

Coping Strategies for Families who have a Family Member in Cancer Treatment

After your family has been told of your diagnosis and you are receiving treatment, family life will be different. Here are some ways to cope with a “new normal” and give structure and reassurance to your family members.

Maintain a family routine. Whenever possible, keep the routines that you already have for your family. For example, if children go to bed at a specific time each night, make sure that still happens—and maybe add some time together reading a book. Or if old routines can’t work any more, create a few new ones. Maybe pick a day of the week that will always be movie and popcorn night. Or a time when a friend or relative brings pizza over for dinner on the same night each week.

Ask for help and create a network of support. Learn how to ask for help doing whatever makes your life easier. Ask friends to bring meals, provide a ride to an appointment, or invite your child for a playdate with their child. People want to help. Think of what support you could use and ask for it.



Include and be open with children. Ask your children to help with easy tasks such as getting a pillow or drink for you or making a get-well card. Some (but not all) children would like to feel useful and contribute to their parent’s wellness. Other children may not be so emotionally attached to how you are doing because they assume you are just fine. Each child is different in how they respond.

Find one easy way to communicate with others. Friends and relatives will no doubt want to know how you are doing. A group email or an online journal posting on a site such as Caringbridge.org or Posthope.org, will get accurate information to many people with the least amount of effort. If you are not up to a posting, a friend or relative could write a guest posting with your guidance.

Let go of unrealistic expectations. This is the time to let go of thinking that your home has to be clean or that you need to make meals. You may want to spend the day in your pajamas or just have herbal tea for breakfast. Be easy on yourself and enjoy each day.

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