





**Ask them what they need**

Ask them for 3 specific things you can do to be there for them. This could be doing a load of laundry, bringing their favorite treat, or grabbing dinner and talking.

**Offer to help with chores**

Offer to help with things they need to get done around the house, like grabbing groceries or taking care of a pet. This way, you'll spend time together while also helping with their to-do list.

people who have, or had, cancer say that these common phrases aren't helpful. In some cases, they can even be hurtful.

Every person is different. These phrases don't bother everyone. But it's a good idea to keep them in mind when you find yourself at a loss for words.

***When you want to give a compliment***

**Instead of saying:** "You're so strong/brave/inspiring."

**Try this:** "It's okay to feel however you're feeling. I'm here for you no matter what."

Telling someone they are strong or brave seems like a compliment. But the truth is, many people with cancer don't feel brave, strong, or inspiring. They don't have much of a choice in the matter. They have no choice but to have cancer, go through treatment, and try to keep up with the other responsibilities of everyday life.

Instead of complimenting the person, it can sometimes discourage them from speaking up about how they are really doing. They might not feel like they can tell you if they are actually scared of saying:

**Try this:** “It’s so great to see you done with treatment. I want you to know I’m still here for you, for as long as you need it.”

This one can be confusing for people. Of course, people want to be cancer-free and done with treatment. But many are confused or surprised when they don’t feel happy and joyful. It’s common to struggle with long-term or late side effects, money problems, loss of a job, loss of independence, and fear of recurrence.

Many people report being on “auto-pilot” for most of their cancer treatment. For some, the end of treatment is the first time they actually begin to process their feelings and everything they’ve been through.

Your loved one might feel guilty or ashamed for not being “happier” or more grateful. They might keep these feelings hidden from everyone, which only makes it worse.

It’s okay to want to acknowledge and celebrate a person when they finish treatment. But

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/caregivers/when-someone-you-know-has-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/caregivers/when-someone-you-know-has-cancer.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/caregivers/how-to-be-a-friend-to-someone-with-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/caregivers/how-to-be-a-friend-to-someone-with-cancer.html)

## References

Aburizik A, Raque TL, Spitz N, Mott SL, McEnroe A, Kivlighan M. Responding to distress in cancer care: increasing access to psycho oncology services through integrated collaborative care. *Psychooncology*. 2023; 32(11): 1675-1683. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.6217>

Adams RN, Mosher CE, Rand KL, et al. The cancer loneliness scale and cancer-related negative social expectations scale: development and validation. *Qual Life Res*. 2017;26(7):1901-1913. doi:10.1007/s11136-017-1518-4

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. Survivor views: Social connection during cancer diagnosis & treatment. Survey. August 2023. Accessed March 1, 2024. [https://www.fightcancer.org/sites/default/files/national\\_documents/survivor\\_views\\_on\\_social\\_isolation.pdf](https://www.fightcancer.org/sites/default/files/national_documents/survivor_views_on_social_isolation.pdf)

National Comprehensive Cancer Network. Distress during cancer care. NCCN Guidelines for Patients. 2023. Accessed December 15, 2023.

National Comprehensive Cancer Network. Distress management. Version 1.2024. NCCN Guidelines. Updated October 2023. Accessed December 15, 2023. [https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician\\_gls/pdf/distress.pdf](https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/distress.pdf)

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (OASH). Social cohesion. Healthy People 2030. 2021. Accessed December 15, 2023. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/social-cohesion>

Survivor views on social isolation & loneliness. American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN). August 2023. Accessed March 27, 2024. <https://www.fightcancer.org/policy-resources/survivor-views-social-connection-isolation>

Syrjala KL & Chiyon Yi J. Overview of psychosocial issues in the adult cancer survivor.

**Written by**

---