

Setting Priorities

What are priorities?

Priorities are those things in your life that you think are important. Your priorities can be ideas, goals, people, activities or things that you want to achieve. Everyone's priorities are unique. Your priorities can change during your life.

Some examples of priorities are:

- Family
- Friends
- Health
- Career
- Health insurance
- Happiness
- Spirituality
- Advocacy

Setting priorities means deciding what is important to you. Your priorities guide your attention and energy as you organize your daily, weekly or monthly schedule. Your most important goal becomes your top priority. Knowing what your priorities are and whether they have changed can help you decide how to live your life to the fullest after cancer.

How does setting priorities relate to cancer survivorship?

Cancer can be a very stressful and scary experience. Some survivors find that their priorities change following their cancer diagnosis because they view life and value things differently. Sometimes these changes can positively influence your life, but they can also cause a lot of stress and confusion.

Your priorities may not have changed, and you can continue living life just as you did before you were diagnosed. However, if your priorities do change, understanding why or how these priorities affect your life after cancer is sometimes difficult. Many survivors experience changes in their priorities after cancer and have learned how to incorporate these changes into their lives.

Why do some survivors change their priorities after surviving cancer?

Cancer may cause you to change your priorities for many different reasons. Many of these reasons relate to how much the cancer experience has changed your life. A few examples are listed below.

Emotional reasons your priorities might change:

- You enjoy doing new things
- Your outlook on life has changed
- You want to achieve new things

Physical reasons your priorities might change:

- You no longer have enough energy to exercise or work as hard as you used to
- You want to live a healthier lifestyle
- You want to avoid stress

When can a survivor's priorities change?

Your priorities can change at any time during your survivorship. Some survivors experience changes in their priorities during treatment. Other survivors begin to notice changes after treatment. It is also possible that your priorities won't change until years after your diagnosis and treatment. You can add to or shift your priorities when you feel the need to adjust to new realities or changes in your energy levels.

How can changes in priorities affect a survivor's life?

Some examples of how survivors have changed their lives because of changes in their priorities are:

- They don't return to work at a high-paying, stressful job because their health has become a priority.
- They choose a graduate school near their parents because spending time with their family has become a priority.
- They don't change jobs because keeping a good health insurance policy has become a priority.
- They join a cancer advocacy group because giving back and helping other cancer survivors has become a priority.
- They don't spend time with the same friends because doing the things they used to do with those friends no longer interests them or conflicts with other priorities.

Changes in your priorities can sometimes add stress in your life. Sometimes, the people in your life may not understand or accept that your priorities have changed. It may take them a while to get used to these changes, especially if they directly affect your relationship with them.

Why is it sometimes difficult for survivors to communicate how their priorities have changed?

Talking with others about your priorities may not have been part of your life before cancer. You may not want to share your priorities with others. That is OK. You may find that you want to share your current opinions about what is important to you now. Knowing how to talk about your priorities, especially when you aren't sure how people will react, can be difficult. But if you feel that sharing your priorities with others is important, you must explain to them what's important to you now.

Some times you may want to share your priorities with others include:

- When the change affects another person's life
- When someone notices that you are acting differently or doing different things
- When you want to share how you have changed since your diagnosis

Some reasons why you may find it difficult to share your priorities:

- You feel like your priorities are too personal to share
- You are worried how other people will react

If others don't accept the changes in your priorities, you can:

- Make changes to your new priorities
- Talk to a trusted friend, family member or counselor about how to work out your problems with that person
- Stop spending time with the person who conflicts with your priorities

Changes in priorities may cause you to end friendships with people who you were close to before your diagnosis. This can be hard. Many survivors experience this. Real friends will understand that your priorities have changed and will still choose to spend time with you. If your friends don't understand your changes in priorities, continue doing the things you enjoy and think about making new friends who accept you for who you are.

Works Cited

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