

Emotional Support

What are emotional support systems?

Your support systems are the people, organizations and activities that help you during your survivorship. There are many types of support systems: emotional, social, spiritual, financial, medical and legal. These are just a few of the types of support systems you can have. A common definition of an emotional support system is the people who help you deal with the emotions you experience during your survivorship and offer you encouragement and comfort during difficult times.

Emotional support systems may include:

- Family
- Friends
- Support groups
- Co-workers
- Neighbors
- Your health care team
- Faith based groups or clergy
- Mental health providers
- Other survivors

Emotional support systems can be made of many people or a few people. You may have people who help you in different ways throughout your survivorship. You may also provide your own emotional support system by taking care of your health and doing things you enjoy. If you don't have many people around you and you are feeling lonely, there are places you can call or go to find others to talk to or rely on for emotional support. Some ways to find this emotional support are through a support group, a free telephone counseling service or an online chat group.

Some examples of emotional support are:

- A card in the mail offering cheerful messages
- Meals made by friends
- The neighbors raking your leaves
- A long talk with your sister
- Being added to a prayer list

If you have an emotional support system in place or would like to create one, think about how you want to communicate with your emotional support system. Everyone has a part to play in order for there to be good communication. Sometimes you have to do a little bit more by asking questions and telling others exactly what kind of help and support you need. Other times, the people in your emotional support system will communicate their concerns and ask you questions. Keeping open lines of communication, where everyone

talks openly and listens to each other, is a good way to build a strong emotional support system.

What are some signs that a survivor may benefit from emotional support?

You may benefit from emotional support if:

- You often feel lonely
- You stopped going to church or synagogue or other faith based group
- You feel intimidated by your health care team
- You can't remember the last time you laughed
- You aren't sleeping well
- You or your partner shy away from intimacy
- You haven't spent much time interacting with your children

Even if you feel your life is full of people who love and support you all the time, you may experience strains in your relationships with people in your emotional support system.

Examples of strained relationships in an emotional support system:

- You are arguing with a spouse, friend or child
- Your ordinarily talkative family sits quietly around the dinner table
- Your best friend calls you less often

Open communication is usually the best approach to improving a relationship. And remember, this is not all on your shoulders. All relationships require give and take from both parties. Your role is to do just your part – not theirs, too. It is OK to let others know what you need.

How can emotional support systems help survivors?

Being a cancer survivor may create added stress in your life. You may prefer to deal with these stressful things on your own. However, you may find that talking to others about your concerns and getting emotional support during scary times helps you. Cancer may have also had an effect on the people in your emotional support system, and sharing experiences might help all of you.

Aspects of your survivorship you might want to share with your emotional support system:

- Fear of getting cancer again
- Worrying about keeping affordable health insurance
- Questioning your faith
- Worrying about being able to have children
- Worrying about sharing your cancer experience with new friends

Examples of ways to communicate concerns with your emotional support system:

- "I know that we have already talked about this, but do you think I could talk to you more about how confused I am about my spirituality?"
- "I just hate that I have to go back for my annual check-up. It makes me feel so insecure and frightened again."

Will emotional support systems always be helpful for survivors?

If you choose to rely on an emotional support system, there may be times when you depend on it more than others. Even if you don't feel the immediate need to get help from your emotional support system, sometimes it is nice to know they are there for you if you need them.

It's also possible for your emotional support system to change over time. You may find you are closer to some people than you were before your cancer diagnosis. You may make new friends who become part of your emotional support system later in life. It is also possible to lose touch with some people. Some friends may not feel comfortable supporting you during and after cancer, maybe because of their own fears about cancer. If you lose touch with a friend, it's perfectly normal to feel sad. Be patient with yourself, and give yourself time to adjust. Spend time with the people in your emotional support system that are able to help you during your survivorship.

What are some suggestions for survivors who want to gain emotional support from others?

Below is a brief list.

- Think about what things you might want or need from your emotional support system
- Go to gatherings that you enjoy
- Find a support group that can provide emotional support

Works Cited

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