

34. Relationship with my Partner

When people are distressed they are most likely to turn to their spouse or partner for support. When both members of a couple are under stress, their relationship can become strained. One reason many couples struggle in the face of cancer is that the patient's partner is frequently highly distressed and in need of emotional support themselves. Cancer may not always cause problems, but it can often aggravate existing ones. Couples seem to manage best when they are able to discuss the real issues facing them (their private concerns as well as their shared ones) and how they will deal with the changes to their relationship. Attempting to avoid hurting one another can paradoxically lead couples to feel isolated from one another. Of course some partners discourage or withdraw from open communication in case they say 'the wrong thing', fearing they may make matters worse. The insistence on 'positive thinking' may stop couples discussing openly what they may be privately thinking and feeling (e.g. feelings of fear or despair).

How can I manage this situation?

- Anxiety and depression are less likely to develop if couples are able to face the stress of cancer together. Remember that patients can support partners, as well as the other way round. Partners often try to protect each other from what they are feeling by not being honest and open about how they feel. Bringing your feelings into the open may help you understand each other, bring you closer together and enable you to move forward.
- Try to be clear about what you are feeling and thinking, but don't assume you know what your partner is feeling or thinking. People who have known one another a long time tend to think they can mind-read in this way!
- Do your best not to interrupt your partner when they are speaking; try to listen as well as talk. Acknowledge what your partner has said first, and only then respond to it openly, calmly and honestly.
- Fear is often expressed as anger, so think carefully if you find yourself criticising or being irritable with your partner. Remember that this is a stressful time for both of you and both of you need support, especially from each other. Try not to interrogate your partner, nor expect them to know immediately what you or they are feeling.
- Words may not always be as important as giving or receiving a hug from your partner.
- Being overly positive, giving advice or finding a solution is not always what is needed. Try instead to find out whatever your partner would really find it helpful to talk about.
- Don't worry about saying the 'wrong thing' — the important thing is to do your best to stay involved. Avoiding conversations with your partner can be particularly hurtful.
- If possible, find someone in addition to your partner whom you can talk to, and get support from, on a regular basis. It can sometimes be stressful for both of you if you are depending solely on your partner for support.
- Above all, remember that you and your partner (and other family members) may well have different ways of dealing with the situation you both face, and that this is natural. It helps though to acknowledge these differences and to accept that you may each have different needs and priorities at any particular time.
- If more serious problems seem to be developing in your relationship with your partner, speak to your GP about referring you both to a couple counselling service such as Relate

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

34. Relationship with my Partner - Resources/Information

Local Resources:

<p>Relate The Tarka Clinic Paiges Lane Barnstaple Tel: 03007 729 681</p>	<p>Offer a confidential relationship counselling and sex therapy service. Charges may apply.</p>
<p>Cancer Care Counselling Service The Fern Centre North Devon District Hospital Raleigh park Barnstaple Devon EX32 4JB</p>	<p>Jess French, Lead Macmillan Cancer Care Counsellor Tel: 01271 334472 (ext. 5672) Email: ndht.cancercarecounselling@nhs.net Web: https://overandabove.org.uk/fern-centre/ Self referral or though your CNS or keyworker</p>

National Resources:

<p><u>Prostate UK</u></p>	<p>Help and online support for patients and their families.</p>
<p>Penny Brohn UK Tel: 0303 3000 118</p>	<p>Runs courses and offers physical, emotional and spiritual Support for people with cancer and those close to them.</p>
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 — 7 days a week 8.00am—8.00pm</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230</p>
<p><u>Macmillan on-line Community</u></p>	<p>Online support— to share experiences or vent your emotions find others who understand—join today!</p>
<p>Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 11am – 5pm Saturday</p>
<p>LGBT Foundation— www.lgbt.foundation Tel: 0345 3 30 30 30 Email: info@lgbt.foundation</p>	<p>Information, advice and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people, including a helpline and email support.</p>
<p>Samaritans https://www.samaritans.org/</p>	<p>When people feel listened to, it can save a life ‘, confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair Tel: 116 123(free 24hr helpline)</p>

Other Resources :

<p>Macmillan booklets:</p>	<p>Talking about cancer—MAC11646</p>
	<p>Talking with someone who has cancer— MAC11631</p>
<p>Prostate UK Booklets:</p>	<p>Sex and Relationships Prostate problems</p>
<p>Video: How cancer can affect relationships https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUS_pFCOcRM&feature=youtu.be</p>	