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We Are Here For You!
Home support, durable medical equipment,
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Winter 2023

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Lopez Island
Home & Hospice
Support is a 501(c)(3)
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How to Donate

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Check or credit card.
An envelope is
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*Many thanks for your
continued
generosity.*

How to Support a Friend With a Serious Illness

by Elizabeth Landrum, Ph.D.

When someone you care about is dealing with a serious illness, it can be hard to know what to do or say. Your instinct might be to give them privacy or space, especially if they've received a difficult diagnosis. The anxiety that comes with not knowing what to do or say—or fear of saying the “wrong thing”—can keep your much-needed support at a distance. Instead of going into hiding, remember that **support actually makes a difference**. When asked what helps them get through illness, whether acute or chronic, most people say it's the support of friends and family. Still, some well-intentioned attempts to be helpful may fail. What follows are some guidelines, suggested by those who have been on the receiving end, to help you reach out as a friend.

A serious illness diagnosis usually comes as a shock; it might ignite your own fears, anger, and/or feelings of vulnerability. Recognizing and managing your internal reactions can free you to be more present as a friend. It might help to talk with someone else first.

If someone has told you about their illness, consider it **confidential** unless specifically told otherwise. Try to find a way to express your concern that's direct and comes from the heart. In many cases, a **simple expression of concern**, such as “I'm sorry you are going through this,” is enough. If you're at a loss for words, acknowledge it. And if you're in a public place, be brief. When appropriate, a touch or hug might say the most. People often don't remember, or even need, words, but the physical, auditory (tone), emotional, and energetic levels of how we convey messages do matter.

The most important and yet hardest thing we can do is simply to **listen**. Ask if your friend wants to talk and take your cue from what you hear, letting it guide what you do and say next. If they do want to talk, offer a specific time and place to do so, and when the time comes, ask what they want to talk about, allowing them to say whatever they want, without interrupting. This can be difficult, especially when we want to rush in, offer comfort, and ask questions. Yet, simply holding space for someone to experience their emotions in your presence is a gift. Be open to unexpected or difficult reactions, trying not to take any of it personally. Grief and anger are natural parts of the process of letting go of what one thought one's life, health, and plans would be. Particularly when adjusting to a new diagnosis, each day will be a bit different.

There is a big difference between being a good listener and being a problem-solver. **Don't advise** on how to manage. Everyone has their own ways of coping, their individual strengths, struggles, and resources. **Don't offer advice or treatment options** unless it's asked for. Your friend is likely already dealing with information overload. While it may be helpful for you to learn more about their illness on your own, **trust them** to learn as much or as little as they need in order to adjust, adapt, and make their best decisions. Remember that each person, each illness, and each strategy is unique. What you think you would feel or do is neither relevant nor helpful.

Resist temptations to share stories of others you

know with similar challenges. They are never quite the same. **Resist the urge to reassure**. Platitudes and cliches, like “I'm sure you'll be fine” or “think positively,” may ease our own discomforts, but to the sick person, they likely sound dismissive.

It's natural to have questions about contributing factors (e.g., habits, genetics, exposures, lifestyle) that often arise out of our need to feel safe. They are probably not helpful to the person living with a serious illness, and sometimes elicit their feelings of shame or powerlessness.

If you are willing to offer something other than a listening ear, don't end with “let me know.” It can be hard for them to ask or even to make another decision. **Offer specifics of what you can do, and when**—things like setting up a meal schedule, picking up something to deliver, or doing laundry or gardening. If you aren't available in other ways, cards, messages, and appropriate gifts are welcomed ways to remind people you're thinking of them without the need for a response. Share a poem, a quick story, or observation. Since they are living with this 24/7, you may be one to offer moments in the day when they can think of something other than being unwell.

Stick around. Bear in mind that some conditions, treatments, and recoveries can be lengthy. Your ongoing kindness and support matter and are just as crucial as your initial efforts and gestures. Do your best to understand and **adapt as their needs evolve**. Things are always changing, even for those with chronic conditions, so asking “What's on your mind today?” can bring you together into their present experience. Knowing they have someone in their corner will make it all a little more bearable for them. While your friend might feel like a different person, with new perspectives on a life that is deeply affected by an illness, they still want to be seen and treated as the same person you know.

Of course, we all make mistakes, especially when we're feeling awkward, when emotions run high, and we're frightened. Forgive yourself, move on, and your friend will too.

blessing the boats
by Lucille Clifton

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may your innocence
sail through this to that



LOPEZ ISLAND
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Companionship, Caring, & Compassion

A Community Volunteer Service

Pathways to Bereavement Support

You might already know that LIHHS offers bereavement support in a variety of ways for our community. When dealing with a significant loss, for some people it is helpful to talk with someone who understands grief in its various forms and can also listen compassionately to their unique story. If you or someone you know might benefit from brief one-on-one support, it's a simple (but often difficult) phone call to ask for information, support, and a return call from our bereavement support team. Someone will call back to evaluate your needs, schedule a time to talk further (if you wish), and/or make referrals. Most often, people benefit from a few supportive sessions, no matter the stage or nature of their grief.

What you might not know is that LIHHS also attempts to reach out to local families after a death to send a personal note, offer consolation, and later, a letter with information about grief and our bereavement services. While we make a variety of efforts to learn of any deaths that impact our community members, we have no reliable ways to learn of each one. Please know that we value calls to the office to inform LIHHS of anyone who might need or appreciate our support, even a simple condolence card. In a small community, we are all connected, like a thousand woven fibers, where every death affects the whole. We would like to be able to acknowledge each one.

Special Bequest Gift From Ken Savage

With deep gratitude, LIHHS accepted a generous special bequest gift of \$10,000 from the estate of Ken Savage. Ken wished to acknowledge the support he found in LIHHS, specifically through the Durable Medical Equipment lending program. Our DME is loaned out, at no charge, to the Lopez community and includes walkers, wheelchairs, commodes, shower seats, crutches, and more. Ken's gift supports LIHHS in continuing this meaningful service.

Welcoming New Board Members

Lopez Island Home and Hospice Support welcomes Perry Heffelfinger, Elizabeth Suden, and Jan Wilson to the Board. They each bring experience and energy that compliment our organization, and we are grateful for their willingness to join the good work of the LIHHS.

We bid Jeremy Rempel a fond farewell, with deep gratitude for his six years of service on the Board.

Volunteer Training: We Need You!

Lopez Island Home and Hospice Support will be offering a comprehensive volunteer training this year, and we invite you to join us.

We are seeking volunteers for ongoing, once-a-week client needs, for less frequent but perhaps more involved requests, and/or for occasional coverage when clients' regular volunteers are away.

If you are interested or have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Rabel at our office (360-468-4446) or visit our website lihhs.org, click on "Become a Volunteer" under the volunteer menu option, and scroll down to the link to the volunteer application.

The training will cover a range of topics, including LIHHS specifics, communication, family systems, dementia, and compassionate care. We will have guest speakers, current volunteers, and LIHHS staff and board members sharing experiences, insights, and knowledge.

Specific dates are still TBD, but we will offer options for anyone who is not comfortable with in-person sessions. Our goal is to increase our volunteer pool to better meet client needs in our community. We look forward to welcoming you!

Jingle Bell Dinner & Auction 2022

Once again the Jingle Bell Dinner and Auction was a success, and with a deep bow of gratitude, we thank a community that continues to travel along with us and support Lopez Island Home and Hospice Support.

This year, the classic Jingle Bell Dinner became more of a Jingle Bell Party. Our guests gathered at the Lopez Community Center to join in the auction fun and to pick up hot, boxed, amazing three-course meals from Haven.

The auction featured donated experiences and art from more than 40 generous artists, businesses, and individuals. Bidders competed for items or chose the “buy it now” option if their heart was set on something.

While bidders and “dinner guests” lingered to keep an eye on the bidding sheets and visit with fellow islanders, they enjoyed wine and hors d’oeuvres. All of this to the wonderful music of the talented Hawk Arps. For the first time in three years, it felt like a real party!

Most importantly, we at LIHHS experienced the incredible generosity of this community, as you did it again...making us financially whole as we look to providing services to our most vulnerable for another year.

To our sponsors, auction donors, supporters, volunteers, and local businesses, as we continue to find ways to connect and prosper in more trying times — we at LIHHS honor YOU. Being a part of this community is quite the holiday gift!

A special thanks to our amazing Jingle Bell Sponsors!

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Winter 2023