

Helping Out The Cancer Patient

By Esther Hughes

“What should I say?” and “How can I help?” These two questions go hand in hand. We ask ourselves these questions when we encounter someone who is undergoing a trying time. Any family encountering a battle with cancer will need assistance in one way or another at some time. The best thing you can do for that person or family is be available when needed. Here are ideas to lend a helping hand to a family touched by cancer. Don’t shy away from them for lack of not knowing what to do, instead:

1) Recognize their pain.

Show the family that you care by being there for them. Visiting them, sending notes or making phone calls are ways of letting the family know you are thinking of them.

2) Talk about the situation.

All too often avoidance of the topic signifies to the person that you are not interested in his circumstance and, therefore, do not want to hear about it. Make every effort to talk to him and ask him questions pertaining to his illness. If he does not want to talk about it, he will let you know.

3) Ask her how she is and mean it.

Listen to her response and ask questions. When you ask someone how he or she is doing, that person can tell if you are truly interested by your response when she actually tells you how she is



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doing.

4) When a person tells you he is not doing well, don’t ignore what he said to you.

Often he may want a listening ear. He wants to know you care and your reaction will tell him. React to him with questions about his specific answer. Also, offer encouragement.

Before I had cancer, I was one of those people not knowing what to say or do when someone was going through a difficult time. Through the example of family members and friends who came to our aid and helped without ever being asked, I now have a better idea of how to help others during trying times.

Here are ways you can help a cancer patient:

1. Call and ask to take the children on a certain day. Do not accept “no” for an answer.

2. Make note of surgeries, radiation treatments and chemotherapy dates, and arrange to take a meal that day or take their children that day.

3. Show up with groceries such as milk, juice, apples, oranges, bread, eggs, etc. or

call from the grocery store and ask what you can pick up for them.

4. Do NOT, say “call me if you need anything.” They will not call, or if they do, it is only out of true desperation.

5. Show up and do the laundry.

6. Clean your friend’s house and have a scented candle burning when you leave.

7. Buy your friend an inexpensive comforter set to put on her bed during her treatment and recovery period. She may spend a lot of time recuperating in her room and when she has completed her treatments, she can then throw it away, or give it to someone.

8. Telling the cancer patient “You look great!” is nice; however, if you do find yourself saying that, do not say it every time you see him. Maybe say, “Do you feel as great as you look?” Because looking great and feeling great are two different things.

9. Offer to help him with the exterior maintenance. Show up ready to mow the lawn or trim shrubs.

10. Buy a large quantity of paper products and plastic silverware so that when the person is not feeling well—she doesn’t have to do the dishes!

11. Buy him fun-to-read books and magazines. Items that will take his mind off the illness.

12. Plan a night out--dinner, movies, game night or whatever.

13. Send the family a cleaning service to clean their home once or twice a month.

14. Organize a “meal cook off” with some friends and cook several meals that can be frozen. The family can then use those meals whenever they need one.

15. Send them a gift certificate to a restaurant or local carry out place.

16. Do something special for the caregiver—anything to show you are thinking of him too.

Obviously, there are many ways to help; it just takes thought and some effort.

Cancer patients are living, breathing individuals who want to be treated and looked upon as normal even though they may be undergoing difficult circumstances. They may need a little extra attention for a season and many times their outcome may not be positive, but you will be given a great reward for your contribution in their time of suffering. And that reward is a new appreciation for the blessings in your life.

Esther J. Hughes

P.O. Box 491

Mullica Hill, NJ 08062

(856) 218-4653

info@onedayliving.com

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