

# Tips for Supporting Our Brothers and Sisters with Cancer

BY TREY KELSO

When one of our brothers or sisters is diagnosed with cancer, we are all profoundly affected. It is important to remember, however, that individuals will respond to their diagnosis in their own unique way. Some people may keep their diagnosis private and some may not want to talk about their diagnosis at all. In balancing the privacy of those diagnosed with cancer with your desire to help, here are a few tips on how to be there to support those brothers and sisters who are diagnosed with cancer.

- ✔ **Let those diagnosed with cancer know that there is help and support available from the Firefighter Cancer Support Network (FCSN).**  
The FCSN will pair those diagnosed with a mentor who has had the same diagnosis. The FCSN will also send a toolbox full of resources, literature, and guidance during this critical time. The FCSN can be reached online at [FirefighterCancerSupport.org](http://FirefighterCancerSupport.org), or by calling 866-994-3276.
- ✔ **Make sure to send text messages or emails to just say “hi.”** Do not expect a message in return.
- ✔ **Offer rides to appointments, to help cover shifts, and/or to run an errand.**
- ✔ **Bring a meal to your brother or sister in need.**  
We in the fire service are stereotyped as loving our food.
- ✔ **Avoid sharing “bad stories” about others you know that have had a cancer diagnosis.**
- ✔ **Always keep things on a positive note.**
- ✔ **Be there for the individual on a personal level.**  
While they may not open up to you to discuss cancer specifically, be available as a friend. If the individual is up to it, take him or her out or go over for a visit. Those facing a cancer diagnosis will let you know what contact they need. It is always nice to “get out of the house,” or “see your friends.”
- ✔ **Be there to simply listen.** Listen to the good, the bad, and the indifferent. Listening can be difficult for us, but truly hear what your friend and colleague is saying. By doing this, you will be able to adjust the way you support the individual diagnosed with cancer. And by listening, you will know what your brother or sister needs to hear.
- ✔ **It is tough, but do not say “call me.”** An individual facing a cancer diagnosis will have a lot going on and most likely will not call you. You need to call them.
- ✔ **A diagnosis does not necessarily mean an end to the individual’s service, but it could be.** The chief’s/officer’s role is an important one. Remember that this individual has provided staffing and service to you and your community. Make sure they are aware that you and the department stand behind them. There is no better feeling than knowing that the organization that you have served has come together and is rallying behind you.



About the Author: Trey Kelso is the Treasurer and Maryland State Director for the Firefighter Cancer Support Network