

## **TIPS: What To Do and Say**

### When someone you love (or know) is going through a breast cancer diagnosis

You may meet or know people (family, friends, co-workers, etc.) who were diagnosed with breast cancer and you may not know what to do or what to say to them.

This resource provides information and tips on how you can provide emotional support to someone after a breast cancer diagnosis. By giving them support, they may feel loved, cared for and understood. You may also feel like you're doing something to help them.

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#### **Not sure how to start a conversation?**

**Try this:** "I've been thinking about you and wanted to check in to see how you're doing. If you'd like to talk about it, I'm here for you."

## **Techniques and skills for emotional support**

### **ACTIVE LISTENING**

Active listening is using focused listening skills. This can help you understand a person's thoughts and feelings.

- Be fully present, don't interrupt. Allow them to complete their thoughts.
- Ask questions, open-ended ones if possible.
- Resist placing judgment.

**Example:** Say - "I am sorry you're going through this. Would you like to talk or just have me be there for you?"

If the person would like to talk, you could say "Tell me more." You can also ask follow-up questions like "What do you think about that?" or "How does that make you feel?"

### **PARTIALIZING**

Partializing is taking an overall problem and breaking it up into smaller, more manageable pieces. This can make a big problem seem less overwhelming.

**Example:** "It sounds like you have a lot going on at once. It's probably overwhelming to think about it all. How can I help you? Or "What feels most important in this moment?"



## **STORIES OF SUPPORT**

**Strength comes in numbers.**

Go to [komen.org/share-your-story](https://www.komen.org/share-your-story) to read stories of hope and encouragement from others. We invite you to share your story to inspire, comfort and support others.

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## **SOCIAL SUPPORT**

In this resource, we focused on emotional support. To learn more about social support, check out these resources on [komen.org](https://www.komen.org):

- [Co-Survivors](#) - How to help those you care about cope with breast cancer brochure
- [komen.org/cosurvivor](https://www.komen.org/cosurvivor)
- <https://www.komen.org/support-resources/support/>

## Techniques and skills for emotional support

(Continued)

### REFLECTION

Reflective listening is hearing and understanding and then letting the other person know they're being heard and understood. Try not to interpret what they're saying, but instead, reflect back on what you're hearing.

**Example:** *"It sounds like you're feeling <insert the specific thing they mentioned.>" "I'm here if you want to talk." Or "I hear your concerns."*

### ACKNOWLEDGING

Acknowledging involves respecting their story by commenting on what they've shared.

- Convey empathy and understanding.
- The tone of your voice has a powerful effect and can show care and concern.
- Nonverbal cues like eye contact, leaning in and head nodding can also show care and concern.

**Example:** *Saying, "I'm so sorry you're going through this." Or "That must be difficult." This may be enough to convey this respect and acknowledgment. You could ask, "How can I help?"*

### VALIDATION AND NORMALIZATION

Validation and normalization are very similar. Validation recognizes and accepts a person's feelings. It explains the way they're feeling is common and expected (in most cases). What they say has validity (or meaning).

**Example:** *"I just feel so overwhelmed and don't know what to do!"*

You: *"It's okay to feel that way. Being diagnosed with breast cancer is a lot to process. It makes sense that you're unsure about what to do next. How can I help?"*

Normalization assures them their feelings and reactions are normal. It's important to provide this reassurance.

**Example:** *"Since my diagnosis, I've just shut down. I don't know what to do or say. I'm just sad."*

You: *"This sounds like a normal response to very difficult news. I would imagine many people feel this same way. You're not alone. I'm here to help."*

### SUMMARIZING

Summarizing is when you both review the conversation you've had and discuss actions you can take together. It may help to write these down.

**Example:** *"It sounds like the most important thing to you right now is <insert what you've talked about>. Would you like me to help you figure out some next steps and people who can help?"*

### THE KOMEN PATIENT CARE CENTER'S BREAST CARE HELPLINE

at **1-877 GO KOMEN** (1-877-465-6366) is a great first place to get help and support.

Our helpline provides free, professional support services to anyone who has questions or concerns about breast cancer, including people diagnosed with breast cancer and their families.

The Helpline is available Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET and Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET

Please refer to the [Patient Care Center](#) for more information.

The Helpline staff speak English and Spanish.



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[komen.org](https://www.komen.org)