



Worry About Family, Children and Friends

People with often worry about how their family and friends are coping with the changes that cancer often brings into their lives.

Relationship Stressors

Examples of causes of stress in relationship are a need to switch roles from caring for others to being cared for yourself, a wish to protect children or other loved ones from your fears and worries, financial concerns or a need for more practical help.

Good Communication is Key

One of the most important things you can do to stay connected to family and friends is to be open and honest in how you are feeling and ask them to do the same. People often don't know what to say so they may say the wrong thing or nothing at all. Tell them honestly about your diagnosis, how the disease and treatment might be affecting you, and how they can and cannot help you. Let them know if it's okay to ask you questions or if something they are doing is adding to your stress and anxiety. It may be useful to put together a list of tasks with which the help from family, even small children, and friends would be appreciated.

Impact on Children

Children understand the world through their parents. How a child reacts depends very much on how the parents or other close adults are dealing with their own feelings. Difficulty in discussing these issues may create distance in relationships that were once close. It is helpful for parents to explain the facts in a way that allows children to understand and participate in what is happening in their lives. When speaking with your children let them take the lead. Answer their questions directly and with simple language. Try not to down play their concerns and worries. Learning to cope with difficult situations will increase a child's sense of self confidence for the future.

Signs to watch for that suggest a child could use some additional help:

- Changes in a child's sleeping patterns
- A drop in school grades
- Unusual misbehavior in school or at home
- Getting in arguments or fights with friends
- Emotional withdrawal

How to get Help

Attending support groups, couples workshops, family counseling, educational programs, and religious retreats are very helpful for finding new ways to cope and communicate. Your oncology social worker can probably suggest some Mt. Sinai and local resources. There are also many national not for profit organizations that can assist you in locating support for you and your family.