

Top Tips – Alex Bailie

Cancer affects the whole family, especially those who are closest to the person, and the emotional impact can be just as significant for carers as it can be for the person themselves. It's perfectly normal to feel a range of different emotions, including shock, anxiety, worry, fear, sadness, and loss and grief as well, and also, it's very common to feel things like irritability, frustration, resentment even at times, and I suppose the first thing really is accessing the supports that are already available to you. So, I think sometimes, we can feel embarrassed about how we're feeling sometimes and we're frightened to kind of talk to other people around us because the focus tends to be on the person who's not well, and so, going to the friends and family that are closest to you as well is probably the first thing to do, and also, it's important to kind of access the other supports that you have, maybe things like hobbies and activities that you already are involved in or your church and organisations like that as well.

But, you know, if you find that you really are feeling overwhelmed and you're struggling, there are lots of different services out there, and I suppose one important thing to do would be to speak to kind of the professionals that you're maybe already in contact with, like cancer nurse-specialists or consultants as well, and sometimes they're able to signpost you to services. There's lots of different services in the voluntary sector as well, where you can access counselling. So, I think be aware that you're not on your own. So, just because you're at home with the person and you're the main person that's with them, there can often that sense that you're responsible for looking after them now, and that's not the case. There is obviously still their medical team and all the services that are there for them. So, I think even making sure that you have phone numbers written down, keeping them in a safe place and knowing where to access them, can sort of help to reduce some of that anxiety or some of that kind of fear that you might feel.

One important thing is also to have some time for yourself as well because we can't, you know, pour from an empty cup, and in order to be helpful, or to be effective in caring, you need to look after yourself first. So, it's really important to kind of take some time out and to keep kind of doing the things that you enjoy and the things that give you a sense of kind of wellbeing as well, so whether that's hobbies that you might have or sports you might be involved in or whether it's just spending time with your own friends or going out for coffee or going shopping or having a round of golf. And, in actual fact, it's often helpful for the person themselves because, you know, we all need time on our own as well.

One thing that's very natural or very normal is we'll find our mind kind of wanting to run ahead, so we find ourselves thinking about potential outcomes or how things might go, and as a result, we can spend a lot of time kind of living in the future. One thing that can be really quite helpful to try and do when we kind of find ourselves getting caught up in those thoughts about the future or what might be to come is to try and kind of bring ourselves back to what's actually just happening here today and think about what can I do in this moment and trying to stay focused on what's happening here and now.

There is this kind of mantra, if you like, that it's really important to stay positive and it's really important to focus on the good things, and whilst that, you know, may well be the case, it's extremely difficult and extremely challenging to do that, and it's really not actually possible to think positively all the time, especially when the situation we find ourselves in is one that's not at all positive. So, it's about kind of allowing yourself to kind of have those thoughts and not to get too hooked up in them, but to realise that they're just very normal and they're kind of part of the experience.