

supporter roadmap

Charting your unique path to connection
and support after a cancer diagnosis



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EMPOWERING YOU TO BE PRESENT

The words "I have cancer" can feel scary and overwhelming. If you are struggling with what is next and how you can stay connected and be supportive, this Roadmap is for you. Created by cancer survivors and supporters who have been there, it will help you navigate this difficult time, be aware of the challenges ahead, and, most importantly, avoid the bumps in the road that can make it a rough ride. **You've got this!** We are here for you every step of the way, so fasten your seatbelt, and let's get on the road to improved connection and support.

1

UNDERSTAND WHAT'S AHEAD

The diagnosis defines the treatment and experience, not the person

Depending on the type and stage of cancer, treatment may start immediately, or there may be some time before it begins. It may require an extended hospital stay or commuting to the hospital or clinic for procedures. Their support needs will vary depending on their care plan and how they feel physically and emotionally on a given day, both during treatment and as they transition back to life after treatment. Remember, the diagnosis does not define them and has not changed who they are on the inside, so **avoid treating them differently and be yourself.**

Improve your empathy by educating yourself on what is ahead

Information is power, and facts are the best way to overcome fear of the unknown. It can be helpful to learn more about the specific cancer and how it can impact all aspects of their life, including their physical, mental, and emotional health. Be sure to seek information from authoritative resources. Visit our online resource library at b-present.org/roadmap to find helpful links and answers to questions about what's ahead.

BE PRESENT NOT PERFECT

Don't let the fear of saying or doing the wrong thing get in the way of showing up. If you are feeling intimidated, you are not alone. Just remember this is likely new for everyone. Stay authentic to your strengths and relationship with them, show kindness, and open your heart; the rest will follow. **You don't have to do something big to make a difference in their life.**

"THE BEST THING YOU CAN OFFER SOMEONE IN THEIR DARKEST HOUR IS NOT YOUR FANCY TALK, YOUR THEORIES, YOUR EXTENSIVE INTERNET RESEARCH ON CURES, OR EVEN YOUR SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE. IT'S YOUR WILLINGNESS TO SIMPLY BE PRESENT AND NOT RUN AWAY."

—EMILY MCDOWELL

IDENTIFY COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES & BOUNDARIES

Clear and honest communication is vital

Good support starts with good communication. This is new territory for everyone, so be as clear and honest as possible. Without clear guidance, people will do what they think is needed, which may not be helpful and adds stress.

What are their communication preferences?

Every person responds differently to the news, and not everyone wants to share their diagnosis or seek help from others. It is a personal choice that should be respected. Use the attached Communication Worksheet to help **ensure everyone is on the same page** with the communication preferences and plan.

Understand and respect their boundaries

Boundaries are the personal needs, limits, and preferences set with other people to clearly and respectfully protect a person's physical, mental, and emotional health. Respect their boundaries and avoid taking them personally. Some examples of healthy boundaries:

- **Physical:** "I need to rest by 9 PM, so I can't have long phone calls in the evening."
- **Emotional:** "I'm not comfortable discussing my medical details today."
- **Social:** "I feel overwhelmed with too many visitors and need more quiet time. Let's text or have a call instead."
- **Informational:** "I prefer to share updates about my health on my terms. Thank you for respecting my privacy."

Some important reminders

- When they share their diagnosis with you, they are trusting **YOU** with that information. Inappropriate sharing can have unintended consequences.
- If friends ask intrusive questions that violate the privacy guidelines, **it is okay to say, "That's not my information to share."**
- It can be humbling to ask for help, and knowing what to ask for may be difficult or stressful. Be specific to ease the burden.
- Give them space to decline your offer of support without taking it personally. They may not be ready to accept help yet. Give it time.

COMMUNICATION WORKSHEET

Clear and consistent communication is key to staying connected. People have different preferences for staying in touch. Clarity upfront reduces misunderstandings and hurt feelings later.



How do they want to communicate (e.g., email, phone, text, social media)? What are their privacy concerns and information-sharing boundaries?



What are the barriers to communicating (e.g., access to the Internet, mobile device, laptop, skill level)? Can everyone access the tools selected? Can the group help with any barriers identified?



Who will help with updates when the loved one is unwell or unable to do so? Select 1-2 people if possible.



What is the communication plan? What are the ground rules for providing updates, following up, checking in, visits, privacy, and boundaries (e.g., checking the app before visiting, checking the app each day, etc.)?

Tips to improve your communication

Listen actively

When someone is speaking, really try to listen and understand what they are saying.

Ask questions

If you're not sure about something, ask them for clarification.

Use nonverbal cues

Facial expressions, eye contact, and body language affect how well you communicate.

Repeat back what you heard

This shows that you were listening and helps to clarify any misunderstandings.

Know your communication style

Everyone communicates differently, so be aware of how you come across to others.

UNDERSTAND & ORGANIZE DESIRED SUPPORT

Understand their support preferences

The Support Worksheet is your guide to clarifying support preferences. Each person's support needs vary, so be sure to ask and honor their preferences.

- Some will be private and want to go it alone, while others want their group to stay connected. **Follow their lead.**
- Needs will change over time and depend on how they feel physically and emotionally, so continue to ask as appropriate (without being overbearing).

Help each supporter see their role in a tangible, doable way

The group will have different talents and limitations, so work together to identify the support roles that are authentic to each person's strengths and their relationship. This will help support feel more accessible, natural, and improves consistency, preserves normalcy and offers comfort in the face of everything else changing.

Ease communication with a connection and support app

Staying coordinated with the support network keeps things running smoothly, provides clarity, and reduces unhelpful acts of support.

- **Several apps are available** to ease communication. Visit b-present.org or scan the QR code on the next page for tips on selecting and using an app that works best for the group.
- Remember to establish some ground rules about using the selected app, keeping it updated, and checking it regularly (especially before visiting).

Work together to be there how and when they need you

An informed and coordinated community of support will improve the likelihood of consistent and meaningful support.

- Your loved one won't always want or need support, but being there when they need you is vital.
- Showing up how and when needed, whether online, virtually, or in person, and, equally important, giving them space when requested, contribute to improved quality of life and allow them to focus on healing and thriving.

SUPPORT WORKSHEET

Whether in the hospital or at home, it is important to understand how your loved one wants to be supported, what brings them comfort, who they want as supporters, and where to establish boundaries. Their preferences guide how to organize support for the best experience possible.

How do they want to be supported? How will this differ when they are feeling well vs. needing rest? Is dropping by for visits okay, or should I always ask first?

What things bring them comfort? What are their favorite foods, comfort items, and activities? Movie, book, or music preferences? Things to avoid? Important routines? Preferred self-care activities? Physical or social boundaries?

Who do they want as supporters? Who do they need a break from?

What connection and support tools align with their preferences? What features are important? Need help? Scan the QR code below for support app tips.

What support roles are most authentic to each supporter's strengths and relationship to the person needing support?

Some support roles based on personal strengths

The Listener

On the days when they need of a safe space and a listening ear to process things.

The Comic Relief

Humor is an important coping tool when they need a distraction or to feel uplifted.

The Organizer

Take the lead when they need help organizing the group or planning activities.

The Cook

A delicious home-cooked meal can offer some much-needed comfort and joy.

The Communicator

Words matter when keeping everyone posted while being mindful of boundaries.



Support App Tips

BE INTENTIONAL AND STAY COMMITTED

Understanding Your Role and Setting Intentions

Being intentional means acting with purpose and awareness, focusing on what matters most. In the context of supporting a loved one with cancer, it involves deliberate actions and consistent commitment to provide meaningful support. For instance, if you aim to offer tangible support, what specific ways do you plan to help based on your strengths? Examples include running errands, helping with household chores, preparing meals, driving them to appointments, organizing activities, helping with updates, helping with school or work needs, offering emotional support, etc. Awareness also means knowing your limits.

Don't give up

Your loved one may not feel well enough to answer your text or call but know that they likely read and listen to all messages of support and appreciate you checking in.

- As appropriate and aligned with support preferences, continue to send "Thinking of You" messages and invite them to group events, virtual meetups, or watch parties.
- Even if they can't make it, they will feel remembered, and that is what matters.

Follow through

Your loved one is counting on you to honor your commitments. Whether you signed up for a visit, activity, or other supportive action, remember they will likely make plans accordingly. Have the courtesy to follow through.

- If a scheduling conflict arises, be honest and have the courtesy to reschedule or find someone who can provide support in your place.
- If you have a busy schedule, create a check-in routine that works for you, and put an alert on your calendar to **stay consistent**.

Keep it fresh and fun - Create memories together

Whether you want to recreate old memories to provide comfort and normalcy or create new memories and traditions to experience for the first time, **find things you are interested in doing together**.

- A few example activities include yoga, game or movie night, art project, or mini book club.
- Set up a calendar reminder and give each other something to look forward to doing one-on-one or as a group.

SELF CARE HELPS YOU BE THERE

Take care of your own physical, mental, and emotional health

If you feel stressed, anxious, or tired, prioritize making time to recharge and take care of yourself. Freedom from these distractions is the first step to being present for others. **Make time for things you enjoy**, including physical exercise, listening to music, journaling, creative activities, or hobbies. Even a short walk can be surprisingly helpful.

Make sure you find your own support team

Unresolved emotions can build up and affect your ability to provide support, and there will be times when you need to talk and **process your own feelings to keep your mental health in check**.

- Talking to a therapist, friend, counselor, trained social worker, or trusted confidant can provide a much-needed outlet and the relief you need. Be mindful of privacy wishes during private conversations.
- Avoid venting your frustrations to your loved one dealing with cancer - they may already feel like a burden.

Find a life balance that works for you

In a busy world with our own timelines, goals, and aspirations, it can feel like there is no room for others.

- Being mindful of your own health, conscious of when you can put others' health at risk, and recognizing when you do or don't have the capacity to make room for others is in everyone's best interest.
- If you feel sick, consider an alternate virtual activity or find a different day to connect (and put it on the calendar) so you can keep them safe.
- Find balance, make time when you can, be realistic about your limits, and prioritize their needs when you know they need you.

NOTES

SOME FINAL TIPS

Be flexible

Make time to be present when they need you, give space when they need it, stay flexible, and be understanding when plans change.

Be free from distractions

You need to be free from external distractions to give your loved one your full attention and listen without judgment. Whether it is your phone, work, undone tasks, or family stress, try to set those aside and be fully present.

Listen actively and watch for non-verbal cues.

Good communication skills start with active listening. Sometimes, being a good listener and providing a safe space for them to process their emotions is all they want.

- Keep your eyes, ears, and heart open. You may have no idea what to say, and that's okay. **Embrace the silence** and welcome those moments of quiet reflection.
- Be careful not to force your beliefs or opinions on them. Respect their choices and decisions, offer advice only when asked, and find positive and meaningful ways to make their day better.



Share the opportunity to share

It can be easy to forget that both of you may be struggling. Allowing each of you to feel validated in your own experiences can bring you closer together. Take turns answering the question, "How are YOU doing?"

Be kind and find forgiveness when emotions flare

When feelings are hurt, be intentional with how you respond. **Words matter.**

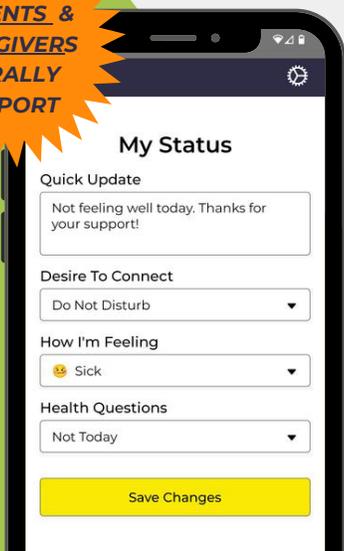
- Acknowledge your mistake and how it made them feel, ask for forgiveness, commit to doing better next time, and move forward together.
- Stay focused on keeping your relationship strong. If it helps, have a favorite picture or other visual reminder of your special bond to help pull you through the challenges together.

NOTES

b-there App: Support How & When It Is Needed

Help everyone stay synced on status, updates, and needs. No more stressing about how to show up and when to give space. Download the app and start supporting today!

USED BY
**PATIENTS &
CAREGIVERS**
TO RALLY
SUPPORT



Connect



Status



Wishlist

Download *b-there*



b-present.org/b-there-app





Learn more on
b-present.org