Article Series Talking About Cancer All

What to ask instead of “How can I help?”

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All Talking About Cancer

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If your loved one is living with cancer, then you know how important it is for them to feel supported by their friends, family and healthcare team. "It's almost surreal, the amount of love and support that's coming from all different angles," says Jordan, a pre-med student who is living with lymphoma. "It's what makes those bad days much more manageable."

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What you might not realize, though, is that asking for help might not always be easy for your loved one. Maybe they're fiercely independent, and they don't want cancer to change that. Or they might spend several hours a week going in for treatments, so sometimes the last thing they want to talk about is cancer.

It's important to remind them there's no shame in asking for help; you're here for them, and you *want* to be. And it's even more important for you to be proactive and think about how you can help them.

Be specific, not general, in your offers to help

There are so many ways you can offer support. But sometimes it's hard to know where to start.

Your first instinct might be to say, "Let me know if there's anything I can do" or "How can I help?" People often make these kinds of general, catch-all offers to help. But, as well-intentioned as these offers might seem, they might not actually encourage your loved one to ask for help—even when they need it.

Instead, try to come up with your own thoughtful ideas of how you might help. Does your loved one have children? Ask if you can drive their kids to orchestra rehearsal or softball practice. Or offer to babysit when they go to their next doctors' appointment. If they have dietary restrictions as a result of their treatment, you can find a few recipes and offer to make dinner a few times a week.

Chances are, your loved one has more to juggle now than they did before their diagnosis. And sometimes that means they'll have less time and energy for things that were once just part of their routine, like cooking and cleaning. Finding specific ways to offer support is a great way to show how much you care. Plus, they may be more likely to accept help with day-to-day tasks, no matter how small.

You might try using a free app, **LivingWith®**, designed to help people manage a loved one's care and update friends and family on their behalf. On the app, you can build a circle of support with friends, family and loved ones, and easily receive requests for help with daily tasks like meals or rides to doctors' appointments.

Download **LivingWith** today

Listening is key

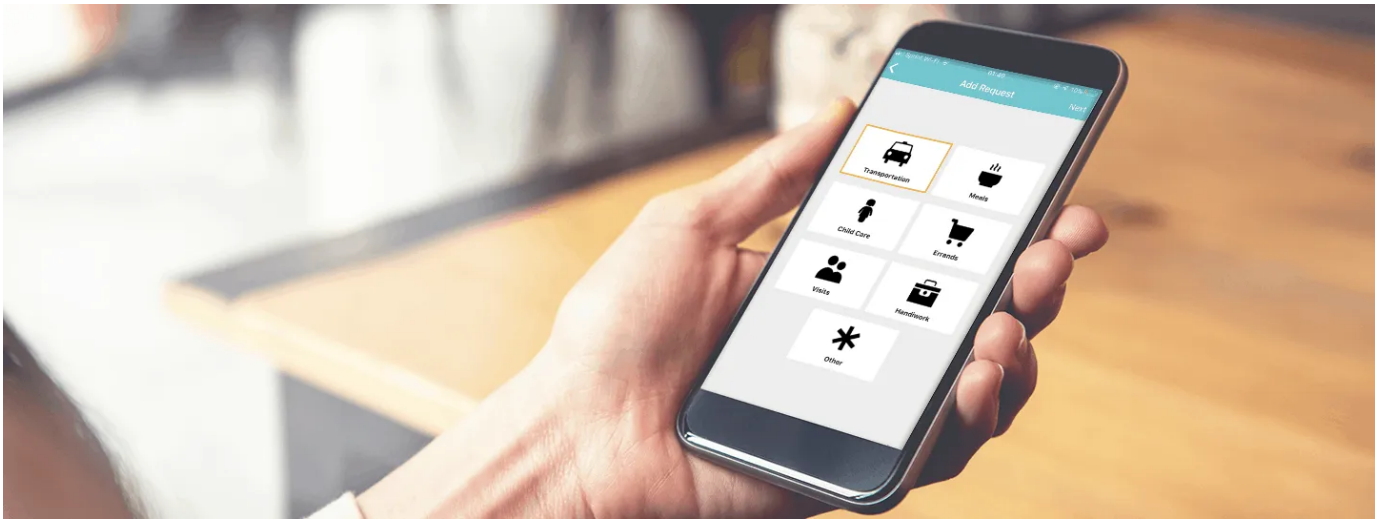
> Sometimes the simplest expressions of concern are the most meaningful. And sometimes just listening is the most helpful thing you can do.

If your loved one declines your offer to help, don't pressure them to accept it. Try to be flexible and understanding. Maybe you offered to help with cooking, but they view cooking as a break from the stresses of the day. Listen to them closely so you can learn what they really need—it may give you more ideas of how you can best support them.

What's important is that you're there for them. As the American Cancer Society's *Caregiver Resource Guide* reminds us, "Sometimes the simplest expressions of concern are the most meaningful. And sometimes just listening is the most helpful thing you can do." Even if your loved one doesn't need your help this time, they may ask you for something else in the future.

The bottom line: Reach out

Try your best to anticipate your loved one's needs rather than waiting for them to reach out. They'll appreciate you all the more for going above and beyond to find ways to help.



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