

Supporting Your Loved One

No matter how much support you can give, your loved one's journey with MBC will be difficult at times. They may experience setbacks with their disease, as well as side effects from medications. Feelings of anger and discouragement are common, and sadness and confusion may worsen. Don't take it personally if your loved one takes out their emotions and frustrations on you or others. Ideas to provide support during these difficult times include:

- Remind them that they don't have to face this journey alone and encourage them to lean on you when needed
- Try to understand what your loved one is going through—by listening or offering to lend a hand with chores and errands
- Don't act like a cheerleader, or try to make them feel good when they're feeling bad. Instead, allow your loved one to express anger, frustration, and any other feelings
- Stay in touch. Schedule regular check-ins to demonstrate your support. Call at times that work for your loved one's schedule, and visit as often as your schedule allows

Since you may not be able to complete all of these tasks alone, organize friends and neighbors to help. You may also want to consider asking for assistance researching information or to be the contact person who updates friends and family. Depending on the type of treatment your loved one is on – whether they require infusions or oral therapies, your needs as a caregiver may be different. Take the time to seek the support and care that you need, specific to your situation, and if one support system isn't working for you, try not to get discouraged. There are many support services out there – ask your loved one's care team for additional recommendations or read the Resources section of the Understanding MBC guide.



Communicating with Your Loved One

It can be very difficult for you and your loved one to talk about an MBC diagnosis. When you do communicate, take some time to assess how much or how little they want to talk about the disease. Below are some tips for interacting with your loved one throughout your shared journey.

Be a Sounding Board and Focus on Their Needs

- Try putting aside your own feelings and practicing active listening



- Try not to judge, make light of the situation, or change the way your loved one feels or acts. Sometimes it's OK not to say anything, but let them know you are there for them and offer a hug or other sign of affection
- Ask open-ended questions to help keep the conversation going, such as, "What are you feeling?" Try to avoid questions that may get a one-word response
- Be prepared to hear anything. Your loved one may be thinking about death or may tell you they're afraid. If they share these types of feelings, you don't have to reply, but you should acknowledge how they feel and ask if there is anything you can do to help
- Gear the conversation to your loved one's attention span so they don't feel overwhelmed or guilty if they want to end the discussion or change the subject

Offer to Participate in Treatment Discussions

A major role for a caregiver can be helping make treatment decisions, which may come with many strong emotions. While these decisions can be difficult, you can help by talking through various options to help your loved one actively manage their disease in partnership with their medical team.

Supporting Your Loved One When Talking About an MBC Diagnosis With Children, Friends and Family

One of your most important caregiver roles is helping your loved one talk with close friends and family about their diagnosis. A good place to start may be helping them decide whom to talk to, when and how much information to share. The following tips can help with these decisions:

- Help them make a list of people they want to talk to in person
- Help make another list of people that you (or someone else) may contact with the news of your loved one's diagnosis, if they are not comfortable
- Offer to be present when they share the news with others for moral support
- Encourage your loved one to be clear with family and friends about what type of information they want to share about their disease and how they feel. This approach can help others better understand and provide the appropriate support
- Encourage them to be honest with friends and family about what they're going through

If your loved one has children, unless you're asked to be there, let your loved one handle these conversations. However, you can still help them figure out what and how much to tell their children. Keep in mind that:

- Young children (up to age 8) don't need a lot of detailed information, but older children may want to know more. The most important issue for children of any age is their own sense of security and safety
- Remind your loved one that their children are probably very worried about them
- Above all, help ensure the children get a balanced point of view, emphasizing that cancer is a serious disease but there is a team of medical professionals helping their mom or dad
- Encourage your loved one to choose a time when they're feeling fairly calm to talk to their children
- Reassure your loved one that it's OK for children to cry, and to see their parents cry sometimes
- Your loved one can help their children cope by encouraging them to share how they feel, and by reassuring them that they will always be loved and cared for no matter what

Helping Your Loved One Seek and Accept Help

Some people find it hard to accept help, even when they need it. Don't be surprised or hurt if they resist; just continue to offer your support. There are several ways you can assist your loved one to accept help:

- Provide emotional support through your presence
- Offer practical ideas on what you can do to help. If needed, insist they select one specific chore for you to complete
- Remind them that allowing others to help can be an important way to help family/friends to cope with your loved one's disease

