

# Clinical social worker offers advice on the right way to talk with someone who has cancer

December 20 2023, by Jason Howland, Mayo Clinic News Network

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

The holidays are a joyous occasion for most people. But for someone with cancer or other serious illness, it can be a time of overwhelming

anxiety and fear. And as family and friends get together, it's important to show that you care without coming across as insensitive.

Lynne Vitagliano, a clinical social worker at Mayo Clinic, offers some helpful advice to make those uncomfortable conversations less awkward.

Many times, people mean well but don't know the right things to say to someone with [cancer](#).

"Every person is different. So it would be hard to say that there's any one right question to ask or right thing to say. What I think is most important is to convey genuine care and concern," says Vitagliano. "Offer an invitation rather than a question. So to say something along the lines of, 'I've been thinking of you. I know a lot is going on in your life. I'm here if you'd like to talk.'"

Vitagliano says it's also important how you respond. And the best response is simply listening.

"Allow them to talk about their experience without feeling the need to kind of jump in with your own advice or suggestions," she says.

And it's important to show that you care without coming across as insensitive.

"We want to say something that we think is supportive. So we say, 'I'm sure it'll all turn out OK.' Well, we don't know that, and that's not necessarily true. And so, by saying that, it almost invalidates what they've shared with us," Vitagliano says. "It's not as supportive as saying, 'Wow, you've been through so much this year. And I'm just blown away by your strength. What can I do to help?'"

2023 Mayo Clinic News Network. Distributed by Tribune Content

Agency, LLC.

Citation: Clinical social worker offers advice on the right way to talk with someone who has cancer (2023, December 20) retrieved 29 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-clinical-social-worker-advice-cancer.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.