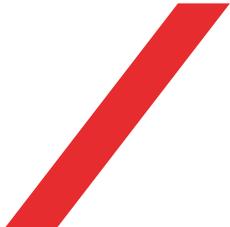


#LetsSpeakCancer



Let's Speak Cancer

**6 top tips to help you talk
about your cancer**



At AXA PPP healthcare, our Dedicated Cancer Nurses have phone conversations every day with people who've been diagnosed with cancer, as well as their loved ones – about their condition, what to expect from their treatment or recovery or any other concern they may have.

We've collected some of the things they've learned. Things people said to them that were difficult, upsetting or just plain annoying – but also things that were useful, kind, and got it just right. Using this feedback we asked people living with cancer to help us create our top tips on how to 'speak cancer' to share with those who are going through it and their loved ones.

Of course, it's not like there's actually a single language. It's personal.

It's about how you want to talk about your cancer experience and how you'd like other people to talk about it with you. We hope this guide helps you find the way that works best for you.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all those who have contributed to our Let's Speak Cancer guide, including Andy Golding, Denise Dallender, Jane Thorn and Julian Quick.

1. A bit of planning can help you take back control

While it's personal to you, those who put in a bit of thought about how they want to speak about their cancer usually find that it pays off.

For example, you might want to disclose different amounts of detail to close family and friends compared to people at work or those who you only bump into occasionally.

Practising what you want to say can help you keep control, rather than feeling on the spot when you see them. This could include things like who you want to tell or who you'd prefer a family member to tell for you, whether you tell them the type of cancer you have and how your treatment's going.

2. Use whatever words work for you

You might develop a whole new vocabulary to help you navigate the medical jargon you come across, or you might find that people want to give you some new labels once they find out you have or have had cancer.

'Survivor' is a common label people use, along with 'brave', 'fighter' and 'lucky'. While words like these might help some people feel empowered, others might find words like these too heroic for how they feel.

Equally we know that people sometimes like to give their tumour a name. This can be to distance themselves or as a way to accept it.

There are no rights or wrongs when it comes to the language you use to describe how you feel, but it can help others to understand if you let them know what works for you.

How not to speak cancer

“I knew you'd beat it - you're such a fighter.”

Real comment

#LetsSpeakCancer

© AXA PPP healthcare 2016



3. It's ok to let people know if you feel a bit down

Like everyone, you probably have your good days, bad days, and 'meh' days. One difference now might be that people assume that your not-so-good days are a cause for concern or a silent cry for help.

When others are determined that you should cheer up, you might be thinking "Why can't I just be a bit fed-up sometimes, like everyone else?". On the other hand, you might welcome people trying to help.

How not to speak cancer

“Now the cancer's gone, can't you just be a bit more - y'know - upbeat?”

Real comment

#LetsSpeakCancer

© AXA PPP healthcare 2016



Letting people know how you'd like them to respond when you're feeling a bit down can make it easier to get the support you need, so don't be afraid to say that you just want a bit of time on your own, a cup of tea, or to hear one of their bad jokes.

4. It pays to keep in touch with your boss

It's likely you'll need time off work for medical appointments during and after your treatment so whether it's by email, phone or face to face, letting your manager know how you're doing and any workplace support you might need can help make things easier when you go back to work. For example, will you be able to return to your usual work duties and hours straight away, or are there adjustments that would help ease the transition?

It's also a good idea to let them know how you want to talk about your cancer and how much you want your workmates – and even customers – to know.

People sometimes describe a feeling of losing control when a well-intentioned manager or colleague has told everyone about their cancer, so let them know up front what you want and if you'd find it helpful for them to tell others on your behalf.

For example, here's a fictitious email from 'Claire' to her manager before she comes back to work that might help you think of the things you want to talk about with your manager.

To:

brian@workemail.com

Subject:

Coming Back to Work

Hi Brian,

As you know, I'm due to come back in a couple of weeks. I'm still taking some medication and not quite at full strength but I'm looking forward to coming back and seeing everyone. Can we talk about perhaps slowly building up my hours to what I was doing before?

I'd really like it if we could make things as 'normal' as possible - no fuss, no cakes or big welcome back stuff please - as you know, I'm quite a private person.

It would also really help if you'd be able to get the team together before I see them and let them know I'm grateful for their support and the flowers and card but at the moment I don't really want to talk about my cancer. It's been pretty horrible and going over it all can be hard. I'm sure they'll understand I want to start to move on. And I bet there's a lot for me to get stuck back into!

I certainly don't want people to feel like they're walking on eggshells though so I'm happy to talk to people one to one.

Thanks again for all your support.

Claire

SEND



5. Don't feel pressured to move on before you're ready

With partners and loved ones there's more opportunity over time to learn the best way to 'speak cancer' with each other. You might find that your partner wants to move on quickly and make cancer a thing of the past, particularly at the end of your treatment. But this eagerness and encouragement to put things behind you may not reflect how you feel.

How not to speak cancer

“You'll be fine...
My sister had your
cancer, and she just
ran a marathon.”

Real comment

#LetsSpeakCancer

© AXA PPP healthcare 2016



Reaching remission can be a great relief but there's also the emotional impact of transition back to 'everyday life'.

Don't feel pressured to move on before you're ready – take the time you need to think about what the next phase of your life looks like. Then, importantly, let your partner and loved ones know as soon as possible.

You might prefer a chat at the kitchen table, on the phone, walking to the pictures or a letter on the pillow. Maybe adapting the sentiments of this letter to help your conversation will help you to think about your next steps to finding your 'new normal'.

Dearest <delete as appropriate> [Husband] [Wife] [Partner]
[Son] [Daughter],

It's been [no time] [6 months] [2 years] [ages] since I've
[finished treatment] [had the all-clear] [been cancer-free] and
in all that time you've been [great] [supportive] [a fantastic
help driving me to my appointments and making cups of tea].
And now I [don't feel any different, yet] [am ready to move on]
[want to get back to how things were] so it's okay if you [never
mention the cancer again] [just hug-it-out]. Just don't feel like
you've got to [snap me out of it] [cheer me up] [distract me] if
it looks like I'm feeling a bit low, it's just that I might still [feel
scared] [feel angry] [feel sad] [feel a bit down, like we all do].
Just a good old [hug] [kiss] [smile] [box of chocolates] [ticket to
Paris] will work, everytime.

X

6. Remember, you're not alone – support networks can be a great help

It's not unusual to feel isolated when you have cancer – it's a very personal thing happening to you, no matter how many of your family and friends are there with you.

You might find comfort in speaking with other people going through the same thing – whether it's a group of people at work who are living with or have had cancer, a charity support group or a network of people with the same type of cancer as you that you meet at the hospital.

Equally, there are information and resources online that can help you feel like you're not alone. For example:

- **AXA PPP healthcare's Cancer Centre contains a range of information and articles about cancer**

www.axapphealthcare.co.uk/speakcancer

- **Macmillan provide guidance that can help with all stages of cancer**

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/resources-and-publications/publications

- **Maggie's have centres around the UK and offer support online**

www.maggiescentres.org/how-maggies-can-help/

Some people like to use social media to share with people how they're doing. It might be a tweet about your latest round of chemotherapy that leads to a conversation with your followers who can relate to what you're feeling, or maybe it's an anonymous blog chronicling the impact cancer has had on your life.

If you think this might work for you then it can be worth taking a look at what's out there already to see what approach you want to take.

AXA PPP healthcare:

Our healthcare cover members diagnosed with cancer and receiving treatment in the UK are offered telephone support from our Dedicated Cancer Nurse service.

For further information and resources on cancer, from help spotting the signs to understanding treatment and side effects, visit:

axapphealthcare.co.uk/speakcancer

PB 59114

www.axapphealthcare.co.uk

AXA PPP healthcare, Philips House, Crescent Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 2PL.
AXA PPP healthcare Limited. Registered Office: 5 Old Broad Street, London, EC2N 1AD, United Kingdom.
Registered in England NO. 3148119. Authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by
the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. © AXA PPP healthcare 2016.

