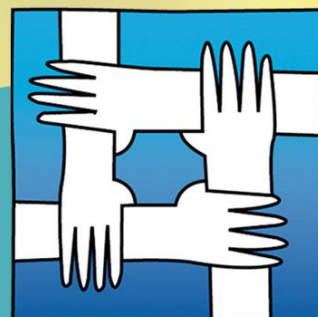


Supporting People Affected By ILLNESS & LOSS



sara Lee



T R U S T

Supporting people affected by illness and loss

At some point we will all come into contact with people who are unwell, dying, bereaved or caring for someone who is ill. When this happens, it's not unusual to feel helpless, awkward or lost for words. We hope this leaflet will help you feel better able to manage these situations.

Lost For Words?

When people are very ill or dying, or someone close to them is, it can be difficult to find the right words. Perhaps we are scared of upsetting them, wish we could make it all better, or are worried that we will make things worse.

If you are concerned about saying the wrong thing, it is easy to rush in with well-meant words that may not be helpful or to end up saying nothing at all.

Here are a few helpful tips:

- **Listen and follow their lead.**
- **Try not to make assumptions.**
- **Use their words.** They may, for example, talk about 'the cancer', 'health problems' or 'feeling poorly'.
- **Acknowledge the illness** – "I'm sorry to hear you're not well" – but treat them as you normally would. It can be a comfort to know that you don't see them any differently.
- **Try not to panic.** If you or the person you are talking to gets tearful, it's a natural response to feeling overwhelmed.
- **You don't necessarily need to fill a silence.** Shared silence and a caring look can still provide comfort.
- **If you don't understand the medical information, admit it.** The person affected is probably only just learning about it themselves.
- **If you are worried about talking or visiting for too long, give options** such as "If you're tired I'll leave soon, but I can stay longer if you'd like."

Touch

Communication doesn't only happen through words. It happens through the way we look at each other and through physical touch. If you usually hug the person you are talking to, don't stop now. Touch is the strongest non-verbal message that one person can give another. If you are afraid of causing discomfort, pain or embarrassment, just ask, "Would a hug help?" Always check it out because it may not be what they want.



Looking after yourself

If we find it difficult to talk to someone who is seriously unwell or dying it might be because we are fearful of seeing them suffer or of them dying. We may have our own fears about illness or difficult past experiences that we'd rather forget. Try to be aware of what makes it difficult for you and perhaps talk about it with a trusted friend or colleague. Sometimes just acknowledging the difficulty can help relieve pressure. Difficult conversations can be stressful. Take a moment, breathe deeply, slow down.



Understanding Medical Terms

Used in Cancer and Palliative Care

Benign

This means a tumour isn't cancer (is not malignant). Benign tumours usually grow quite slowly and don't spread.

Biopsy

A small sample of tissue taken from a tumour, either in surgery or using a needle.

Chemotherapy

A standard treatment for cancer in which toxic substances are administered either intravenously or by mouth, with the aim of damaging cancer cells.

CT Scan

Computed Tomography

A CT or CAT scan makes an x-ray picture of a 'slice' of the body.

Hormone Therapy

Treatments that block the production of a hormone in the body or stop a hormone from working.

Immunotherapy

A type of biological therapy that uses the immune system to fight cancer.

Malignant

Another word for cancerous and the opposite of benign. This type of tumour grows more quickly and can spread to other parts of the body.

MRI Scan

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

Used to determine if the biochemical activity of a tissue responds normally to magnetic forces, tumours may give an abnormal signal.

Oncology, Oncologist

The study of cancer and the specialists who work in this field.

Palliative Care

Treatment designed to help control symptoms and improve quality of life, often for people at the end of life.

Primary & Secondary Cancers

A 'primary' site is where the cancer originally started in the body. If a cancer has spread, this is a secondary cancer.

Prognosis

The likely outcome of the cancer. It could refer to the chance of recovery, the likelihood of it coming back or, how long the person might expect to live for.

Radiotherapy

A standard treatment that relies on high-energy ionising radiation to damage cancer cells so that they die.

Remission

When a cancer is in remission, there is no sign of it in examinations. Doctors tend to talk about remission instead of cure because cancers can sometimes come back.



Help with What To Say...

X Avoid Saying

Say Instead

“You look so well.”

It might seem like you don't believe it's serious.

“How are you feeling?”

“How are you?”

This might seem like small talk that ignores the person's serious difficulties.

“How are you today?”

“That must be terrible.”

You can't know how it is for that person.

“How are you finding it?”

“Try to stay positive.”

It can be helpful to be positive, but the person might need to know it is normal to have a whole range of feelings.

“I can't imagine how you're feeling but if it's helpful, I'd like to understand.”

“If there's anything I can do...”

The person may want help but really not know what you could do or be afraid to ask.

“I would like to help if I can. Please ask if there is something I could do.”

“I know someone who had cancer...”

Different cases cannot be compared.

“I'm sure it's different for everyone. How is it for you?”

“Can I suggest something...”

Don't offer advice unless it is asked for. Only medical professionals should make recommendations.

You could offer practical support in the way of cooking, shopping etc.

“At least it's all over now.”

For many people it is at this point that the reality of what has happened sinks in and they might feel abandoned and alone.

“How are you feeling now that the treatment has finished?”

Professional Support Services

Being treated with warmth and understanding by friends and colleagues can make a big difference to people going through a difficult time in life. In many areas professional services are also available to provide specialised support.

In Hastings and Rother, The Sara Lee Trust provides counselling, complementary therapies and group activities to people, including loved ones and carers, affected by cancer and other life-threatening illnesses.

Visit **www.saraleetrust.org** to find out more about our services and how to be referred, or call **01424 456 608**.



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