

# Meeting Other Survivors

## What does it mean to meet other survivors?

Meeting other survivors is something that can happen anytime during your survivorship. Sometimes you may meet other survivors by going to a support group or joining an online group for cancer survivors. You may also meet someone randomly and discover you are both survivors. However you meet another survivor, talking to him or her and sharing your experiences can provide you with important information, knowledge and hope.

While you may receive a lot of support from your family and your friends, sometimes talking to another person who has experienced cancer in the same way you have is helpful. You may feel like you have to protect the people you love from being upset. Other survivors may understand you in a way that is different from friends and family.

You may be frightened by what you learn from another survivor. You may fear that the other person will tell you something scary or depressing. Even though this could happen, meeting other survivors who have been through similar experiences can be helpful for survivors.

## What can a cancer survivor gain from meeting other survivors?

Some reasons survivors want to meet and talk to other survivors:

- To get information about their cancer
- To get encouragement from others
- To find out how to solve problems
- To be inspired by personal stories
- To laugh or cry with other survivors who have been through similar situations
- To realize that many survivors are experiencing similar things
- To feel more in control of the situation

Survivors have a great deal of knowledge to share about how to deal with problems you haven't encountered before.

Some examples of things you can learn from other survivors:

- How to talk to your child or younger sibling about cancer
- How to talk to people where you work
- How to deal with aftereffects from treatment
- How to deal with fears about the future
- How to remain hopeful when you are dealing with a chronic illness

You may spend time with another cancer survivor and never talk about cancer. It may be nice just to spend some time with people who have shared similar experiences or have similar priorities. Every cancer survivor is different, but many survivors find that they have a lot in common with other survivors besides surviving cancer.

## **Is it helpful to meet other survivors who are your age or who had your type of cancer?**

Meeting with someone with the same kind of cancer can be helpful for some survivors. That person will know, as much as anyone else can, what you're going through. You won't have to explain your reactions to the experience in the same way that you might have to with your friends or family, who, unless they've had cancer, can only imagine what it is like.

Meeting a survivor in your age range may be more useful than meeting a survivor who had the same kind of cancer you did.

Some examples of things you can learn from meeting other survivors your own age:

- Children who have survived very different types of cancer may be able to share similar experiences about changes in their relationships with their parents or their friends.
- Young adults who have been through treatment can talk about when to share their cancer history with people they are dating.
- Older survivors can discuss difficulties they may experience if they have to move in with their children or become dependent again.

The reactions of other survivors to a cancer diagnosis and treatment may be different from yours. Even with the same cancer type and age, your reactions may be different than someone just like you.

Some things that may make your experiences different from other survivors:

- Your personality
- The genes you were born with
- Your family background or culture
- The way your body reacts to chemotherapy or radiation
- The kind of support you already have

Some survivors are reluctant to meet someone similar to themselves and prefer to meet someone totally different. You may fear getting close to another survivor. You may worry that s/he will have more medical problems during your friendship. These concerns are okay because your first responsibility is to yourself. At all times, you must do whatever makes you comfortable.

## **Are support groups a good way to meet other survivors?**

In a support group, you can:

- Share experiences with other survivors
- Learn new ways to handle difficult situations
- Talk about your reactions and feelings to changes in your life

Knowing what happens in a support group is helpful. Many people think support groups focus only on the bad things.

You may not want to attend a support group because you don't want to:

- Hear about depressing things
- Hear anything scary
- Spend the whole time talking about negative things

A good support group will focus on more than the bad things. Often people laugh and share fun or positive experiences in support groups. Support groups can be inspirational. People who attend frequently talk about how much better they feel after meeting the other survivors in the group. Problems always seem more manageable when you talk about them with other survivors who understand.

If the first support group you try is not a good fit for your needs, try another one. Talk to the group leader to discuss if the group is appropriate for your needs. If it isn't, the leader may be able to recommend another group you can try.

## **Is the Internet a good way to meet other survivors?**

The Internet can be useful in meeting other survivors. Many Web sites are dedicated to bringing survivors of all different cancers and backgrounds together. Some are for people with a particular kind of cancer. Others are generic, which means they are for survivors of all types of cancer. If you don't feel comfortable talking in a group or aren't able to leave your home, the Internet can help you meet other survivors. If you don't own a computer, your public library has computers available.

Some advantages to using the Internet to meet other survivors include:

- You don't have to identify yourself.
- You may find it easier to write down your worries and concerns.
- You don't have to feel the pressure of talking in a group.
- You can meet survivors from all over the world.

While the Internet is a great way to meet survivors, be careful about the people you meet and the information you share.

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## MOST Survivor's Notebook

- Do not give out personal information to any Web site unless you find out how they will use that information and why they need it.
- You may meet negative people in the chat room who only talk about the bad things they are experiencing. If this is hard for you, find another chat room or take a break. Come back when those people have left the chat room.
- Discuss any advice you get from another survivor on the Internet with your health care team before making any changes in your diet, exercise routine or anything else that will affect your physical or emotional health.

You can meet survivors in many different ways. Find the way that feels most comfortable to you. Meeting other survivors is something that many survivors feel is an important part of their survivorship. It helps them to spend time with people who understand what life after cancer is like.

### **Works Cited**

Lance Armstrong Foundation Survivorship Topics  
[www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)