

SOME WAYS YOU CAN HELP

When a friend or family member is coping with a loved one's serious illness, you may not know what to say or how to respond. It is common to feel overwhelmed, self-conscious, or to fear saying the 'wrong' thing. However, this may prevent you from giving the love and support that your friend may need.

WHEN YOU FEEL AT A LOSS, TRY TO FOLLOW THESE FEW BASIC PRINCIPLES

Offer your support

Support can be offered in a tangible way, such as bringing a meal to your friend's house or running errands. Support can also be shown by just listening to your friend.

Show your respect

When entering your friend's home, be respectful of the family and their routine.

Follow their lead

Your friend will sometimes need to talk about his or her experience, and other times will choose not to. Remember that keeping a sense of normality is important; whatever you talked about before is appropriate now.

Ask how you can help

When in doubt, ask your friend how you can best offer your help and support.

Some examples:

When you check in on your friends, ask how the dad is, not just the mum.

Be mindful of their child's sensitive health condition, for example, if you or your child is sick or have been near another sick person, it is best to delay your visit.

Don't forget about siblings — if you take a present for the sick child, try to give some special attention or small gift to the siblings as well. You could also try:

- talking to the children about feelings as well as facts at a level they can understand
- reassuring the children that although there may be some very difficult times there will also be better times in their lives
- helping the family to maintain their routine whenever possible
- helping provide ways for the children to keep in contact with their friends or peers
- if you are a favourite relative or adult from outside the family try to spend extra time with the children and try to only make promises that you are able to keep.

Offer suggestions for how you can help, for example, ask 'Can I mind your kids so you can have some time out?' or 'Can I collect some groceries for you on the way over?' Other things you might be able to help with are:

- washing clothes or dishes
- tidying up around the house
- preparing meals for the rest of the family, especially during and following hospital visits, and don't forget to feed the pets!

