

How to talk to someone with cancer

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(HealthDay)—For people diagnosed with cancer, communication with family members plays a vital role in their health and well-being, according to an expert from San Diego State University.

After studying this issue for a decade, communications professor Wayne Beach concluded that cancer patients benefit from continuous positive dialogue.

"Cancer patients do cope and heal better depending on their communication within their families," Beach said in a university news release. "Without this proper communication, these patients don't heal as well or as long. Having a dysfunctional environment around you is not good—it's stressful."

Patients and their loved ones cope better, he found, when they share stories, reminisce and talk about their hopes as well as their concerns.

"How [family members](#) communicate when coping [with a diagnosis] is important," Beach said. "Patients have reported feeling empowered when communication is comprehensive and constant in their home and medical surroundings."

For the past 10 years, Beach and a team of researchers analyzed phone and face-to-face interactions between [cancer patients](#) and their families, as well as interactions between patients and [health care professionals](#).

Though cancer is often viewed as a grim diagnosis, the researchers found that the conversations between [patients](#) and their loved ones focused on life, not death.

"If you hear someone has been diagnosed with cancer, our [natural inclination](#) tends to be to think of it as a death sentence," Beach said. "It is so much more about hope than despair. I really didn't expect that going in."

Beach provided several do's and don'ts for people with loved ones who've been diagnosed with cancer.

Do:

- Offer encouragement and stay positive.
- Talk frequently.
- Be open about how you're feeling.
- Actively listen to what the patient is saying.
- Allow the patient to vent and share their fears.

Don't:

- Be silent.
- Avoid talking about cancer or anything related to the diagnosis.
- Dwell or focus on negatives.

More information: The American Cancer Society offers tips on how to [support people with cancer](#).

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