

# Living Caring Working

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PEOPLE WITH A LIFE THREATENING ILLNESS,  
THEIR FAMILIES, CARERS AND COMMUNITIES

## RESOURCE 6 | Ideas for helping your friend or family member with a life threatening illness

When a friend or family member is coping with a loved one's serious illness, you may not know what to say or how to respond. It is common to feel overwhelmed, self-conscious, or to fear saying the 'wrong' thing. However, this may prevent you from giving the support that your friend may need.

When you feel at a loss, try to follow these few basic principles.

### Offer your support

- Support can be offered in a tangible way, such as bringing a meal to your friend's house, helping with housework, posting letters or paying bills. Support can also be shown by just listening to your friend.

### Show your respect

- When entering your friend's home, be respectful of the family and their routine. You could consider calling first to see if it is a convenient time to visit.

### Follow their lead

- Your friend will sometimes need to talk about his or her experience, and other times will choose not to. Remember that keeping a sense of normality is important—whatever you talked about before is likely to be appropriate now.

### Ask how you can help

- When in doubt, ask your friend how you can best offer your help and support.
- Offer suggestions for how you can help, for example, ask 'Can I mind your kids so you can have some time out?' or 'Can I collect some groceries for you on the way over?' Other things you might be able to help with are:
  - washing clothes or dishes
  - tidying up around the house
  - preparing meals for the rest of the family, especially during and following hospital visits, and don't forget to feed the pets
  - answering the phone or helping to answer correspondence
  - driving your friend or family member to places they need to go
  - mowing the lawn or taking care of the garden.