

When Someone You Care About is Seriously Ill...

All of us want to be supportive when someone we care about is seriously ill. Yet, talking about illness and what the future may hold is never easy. Remember that the person you care about is still the same person they were before the illness. Approach them in the way you think is most likely to make them feel at ease. Just remember your friend or family member may be in need of additional comfort and kindness right now.

Physical decline may be causing fatigue, pain or other uncomfortable symptoms which may make it hard for your friend or family member to do their normal activities.

What you can do:

Provide support in a way that is comfortable for you. When thinking about ways you can help, assess your own strengths and abilities and then offer to do something specific:

- ⊗ Drive your friend to appointments, make phone calls or walk the dog.
- ⊗ Offer to take over the school carpool responsibilities.
- ⊗ Organize meal deliveries through your faith community.
- ⊗ Mow the lawn or assist with other household chores.
- ⊗ Spend time with your friend to give family caregivers some time for themselves.
- ⊗ Help your friend continue to be involved in favorite activities and hobbies – if they have to miss an important event such as a child's recital or ball game you can videotape it.

It is common for people living with a serious illness to feel afraid of the future, be angry with the healthcare system, worry about their family or grieve the loss of their "normal" life before the illness.

What you can do:

Some people will want to talk, and some will not. These wishes may change from day to day.

- ⊗ Listen with respect and empathy; take the lead from your friend about how the conversation should go.
- ⊗ It's all right to admit that you don't know what to say and to acknowledge that talking about illness and the future is difficult. What is important is that you reach out and offer support.
- ⊗ Talk with your friend or family member about their feelings and concerns and remember that there is no right or wrong way to feel.
- ⊗ Support decisions about care, even when those decisions differ from your own. Respect your friend or family member's beliefs and listen to why decisions were made.

Facing serious illness prompts many people to think about their life and what it has meant.

What you can do:

- ⊕ Encourage the person to share memories of important times in their life and about the people who are most significant.
- ⊕ Tell your friend or family member how you feel about the person and find ways to let them know their importance to you and others.
- ⊕ If you are comfortable, offer to share in a ritual or religious service that has meaning for them and would help them find peace and strength.

Many people live with serious illness for years while others have very little time between their diagnosis and death. Because none of us know how much time we have left, it is important to live each day without regret. You can help support your family member or friend by encouraging them to live fully, express thoughts and feelings and not save a hug, talk or activity for 'someday.'



For more information contact the HelpLine at
800.658.8898 ♦ 877.658.8896 (Multilingual)
or visit us at
www.caringinfo.org