

## **Supporting A Loved One With Cancer**

Created May 10, 2021

### **Author:**

Jo Gilreath, MSW, LCSW HHS Extension Educator- Warrick County Area 3  
jgilreat@purdue.edu 812-897-6100

### **Goal/Objective of Lesson**

The lifetime probability (for American adults) of being diagnosed with cancer is 1 in 3. As a result, most people are impacted by cancer at some time, in some way. You may be the one with a cancer diagnosis, or you may have a family member, friend, neighbor or co-worker going through a cancer journey. There are many resources locally and nationally, for the person with cancer, and for their family members and friends. Regardless of if you live near your loved one, or at a distance, you can provide support in many ways: Physical, Emotional, Spiritual, Financial, and/or Logistical.

Homemakers will increase their knowledge of local and national cancer support services/resources and will learn ways to support a loved one, including what to say and not say to a person with cancer.

### **Lesson Plan and Directions**

Review the (4) suggested activities and decide which ones you want to use. Prepare corresponding materials per the supply list. Leader should print copy of this entire Lesson Plan to refer to.

### **Supply List:**

- Lesson Plan Activity 1
- Computer, tablet or smart phone with internet access. Activities 2, 3
- Paper and pens to take notes as desired Activities 1,2,3,4
- 2-3 copies of Handout: *Role Play - What To Say, What Not To Say* Activity 4

*It is the policy of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service that all persons have equal opportunity and access to its educational programs, services, activities, and facilities without regard to race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, disability or status as a veteran. Purdue University is an Affirmative Action institution. This material may be available in alternative formats.*

## ACTIVITIES – Supporting A Loved One With Cancer

### 1. SHARING

- a) Go around in a circle and have each member state if they currently have a loved one with cancer, if they have had a loved one in the past go through cancer, and if they themselves are a cancer survivor.
- b) Based on past experiences, share what you or your loved one found helpful in terms of how others could provide support.

### 2. WATCH VIDEO

(8 minutes) produced & narrated by Extension Educator Jo Gilreath. To watch you will need internet access, a smart phone, tablet or computer.

<https://youtu.be/yolU-bPXgMI> or <https://bit.ly/SupportLovedOneWithCancer>

### 3. EXPLORE RESOURCES

Research cancer-support organizations & services in your county or in the area where your loved one lives.

1. Cancer Support Community Visit website: [www.cancersupportcommunity.org](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org) click “Find Support”, “Find A Location”, “Zipcode Search”. Or Call 1-888-793-9355
2. American Cancer Society Visit website: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
3. Other: Google “cancer support in my area”

### 4. ROLE PLAY

Follow directions on Handout “*What to say, not say*”.

#### References and Additional Resources:

American Cancer Society [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)  
Cancer and Careers [www.cancerandcareers.org](http://www.cancerandcareers.org)  
Cancer Support Communities (CSC) [www.cancersupportcommunity.org](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org)  
Caring Bridge [www.CaringBridge.org](http://www.CaringBridge.org)  
My Life Line [www.MyLifeLine.org](http://www.MyLifeLine.org)  
National Cancer Institute [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

[www.extension.purdue.edu/\(county\)](http://www.extension.purdue.edu/(county))

Video from Extension Educator: <https://youtu.be/yolU-bPXgMI> or  
<https://bit.ly/SupportLovedOneWithCancer>



## HANDOUT Role Play – What To Say, Not To Say

Supporting A Loved One With Cancer

*This activity provides some general statements that a person might say to a loved one with cancer. One Homemaker will be the “person with cancer”, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Homemaker will be the “loved one” who is providing support. Talk through the different phrases, then discuss how they made the person with cancer feel. Discuss which statements may be a better option. As a result, your empathy, awareness and comfort level should increase!*

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

- Ask two Homemakers to volunteer to role play. Homemaker A plays role of “person with cancer”.
- Homemaker B plays role of “friend or family member of the person with cancer”.
- Homemaker A reads Statement #1. Homemaker B replies with Response #1, then Response #2.
- Homemaker A provides feedback *i.e. which one did she prefer? why? how did they make her feel?*
- Repeat the exercise with Statement #2, #3 and #4.
- Group Discussion: Engage all the members in discussing the following:
  - What were your thoughts hearing those statements?
  - What phrases do you feel comfortable using?
  - Are there any you want to practice saying?

NOTE: There are no “right” or “wrong” answers; this is an experiential activity to increase awareness and empathy and sort through what is “more helpful”.

**Statement #1** *Hi. I know I haven’t been to a meeting in a while.*

Response #1: *I can’t believe you didn’t call me – what is going on with your cancer?*

Response #2: *I heard you have been diagnosed with cancer, to be honest, I wasn’t sure whether to call or not; do you want to talk about?*

**Statement #2** *I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I am about to start treatment.*

Response #1 *I know what you’re going through, my Mom had breast cancer and did great, don’t worry, it will be fine.*

Response #2 *I went through cancer with my Mom and I know how she felt; however, every experience is different. I wonder how you are feeling and what this is like for you?*

(Handout Role Play con’t)

**Statement #3** *Now that I am in treatment I am having a hard time keeping up with everything that needs to be done.*

Response #1: *Let me know if there is anything you need!*

Response #2: *I would be happy to do the following for you \_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with specific tasks and a timeframe, i.e. water your flowers the days I water mine; send my grandson over every Saturday to mow your yard; drive you to your appointments every Monday and run any errands afterwards...*

**Statement #4** *Apparently, I have a pretty rare type of cancer.*

Response #1 *There are a lot of resources out there, there are all kinds of support groups and booklets and people you can talk to.*

Response #2 *I know there is an organization called Cancer Support Community that has online and in-person support groups, along with articles online and a help line. Are you wanting more information on it? If so, I would be happy to do some research for you or with you.*

**Some Points to Keep in Mind:**

- Determining what you can do for your loved one starts with asking them what they need and want. Everyone is a little different – do not make assumptions, just ask. If they do not need anything right then, ask again later. They may be overwhelmed or inundated at this time.
- Think about what you can realistically provide, then offer specific help. Give them the ideas of what you can do so they don't have to come up with them – they have enough on their mind!
- Respect and guard your loved one's privacy. Some people are an open book and like to share everything, while others are more private and prefer for things to be held confidential.
- There are many options for caring: call, text, email, mail a card or gift. Doesn't have to be expensive or fancy!
- Use active listening – listen, affirm, be nonjudgmental; this is not a time for advice giving or problem solving.
- People with cancer can get exhausted communicating with everyone – help by being a designated point person for sharing information (“point person”); you can set up and/or manage a communication platform for them – several free online tools exist for this. (My Lifeline, Caring Bridge)