

HELPING A COWORKER WITH CANCER

Do you want to support a colleague, but don't know what to say, let alone how to help? Some tips:



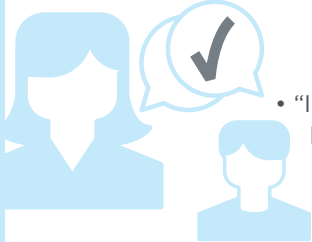
PRIVACY MATTERS

Not everyone will disclose widely. Knowing the level of privacy your coworker wants to maintain will help you determine the best way to provide support.

WHAT TO SAY

This will depend on your level of closeness and how much your coworker wants to talk about cancer. Remember not to make all your interactions about cancer; your coworker may be at work to have a break from that being the focus. Here are some suggestions:

- "I'm sorry this is happening to you."
- "How are you feeling today?"
- "I don't know what to say or how to say it, but I want you to know I'm here for you."
- "Wasn't that a productive meeting?"



WHAT TO DO

Go beyond "Let me know if I can do anything." Be specific:

- "I would like to bring you lunch every day next week, is that okay." Be sure to ask about any dietary restrictions.
- "I can do your post office runs on Mondays, if that would be helpful?"



EDUCATE YOURSELF

Educating yourself about cancer can positively inform your interactions with your coworker and prevent you from jumping to conclusions and making assumptions.



WHAT NOT TO SAY

It's also important to be mindful of questions and comments that can be hurtful or insensitive. Here are some things to avoid saying:

- "I know how you feel."
- "The same thing happened to my neighbor and it turned out fine."
- "Do you smoke? Did you drink?"
- "Things could always be worse!"



WHAT NOT TO DO

Wanting to help is wonderful, but it's also important to respect boundaries:

- Do not drop in. Call or text before visiting.
- Do not spend time with your coworker if you're sick.
- Do not be so afraid of doing the wrong thing that instead you do nothing.

BE AN EFFECTIVE POINT PERSON

If your coworker has to take leave for treatment, you may want to pitch in. Be sure to:

- Get all the info about projects/tasks you'll be overseeing during their absence.
- Know your limits and don't take on more than you can handle.
- Maintain a detailed summary of what you've done.



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Cancer and Careers is a national nonprofit empowering and educating people with cancer to thrive in their workplace. Since 2001, Cancer and Careers has been helping patients, survivors, healthcare professionals and employers navigate the challenges that come with balancing work and cancer. All programs and services are provided free of charge.