

New Connections

HELPING YOU CARE FOR A LOVED ONE DURING TREATMENT



Issue 15



Caregiver Corner:

You're not alone:
How connecting with
other caregivers can help

Even if there are friends and family members helping you care for someone with cancer, there is nothing quite like having the support of other full-time caregivers who know exactly what you're going through. That's what you will find in a support group. In addition to the comfort and companionship that comes from shared experiences, you can also expect to learn more about cancer and ways to help the person you're caring for better cope with the disease and its treatment.

Is a support group right for you?

Chances are, there is one or more support groups that will be right for you. Not everyone is comfortable in a group setting, but for most people, any discomfort or shyness disappears with time, and members come to genuinely enjoy the camaraderie. And most also derive satisfaction from helping others in the group.

There's no right or wrong way to feel about participating in a group. And even if you don't feel one is right for you now, you may feel differently later. What's more, you may want to try several different groups before settling into one.

A support group can:

- Provide connection in an experience that can feel isolating
- Provide refreshing respite from day-to-day caregiving tasks
- Provide support in hard times
- Provide information and coping skills
- Offer tips that only people dealing with cancer can provide
- Allow you to share powerful emotions

What types of groups are there?

There are a large variety of groups to choose from, so there will very likely be one or two that will meet your needs, schedule, and personality.

In general, support groups are either open-ended groups or closed groups.

Open-ended groups allow anyone to attend – people in treatment for cancer, cancer survivors, caregivers, or family members and friends. Attendees may come and go freely, attending for as long or short a time as needed. Flexibility is a key advantage of this type of group. If you are unable to commit regularly to a group, this type might be perfect for your situation.

Closed groups include the same group of people meeting for a prescribed period of time. An advantage of this type is that members get to know one another well.

Some of these groups are organized by topic, with a different topic as the focus of each meeting. Other groups follow a free-flowing format, where participants may discuss whatever topic they choose.

Cancer survivors facilitate some groups, while licensed professionals – such as oncology social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric or oncology nurses, or clergy – facilitate others.

The most common cancer support group is called a peer support group. As the title implies, this type of group consists of those who have similar experiences – in your case, the experience of caregiving. Shared experiences and information form the glue that quickly bonds people in these groups. Peer groups can provide comfort, companionship, and a safe place to go with fear, guilt, pain, and depression. Not only is the peer network supportive, it can also be fun.

Another type of group, educational groups, focus on medical information, while another type, coping skill groups, focus on practical skills to help your loved one better deal with cancer, such as exercise and relaxation techniques.

There are also telephone support groups that may be helpful if you are unable to participate face-to-face. What's more, there are now many online groups, which have some distinct advantages. (See the article in this newsletter on online groups).

How can you find a support group?

American Cancer Society local offices maintain listings of cancer resources in your neighborhood, including support groups. The Society can give you comprehensive cancer information, as well as put you in touch with services in your own community.

To find your local American Cancer Society office, click [here](#) and enter your zip code or city and state. This will give you the contact information for your local office. When you call, the office will put you in touch with Society-sponsored support groups, as well as other support groups in your area.

Your local hospitals and community agencies may also have caregiver support groups as well.

[Learn More](#)

[Click here to get more information on this subject from the American Cancer Society's online bookstore.](#)

**For more cancer information, call 1-800-ACS-2345
or visit www.cancer.org, anytime, day or night.**

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