



By
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According to the American Cancer Society, one in three women and one in two men will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. That makes cancer a disease or diagnosis that most of us will be touched by at some point in our lives, often multiple times. What can you do when cancer enters your life because someone you care about has been diagnosed? This is a question I hear often, and I also often talk to cancer patients about what friends and family can do that would be helpful to them.

Understanding that everyone is different, and those differences will impact how a person chooses to manage their cancer experience, there are some general ideas to keep in mind. Most importantly, don't make assumptions about what the friend needs or wants. Talking with the patient or the caregivers is highly recommended to help you understand what is needed or wanted at any given time. Meals, errands, visits, rides to treatment or doctor's visits, doing research, flowers, and so forth can all be helpful and appreciated, but try to get specific information about what the family could use.

When you say things like, "If you need anything, just let me know," that is often too vague and feels too much like a platitude for the family. Though they could use help, they may be reluctant to call upon

helpers when the offers are not specific. Be specific with suggestions of what you are able and willing to do to help.

Emotionally speaking, don't assume you know about your friend's experience just because you may know someone who has had the same cancer. Ask questions, listen to the answers, be compassionate and patient, and respect the family's privacy. The patient is going through a very challenging emotional time and often wants to be heard and understood. Being able to just listen without judgment is a powerful experience for someone who is having a difficult time.

Research shows that those who have strong social support often do better throughout their cancer experience than those who are isolated. Help the

patient and family find the support they need through community and private resources.

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