

# MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CANCER



If you've been diagnosed with cancer, you may find that the challenges of your condition make it difficult to maintain close relationships with friends and family members. But it's critical to stay in touch with people who are honest, empathetic, and open with you—and with whom you can express yourself freely. The intimacy and trust you share with friends and family will go a long way in helping you through the treatment process. Here are a few tips to help you keep your relationships open and positive.



## WITH YOUR PARTNER OR SPOUSE:

**Redefine intimacy:** It doesn't have to mean sex. Hold hands, spend time together, and be affectionate with each other.

**Seek out couples who have been through cancer together:** Reach out via web forums or support groups. Ask them about what went right, and learn from their experience.

**Take a breath:** Cancer may put a strain on your relationship. When you're feeling anger, sadness, or tension, give yourself a moment to regroup.



## WITH YOUR FAMILY:

**Speak the truth:** Don't sugarcoat your cancer diagnosis. Explain how you're feeling so they can empathize and understand. Prepare them by telling them about your prognosis and your treatment.

**Spend time with them:** Pursue activities that involve the whole family, and adjust them to your optimal activity level — whether it's reading, watching TV, or going on walks together.

**Seek professional help:** You may find that a therapist can help you communicate more effectively with your kids, especially when the therapist has experience working with people who have cancer. By addressing your own fears and expectations, you'll show your children how to do the same.



## WITH FRIENDS:

**Don't be afraid to accept help:** If friends offer to take you to doctors' appointments, cook meals, or clean the house, let them! Reach out to those close to you for assistance when you need it.

**Keep communication open and honest:** Not every day will be positive. Don't pretend to feel better or be happier than you really are.

**Keep the conversation in your court:** You can talk about cancer when you want to. Should you want to keep the conversation cancer-free, let your friends know. You are in charge here.

**Make new friends:** Join a cancer support group where you'll meet others facing the disease. You may find that you can bond over shared cancer experiences.

Sources: Cancer.gov; Cancer.net; DanaFarber.org; NIH.gov

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