

When Cancer touches our Family



MY E-LIBRARY



When a member of our family is diagnosed with cancer, life can suddenly change. Insecurity and fear may emerge regardless of how close-knit or stable our family is. At a time like this, it's important to think about our needs as well as the person suffering from cancer. We will need time to adjust to the news. One sibling may come to terms quickly with what's happening while another may remain in denial. We may be angry, frustrated and confused. Make no mistake, when one family member has cancer, our entire family is affected. Below are some thoughts to consider if our family is touched by cancer.

Communicate Openly and Honestly

Discuss our feelings and be ready to listen when others want to talk. Do not deny the reality of the cancer diagnosis once confirmed. Blanket statements like, "It's okay" and "Everything will be all right" may keep us from expressing our fears and feelings about the cancer. It may also cause our loved one with cancer to withdraw from accepting family support, which is a critical component to getting better. We should try to be both optimistic and realistic. There will be good days and bad days. An honest and open dialogue will help us make the most of whatever each day brings.

Try to level out the Emotional Roller Coaster

Learning that a family member has cancer can bring on a wide range of emotions. We may lash out in anger, fear, and feelings of helplessness. Realize that emotions are volatile, so take time to sort things out before saying something we may regret.

Learn all we can about the illness

Cancer is a complicated illness and we may feel like an outsider during the treatment process. The more we know, the less we have to fear. The Internet is a great resource for information. Resource information is also available through the Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society. When going to the doctor with our loved one, don't be afraid to ask questions. If our loved one agrees, get involved with his or her treatment regimen.

Family members' role may change

When someone in our family is diagnosed with cancer, we may find ourselves in new and unfamiliar roles. For example, our mom may become the sole breadwinner and homemaker, and our dad may now become unable to work. We may be asked to assume major responsibilities. Everyone will need to take on extra duties. This can be stressful, not only because we are doing something new, but also because it adds to the realization that things aren't the same at home and may never be again. Be aware of everyone's tolerance levels during this time. A little patience can go a long way.

Show our support both emotionally and tangibly

While it's important to be available to listen and to talk to our loved one, it's also important to help out whenever we can. Cancer and its treatment are physically exhausting. Vacuuming or doing the dishes may be beyond what our loved one is capable of doing. Offer to cut the lawn or wash the car. A basket of clean laundry may lift our loved one's spirits more than we realize. After a day of treatment, cooking may be the last thing on our loved one's mind. Offer to prepare a simple meal. For some people, showing we care comes easier than saying it.

Be Mindful

We may have difficulty coping with the fact that a family member has cancer, especially if it is a parent. The parent may be away at the hospital for long periods of time or he or she may be at home in bed, in obvious pain and discomfort. Cancer can cause changes in a person's physical appearance and this can be unsettling. We may be asked to do things we wouldn't normally do such as help around the house and not have friends over. And, harder still, you may be asked to try to understand things you cannot truly comprehend. It is a stressful situation for everyone. Just do your best and remember, it's okay to ask questions.

If you are interested in receiving more information, self-help tools and other resources, remember that your EAP is here to help. Contact us at eap@familiesinaction.net