



**Mount
Sinai**

Changes in Work, School or Home Life

The diagnosis of cancer can change your life and the lives of people around you. Some of these changes will be temporary and some may be more long-lasting. The normal routines of your life (and those who support you) may change or you may find that it is relationships themselves that change. These changes can happen with family, friends, and co-workers. For some, the changes will make the relationships stronger. In some cases, especially when relationships were already stressed, a cancer diagnosis can create additional problems. Let's face it—change is hard. You have had to face many changes in your life with cancer and undoubtedly you worry about how those changes impact your family, friends and work or school colleagues.

Role Changes in the Family, at Work or School

It is often said that cancer affects the whole family. Family and friends may need to take on new roles and responsibilities while you are going through treatment. For example, children might be asked to do different chores; a spouse or partner may need to find work to help pay bills; or a co-worker might need to take on some of your duties. People may have trouble adjusting to these new roles and you may have trouble giving up certain roles—even if only for a short while. All this can lead to distress that can cause worry and upset for you and your family.

Asking for and Receiving Help

Most of us are uncomfortable asking for and or receiving help from others. People close to you will likely want to help, but they might not know what you need or how to ask you. They may offer help with things that you want and can do yourself. Be specific, direct, and clear about what you need and try not to make assumptions about who will help and who will not. Prepare a list of tasks that people can do for you. This list can include anything: transportation to treatment, keeping you company while you recover from surgery, managing a project at work, dog walking or communicating medical updates to others are a few examples. There are some very good free online scheduling tools that will help you (or someone else) coordinate the tasks and will allow you to get the help you need and want when you want it. Here are a few to explore.

www.lotsahelpinghands.com

www.mylifeline.com

www.caringbridge.org

Workplace Issues

It can be challenging to talk about your cancer in your workplace. Some companies are supportive of employees with cancer and do their best to accommodate for missed work days and shifting job responsibilities. Laws are in place to protect you if you are treated unfairly because of a cancer diagnosis or treatment. To receive job protection, you must tell your employer about your cancer. If you are worried about how to navigate cancer and the workplace, there are people who can help you.

Visit Cancer and Careers, www.cancerandcareers.org, for more information.

Good Communication is the Key

Without good communication, misunderstandings can happen. Everyone can become frustrated and feel isolated at a time when being connected and feeling supported is so important. No one can read your mind so it is important to let others know what you are thinking and feeling. It is also important to listen to others as they will have their own ideas and feelings about your diagnosis. Talking about feelings can be hard. Speak honestly and listen carefully. This can strengthen relationships at work, home or school. If you are having a hard time talking with people, or if others don't seem to want to communicate with you, consider asking for help from a counselor, social worker, religious or community leader or by joining a local support group.

This information is provided as an educational service.

It is not meant to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor.