

A diagnosis of breast cancer is a difficult thing. Women and men who hear the words “you have breast cancer” can experience a myriad of emotions: fear, anger, betrayal, powerlessness, resentment, loneliness. More than anything, they need support. This is where you can make a difference. You can help your friend or family member. Here’s how:

Listen – More than anything, newly diagnosed patients need someone to listen. They need to express their fears. If you need to freak out, please don’t do it in front of a newly diagnosed person. While you may want to talk to someone else, be aware of your loved one’s privacy and their wishes to share the news with others.

Provide a safe place for them to experience and share their feelings freely. You can be a mirror for their emotions. Play back to them what you hear them say as a way to help clarify their own thoughts and feelings. Don’t presume what they are feeling, don’t dismiss their thoughts or fears. Saying, “Don’t worry, it will be fine” is not helpful or supportive.

Don’t tell her/him how to feel or what you would do in her/his situation. You are not in his/her situation and you don’t really know what choices you would make. Every situation is different. There are many different kinds of breast cancer and many different decisions to make.

Do give advice when asked. You may choose to research treatment options and particulars to their situation in order to talk about breast cancer intelligently. Information overload is common among newly diagnosed patients. You may help by reading up on research and treatment options, and sharing what is relevant with them.

Offer to accompany your friend to doctor appointments. Suggest recording the doctor’s discussions and help prepare a list of questions to bring to the appointment. Doctors give a lot of information during those first appointments, and your friend or family member may need help processing everything.

Offer to drive your friend to and from treatments. Your friend 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 of great relief.

Ask, don’t guess. Ask your friend or family member one to tell you exactly what they need and when. They may not know at the time, but be prepared for when they do.

Organize friends & family to help with household needs such as, babysitting, housecleaning, and food shopping and preparation. This will allow your loved one the personal time s/he needs right now.

Allow yourself to feel shock, fear, grief, anger... You will need support too. Give yourself time and space to acknowledge your feelings.

Join BCA. Get involved. Everyone can do something besides worry.