



When Cancer Touches Your Family

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

Communicate openly and honestly

Discuss your 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 you from expressing your fears and feelings about the cancer. It may also cause your loved one with cancer to withdraw from accepting family support, which is a critical component to getting better. You should try to be both optimistic and realistic. There will be good days and bad days. An honest and open dialogue will help you 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. You 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 you may regret.

Learn all you can about the illness

Cancer is a complicated illness and you may feel like an outsider during the treatment process. The more you know, the less you have to fear. The Internet is a great resource for information. Logon to sites such as the [American Cancer Society](#) and the [National Cancer Institute](#). If you go to the doctor with your loved one, don't be afraid to ask questions. If your loved one agrees, get involved with his or her treatment regimen.

Family members' roles may change

When someone in your family is diagnosed with cancer, you may find yourself in new and unfamiliar roles. For example, your mom may become the sole breadwinner and homemaker, and your dad may now become unable to work. You may be asked to assume major responsibilities. Everyone will need to take on extra



duties. This can be stressful, not only because you 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 your support both emotionally and tangibly

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

Be mindful

You 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. You may be asked to do things you 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.

Getting Help

Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at www.MagellanHealth.com. Or call EAP at **866-327-4762** for more information, help and support. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance.