

# WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER

Despite billions spent on research and education, far too many people are diagnosed with breast cancer every year. Those who hear the words “You have breast cancer” may experience a myriad of emotions: fear, anger, betrayal, powerlessness, resentment, loneliness. They will need a lot of information and access to good care, and the one thing they may need that you can give is support. You can help your friend, family member, or loved one.

## HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS:

### ***SIMPLY LISTEN.***

Many newly diagnosed people need someone to listen. They need to express their fears. You don't need to fix their feelings.

### ***SEEK SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF.***

You may have your own strong feelings – perhaps shock, fear, grief, or anger. You will need support, too. Give yourself time and space to acknowledge your feelings. While you may want to talk to someone else to process those feelings, remember your loved one's privacy and their wishes about sharing the news with others.

### ***BE REAL.***

Be authentic. You know your friend, family member, or loved one, and you know if they will appreciate a good laugh, a distraction, or the time and space to emote.

### ***PROVIDE A SAFE PLACE TO EXPERIENCE AND SHARE FEELINGS FREELY.***

You can be a mirror for your person's emotions. Play back to them what you hear them say as a way to help clarify their own thoughts and feelings. Don't presume you know what they are feeling, and don't dismiss their thoughts or fears. For most people who are afraid, hearing the empty platitude, “Don't worry, it will be fine” is not helpful or supportive.

### ***DON'T TELL YOUR PERSON HOW TO FEEL OR WHAT YOU WOULD DO IN THEIR SITUATION.***

Remember, you are not in their situation and you don't really know what choices you would make if you were. Every situation is different. There are many different types of breast cancer and many different decisions to make. These are personal decisions and everyone makes them based on their own values, needs, and experiences.

### ***YOU CAN GIVE ADVICE WHEN ASKED.***

You may choose to research treatment options and the particulars of your person's situation in order to talk about breast cancer intelligently. And remember that information overload is common among newly diagnosed people. You may help by reading up on research and treatment options, and sharing what is relevant to them.

### ***OFFER TO ACCOMPANY YOUR PERSON TO DOCTOR APPOINTMENTS.***

Suggest recording the doctor's discussions and help prepare a list of questions to bring to the appointment (see BCAction's [Toolkit to Navigate Breast Cancer](#) for suggested questions). Doctors provide a lot of information during appointments, and your friend, family member, or loved one may need help processing and remembering everything. Be clear on your role. For example, are you there to ask questions? Facilitate the conversation between doctor and patient? Take notes?

### ***OFFER PRACTICAL SUPPORT.***

This could include driving your person to and from treatments. They may be nervous or anxious about a treatment, and may not feel well coming out of treatment. Having someone to swiftly take them back home could be a great relief, and the companionship you provide may be welcomed too.

### ***ORGANIZE FRIENDS AND FAMILY***

to help with household needs such as babysitting, housecleaning, and food shopping and preparation. (People often have specific ways they like things done in their homes, so be patient with their requests.) This will allow your person the personal time they need and will help them conserve energy.

### ***ASK, DON'T GUESS.***

Ask your person to tell you exactly what they need and when. They may not know at the time, so don't force it, but be prepared for when they do know.

***Stay connected with BCAction. Get involved. Everyone can do something besides worry.***