

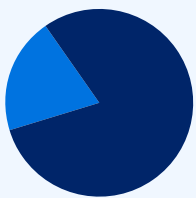
# A manager's guide to supporting employees facing cancer



As a people manager, your guidance and knowledge in supporting employees impacted by cancer is vital. Helping employees through this challenging stage of their lives and careers can make all the difference for them – at work and at home.

20%

of cancer survivors report challenges at work one to five years after their diagnosis.\*



\*(Cancer and Careers)

## Cancer Diagnosis Awareness

A cancer diagnosis is a major life event that can be overwhelming. People facing cancer are managing feelings of shock and disbelief and often feel a loss of control as they navigate the initial stages of their care. Understanding the psychosocial, emotional, and physical struggles they may be dealing with can help you better support employees when they most need your support.

### Common concerns:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Uncertainty of diagnosis
- Challenges of treatment
- Life after cancer

People facing cancer often manage **physical side effects** from their illness or side effects related to their treatment, such as:

- Fatigue
- Pain
- Weight changes
- Hair loss
- Decreased mobility

## How You Can Help

An employee facing cancer confronts many difficult decisions whether they are adjusting to a recent cancer diagnosis, undergoing treatment, or returning to work after treatment. Your recognition and understanding of the impact to an affected employee's state of mind is vital to helping them cope.



### Common challenges:

- Navigating time off
- Understanding insurance coverage
- Managing financial concerns
- Interacting with colleagues
- Dealing with side effects at work

### How you can help:

- Express a willingness to help an employee develop a roadmap and plan to stay in their role if desired
- Emphasize flexibility and creativity, if possible, with working remotely or changing shifts/locations
- Work with Human Resources to develop a written plan for workplace accommodations and become knowledgeable about employment laws (FMLA, Americans with Disabilities Act)
- Inquire about the employee's preference to inform other colleagues, and if not, honor their privacy
- Identify a point person for coverage for anticipated treatments, scheduling conflicts, or other times when the employee needs help

### Helpful Communication Strategies

Knowing what to say when an employee tells you they have cancer is difficult. When having this conversation with an employee you likely have every intention to try to make them feel better, but sometimes how someone responds can often have a very different impact on how they perceive your words from what is intended.

#### Things to keep in mind:

- Be fully present during the conversation
- Emphasize partnership and support
- Ask open-ended questions
- Sensitively explore the employee's concerns
- Show compassion and empathy

#### Things to **avoid** when talking with an employee about their diagnosis:

- "Just stay positive!"
- "Everything is going to be OK."
- "Well at least..."
- **Don't** try to identify a cause for their cancer
- **Don't** bring up the employee's cancer status in front of others
- **Don't** compare the employee's experience to another person's experience

### Connection to Resources

Every employee has different needs, and the nature or extent of internal resources that companies offer vary. Contact your HR & Benefits teams about resources available. The resources below can help employees feel more in control during a challenging time:

- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)** – provide counseling and mental health support to employees, dependents, and family members
- **Human Resources** – provide information about company benefits that promote physical health and well-being, insurance coverage, and disability options
- **Community Resources** – provide external resources, which can be another helpful way for employees to access support when they might feel reluctant to utilize internal resources due to privacy concerns

For more information scan the QR code or visit:

[mskcc.org/direct/mskdirectforyou/access-msk-direct-resources](https://mskcc.org/direct/mskdirectforyou/access-msk-direct-resources)



Memorial Sloan Kettering  
Cancer Center