

PARTNERS' GUIDE TO MANAGING THE CHALLENGES OF BREAST CANCER: IT TAKES A TEAM



At City of Hope you and your family are part of the medical team. To ensure that you get the maximum benefit from your care we request you bring your spouse or life partner with you to your first consultation.

Cancer affects the whole family. Research shows that one important factor in a woman receiving the maximum benefit from her medical care and coping is having a supportive partner. So whenever possible, it is essential we work together as a united team.

Cancer may cause stress in some areas of your life including your relationships, work and home life. However, for many patients and families, the cancer experience can also be an opportunity to grow closer as they solve problems together.

The Partners' Guide was developed from many years of learning from women with cancer, partners and families. You are encouraged to use the wisdom below so that you can benefit from the experiences of others.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A PARTNER THAT IS HELPFUL FOR THE WOMAN:

- Communicate with each other in a way that you will be proud of in the future.
- Actively encourage the sharing of emotional concerns and fears.
- Listen to her concerns without trying to "fix," minimize or give advice. (Unless asked.)
- Only give reassurances that are firmly based in reality. ("You can count on me.")
- Be physically present at key medical appointments, even when not asked.
- Take notes, ask questions and learn about the illness and treatments.
- Actively ask your partner how you can best help them manage home responsibilities.
- Support the woman's efforts to make her own decisions.
- Help the woman to share information with others who she wants to keep informed.
- Advocate for the woman if needed (whether with health care providers or other family members).
- Take care of your own physical and mental health, so your partner can feel confident you will be there for them.
- Talk with the woman about how the illness is impacting you.
- Maintaining active friendships/relationships can make you healthier and able to better support your partner.
- Be open to listening to the woman expressing her concerns as often as she needs to.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A WOMAN TO GET THE BEST OUT OF YOUR PARTNER OR FAMILY MEMBER:

- Communicate with each other in a way that you will be proud of in the future.
- Be honest and direct about how you feel, especially about your fears.
- Avoid testing — be specific about what you want from others.
- Accept help from family and friends so they can feel connected to you and demonstrate they care.
- Stay in the present — no past hurts or conflicts. Start living the relationship you want.
- When confused about a behavior, ask your partner what they are trying to accomplish with how they are acting.
- Tell your partner when you need for them to just listen or when you are seeking advice.
- Let your partner know when it is OK to hold you.
- Maintain an active role in your health care and within your family.
- Look for opportunities to role model open and honest communication, mutual support and joint problems solving.
- Respect that you and your partner might cope with things differently.
- Get help from professionals for you and your family as needed.

FOR ASSISTANCE WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL OR PRACTICAL CONCERNS, PLEASE CONTACT:



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FOR THE “COUPLES COPING WITH CANCER TOGETHER” PROGRAM PLEASE CONTACT:



- There are specific techniques that enhance open and honest communication.
- Practical behaviors can be learned to strengthen relationships.
- Learning effective problem solving skills together really helps.
- You can best help your family by role modeling working together.

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