

## Coping with Cancer: I Am a Survivor!

A diagnosis of cancer can be one of the most frightening and overwhelming things we go through as human beings. It is important to spend as much time taking care of our emotional health as we do our physical health. Our positive outlook, sense of humor, patience, friends and family will get us through the disease process.

Here are some suggestions for things you can do to positively impact your own mental health.

### Educate Yourself

Knowledge is power! The more you understand about your disease and what your medical team is telling you, the more control you will feel about the decisions you are making.

### Keep Hope Alive!

One of the greatest things you can do for yourself is believe you will conquer this disease. Look for the things in your life that bring you joy, make you smile and laugh. That is when it is important to reach out to others who can help keep you moving forward.

### Express Yourself

It can be helpful to take stock of your emotions regularly and share those feelings and concerns with the team of people that support you. You need to be validated and understand that all your emotions are real and they are ok – the good and the bad. If you have difficulty expressing yourself in the moment, write things down ahead of time so you are ready to share when you see your team. If you aren't comfortable expressing yourself verbally, you can use a journal, paint, draw, cook or any other creative or physical outlet. While you are in that activity, be mindful of what you are trying to express.

### Reach Out for Support

There are many supportive services for cancer patients. Often your medical team or your Employee Assistance Program such as CONCERN can help you find support groups, counseling, exercise classes and other ways to connect and take care of yourself. These services are usually free or are able to be accessed through insurance. You can find information online as well by searching "Cancer Support" in your town.

### Be Resilient

Resilience is an important word and it can be helpful to tap into our resilience when we have a big challenge in our life. Looking for the positive meaning in all we go through in life is one way toward resiliency. We can often learn things from our experiences, both good and bad. Take time to reflect on what you are learning. Cancer survivors often talk about appreciating things more: family, friends, food, nature, spirituality and faith, and the ability to have a new day every day. This can be a time to consider our values and how we want to make our lives better in the future.

### Believe in Yourself

Cancer can be challenging physically and mentally. Often the treatments can change the way we look and how we see ourselves. It is important to remember that what people love about us is on the inside, not the outside. Do things that will help keep your self-esteem positive: exercise, participate in activities you enjoy, spend time with loved ones and be mindful of the fact that the disease is a process and you are working at getting better. When you feel up to it, find a way to give back or help others. Helping someone else can do so much for our self-esteem by reminding us that we aren't alone, we are able to help someone else and the world can be a good place. Taking care of yourself emotionally needs to be a priority. It is one of the best ways you can get through this difficult time and be well. Be good to yourself, let others in to help you, be mindful of how you are everyday and look for the good things in life. A positive attitude is vital to your healing.

