

# Communicating as a caregiver

For both patient and caregiver, a cancer diagnosis means the beginning of many new relationships—with doctors, nurses, and other members of the treatment team. It can also change relationships you already have. These tips can help you openly communicate with the people in your life.

## Talking to your loved one's treatment team

### Bring a List of Questions to Appointments

Before appointments, prepare a list of questions for the treatment team. It's easy to get distracted during an appointment and forget a question or concern. Remember that every question is valuable.

### Take Notes During Appointments

Bring a notebook and pen to help you remember information from your appointment. Or ask your treatment team for permission to record the appointment with a phone or audio recorder. Repeat back what you have written down to make sure it is correct.

### Make Sure the Team Knows What Your Treatment Goals Are

It is important for your team to know about you and your loved one's treatment expectations. What are your goals for treatment? Are they the same as your treatment team's goals? Open communication will ensure that your loved one's wants and needs are honored.

### Connect with Mental Health Specialists

Ask the doctor or nurse how to connect with the social workers, psychologists, and other specialists on the treatment team. At first, you may not feel you need their services, but this may change over time. It is never too late to ask.

### Address Financial Concerns

If you have questions or concerns about financing treatment, contact your hospital's financial counseling office or consult the National Cancer Institute's financial resources fact sheet at [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov).

## Talking to your loved one

### Discuss Your Relationship Openly

Be honest and say what is on your mind and invite your loved one to be open with you. Let them know you are always there to listen. Be kind and patient with each other.

### Empower Your Loved One

It is important to give your loved one space to make their own decisions about their treatment and day-to-day life. It can be helpful to discuss who will make each medical decision ahead of time. In every instance, make sure your loved one's intentions and preferences come first.

### Be Understanding of Changes in Physical and Emotional Intimacy

Treatment may affect your partner's body, emotions, and their interest in sex. Social workers can help you communicate openly about changes in your intimate relationship.

### Oncology Social Work

At Mass General Cancer Center, free oncology social work services are provided to patients and caregivers. Oncology social workers provide support, counseling and information about helpful resources. They also lead diagnosis-specific support groups. To reach out to a licensed counselor with experience working with cancer patients and their families, ask your care provider to connect you with the social worker on your team.