

I WANT TO HELP

When cancer has been diagnosed in a relative, friend, workmate or neighbour

The diagnosis of cancer can be devastating for the patient, their family and friends. You may be involved with helping and supporting them.

What you can offer will depend on your relationship with the person, their needs and your own abilities and availability.

- Help can include practical assistance and /or emotional support
- Having some guidelines to work with can help prevent you from becoming overwhelmed by the situation

Understanding what is happening for the other person can assist you to respond in a useful way.

USING A PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

1. Identify the needs. The problems can be:

Psychological, social, financial, spiritual or involve family relationships

2. List all the possible solutions

Brainstorm and explore all options

To do nothing must also be considered

3. Investigate all resources

What can you do and what can others do?

Is any other help available?

4. Decide on realistic action with the other person

Who will do it?

When is it to be done?

Where will it be done?

How will it be done?

Evaluate how helpful this has been and decide whether to continue in this way.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Resist the temptation to “take over”. People still want to lead their own lives and stay as independent as possible.
- Start with small, practical things that the person may not be able to do him or herself.

- The plans you make will certainly change as conditions change, so be prepared to be flexible and learn on the job.
- Be specific about your availability and what you can do, e.g.: *"I will be free to visit every Saturday", "Would you like me to mow the lawn?"*
- Just saying 'Can I help?' may be enough. Identify what you are good at and would like to offer.
 - Prepare a meal or help around the house
 - Look after the children or pets
 - Provide transport to hospital or the shops
 - Accompany on a walk or give a massage
 - Help in the garden
 - Obtain information or borrow videos and books
 - Entertain, prepare special treats or have fun

Much of our self-image comes from the roles we play – parent, spouse, worker, artist or friend. Illness can interfere with these valuable roles but sometimes the most valuable help you can give is to call on people's skills and experiences and to reassure them they are still valued.

WHAT CAN I SAY?

- Breaking the ice and making the first contact may be the hardest part. "How are you today?" can be a good opening that will allow the person to then take the lead.
- Let the person dictate when and where they want to talk and what they want to talk about.
- Talking is the best method of communication that we have. Simply talking about distress can help relieve it.
- You do not always have to be cheerful. Thoughts that a person tries to shut out can eventually do harm so allow them to feel angry, fearful or depressed.
- Listening may be more important than speaking. You do not need to have all the answers; just listening to questions can help.
- Encourage reminiscences. It enables people to put their lives into focus.
- Although people need to talk about what they are going through, equally they want to hear about the outside world and be distracted and entertained for a while.
- Don't be afraid of silence. Sharing silence can be very comforting.
- Avoid giving general advice unless it's asked for. Do not give medical advice but suggest instead that medical concerns are discussed with the doctor or nurse.
- Do not lie or give unrealistic assurances.

WHEN CONSIDERING HOW YOU CAN HELP.

Ask yourself the following questions:

Does the person want my help?

Have I asked them what they would like?

What sort of help have they requested?

What can I do?

What do I have time to do?

Is the help I am offering appropriate to my relationship with that person?

Who else is available to help?

How will the rest of their family react to my involvement?

Are there any language, cultural, gender or religious differences that might aid or interfere with my help?

DO NOT UNDERTAKE TO DO THINGS THAT YOU CANNOT CARRY THROUGH

How The Cancer Council Tasmania can help you:

- **Cancer Helpline 13 11 20** is a telephone information and support service available to all those with cancer, or those caring for a person with cancer. 9.00am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday
- All Cancer Support Centres have a large selection of information materials on cancer freely available to all those dealing with a cancer diagnosis.
- **Cancer Connect** can connect you with a trained support worker who has been through a similar experience, either as a person with cancer, or as a caregiver. Call **13 11 20** for more information on this peer-support service.
- We can link you with appropriate health, welfare or support services, depending on where you live and what you require.

Acknowledgement: The Cancer Council Victoria and The Cancer Council South Australia for material used in this Information Sheet
