Article Series Talking About Cancer All

Caring communication

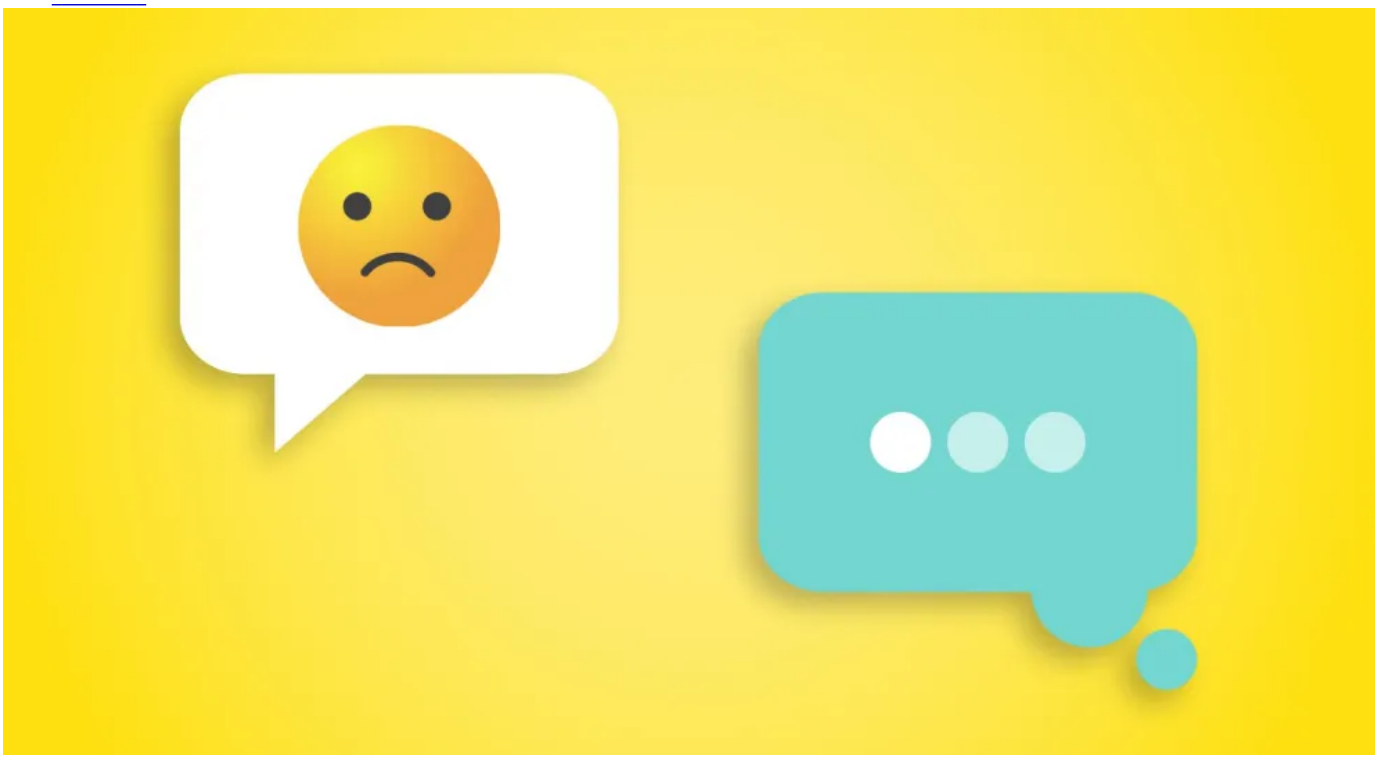
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All Talking About Cancer

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When a loved one is diagnosed with cancer, we often struggle to find the right words. Here are some helpful tips for saying what you really mean, when it matters most.

Offer Heartfelt Words of Support

When someone is diagnosed with cancer, they may be experiencing feelings of sadness, confusion and fear. Try not to compound those feelings with intrusive questions, declarations of your own sadness or unsolicited advice. Instead, offer

authentic words of support. Something like, "I'm so sorry to hear this news. Please know that I love you and I'm here for you" is a simple, straightforward way to be there for your friend or family member.

Follow Their Lead

Once you've reached out, let them set the tone. Everyone deals with cancer differently. You may have a friend who wants to continue living as normally as possible. If that's the case, chat with them about the same topics you would have pre-diagnosis. Or you may have a family member who wants to share the intimate details of how they're feeling, discuss doctor visits and talk about fears. If that's the case, be a good listener and try to offer words of encouragement. Either way, let them lean on you in whatever way works for them. And remember, it's up to you to be the strong one in the relationship. Your feelings of confusion and sadness are valid, but save those discussions for someone else. The patient should never be the shoulder to cry on.

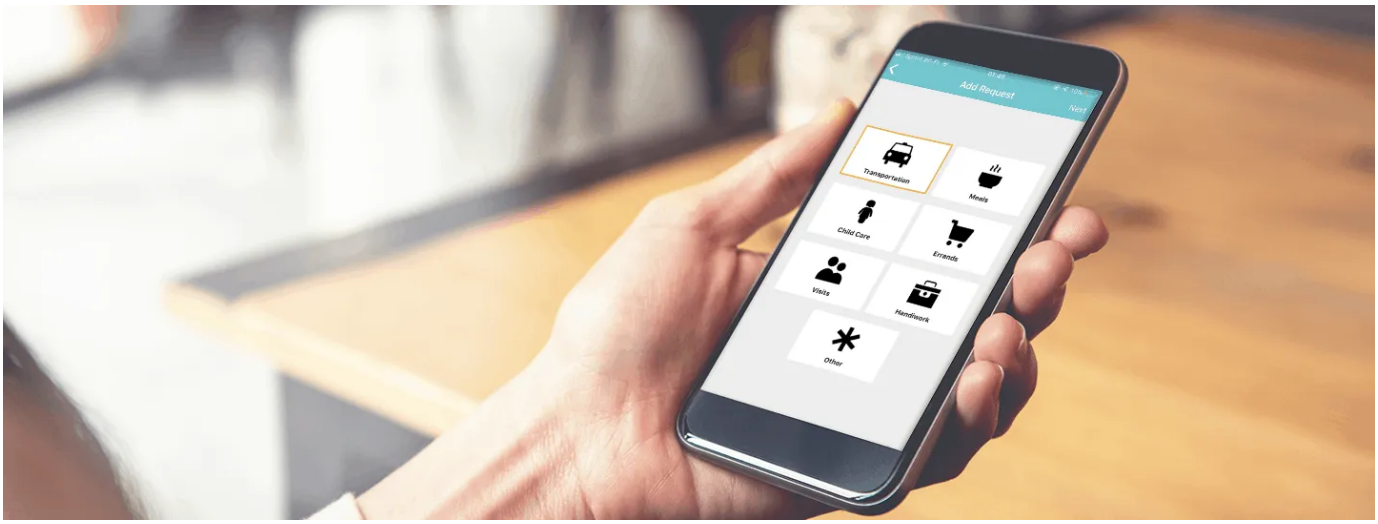
Be Specific in Your Offer to Help

A cancer diagnosis comes with life-disrupting appointments, unexpected bouts with exhaustion and other issues that can make managing the normal day-to-day a challenge. It can also be hard to know how to enlist help from family and friends. Take that off their plate by offering very specific ways you'd like to help. For example, don't say something vague, such as "Let me know how I can help." Instead, try something like "I'd like to make a meal for you and your family. Is there a good night this week to drop it off?" Or, "It sounds like you've understandably been tired after treatments. May I take your daughter to the park Wednesday afternoon so you can get some rest?" This allows the patient to accept help without having to coordinate. Another way to assist, sans logistical planning? The free **LivingWith™** app allows supporters to select specific ways they can help—whether it's childcare, scheduled visits, errands or chores—and the patient can notify you when they're in need.

Keep the Communication Going

Cancer is a stressful experience. Reaching out once and then disappearing into your own busy life doesn't check the friendship box. A patient can often feel isolated and alone, so check in regularly via phone, text, handwritten notes and in-person visits (but not unannounced!) to remind the person that you're thinking of them. Keep up those offers of specific help. You could even send them small gifts or flowers to brighten their day.

One thing to keep in mind: don't expect a response every time. Someone going through treatment may be too tired to respond or write a thank you note. But know that the sincere messages they receive from friends and family go a long way in helping them feel supported during this difficult time.



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