt.

There’s no right or wrong way to feel when you’re living with cancer. And while everyone processes emotions differently, it can be important to let them out instead of bottling them up inside.

Here are some **Microsteps** that can help you identify, express and own your feelings. As always, consult with your care team for the guidance and recommendations that are best for you.

Keeping a journal to document your feelings about living with cancer.

Research shows that putting our feelings into words can help us cope with them better. If you’re already keeping a journal to track your physical symptoms or daily habits, consider adding your feelings to what you’re already tracking.

Choosing a moment each day to check in with yourself.

Think of it as an appointment with yourself, just like visiting a doctor. If it helps, choose a simple prompt to help you think about your feelings, such as “Right now, I’m feeling…” or “The emotion I’m feeling now is…”

Using mealtimes or other daily rituals as built-in moments of mindfulness throughout your day.

Emotions can be easier to identify in a moment of quiet, without distractions. Think of breakfast, lunch and dinner, or taking a bath or shower, as opportunities to be in the present moment to simply observe your feelings while enjoying your meal.

Sharing any positive moments or feelings with a loved one.

Owning positive feelings is important, too. If you’re feeling positive, hopeful, or relieved, consider sharing it with someone you trust. This can be anything from enjoying a good meal or having a hopeful thought about the future.

Saying things out loud when you experience physical or emotional discomfort.

Saying what you feel out loud when you’re in pain may help you notice how the pain affects your emotions. This can make you feel less alone and give you a bit more control over what you're going through.

Reminding yourself that it’s normal to feel opposing emotions at the same time.

For example, you may simultaneously feel hopeful and scared about starting a new treatment. Rather than trying to force one of those feelings away, tell yourself that it’s OK to feel both of those things at once.

Arriving at your doctor’s appointment or scheduled treatment 10 minutes earlier than usual.

You may wish to take these 10 minutes in the waiting room to center yourself. Here you can acknowledge how you're feeling by silently noting your emotions or writing them down.

Acknowledging your courage after sharing your feelings.

Each time you open up about how you’re feeling, take a moment afterward to recognize and even celebrate the strength it took. A simple mental note like “I’m proud of myself for sharing that” may help reinforce the habit of speaking up.

For more, check out this resource: Guilt is a common emotion. Here are ways to cope with it.

Developed with Thrive Global