

“I Don’t Know What to Say.”

When friends are ill, “just being there” is often best.

Someone you know is dealing with a serious illness, or is about to.

According to the American Cancer Society,* over 70 percent of the 1.4 million cancer cases that will be diagnosed in 2007 will be in persons 55 and older. That stat correlates closely with the first wave of American baby boomers (the 72 million people born between 1946 and 1964) who just reached the age of 60. By 2030 there will be 57.8 million Americans between the ages of 66 and 84, and cancer rates will see the bulge.

Aflac, which insures over 40 million people worldwide, recently conducted a nationwide survey of unpaid caregivers in order to better understand how people with serious illnesses would like to be approached socially, as well as to provide insight into the challenges of those faced with daily caregiving.

Lori Hope, author of *Help Me Live: 20 Things People with Cancer Want You to Know*, documentary filmmaker and cancer survivor, helped with the Aflac Caregiver Survey. Here are her top 10 things to say to someone who is ill:

- 1) **“I love you, and I am here for you no matter what.”** Those faced with a serious illness find it helpful to hear that they are loved and that their friends and family will be by their side through sickness, whether they need a hand to hold or nothing at all.
- 2) **“I’m going to the store. What can I pick up for you?”** Someone with a serious illness often is too overwhelmed, tired or sick to ask for help, and doesn’t want to feel as though they are burdening family and friends. Offering help in a specific way, without their having to ask first, shows that you truly want to help.
- 3) **“Why don’t I rent a movie for us to watch together?”** Patients and caregivers both can begin to feel isolated, and brief visits can be very welcome. Distractions like music and funny movies help to lighten the load.
- 4) **“I’ll be thinking about you tomorrow at [noon] during your treatment/appointment/surgery.”** During times of serious illness, every doctor visit or treatment can be painful physically and mentally. Although you can’t always be there for loved ones during their treatments, letting them know that you are thinking of them during that time helps them feel supported.
- 5) **“Let’s go out to eat. It’s on me.”** Being sick costs a lot. In addition to medical bills and prescription costs, many people with a serious illness are not working or have to take extended periods of time off of work. Offering to pick up the tab for various incidental items like lunches, dry cleaning or a few groceries relieves friends and family of some of the financial pressure and doesn’t put the onus on them to ask for assistance.
- 6) **“Hello beautiful/handsome.”** Surgery, treatments and the general wear of serious illness can leave your ill loved ones feeling unattractive and undesirable. Acting as a “talking mirror” by letting them know how beautiful and handsome they appear is comforting and can help them get through difficult times.
- 7) **“It’s normal to be scared or depressed. I’m here.”** Each person faces different sets of fears and challenges when met with a serious illness. Telling people how to feel, or that

- they should think positively, can be counterproductive. Letting them know that it's all right to have feelings of fear and sadness is often more effective than saying, "You're going to be okay."
- 8) **"What's your favorite soup/meal? I'd like to make you some and bring it by."**
Bringing ill friends their favorite meals not only gives you an excuse to visit them but also helps relieve them of the stress of planning and preparing meals.
- 9) **"This may not be a good time. I'll call again in a few days."** Every serious illness is a series of good days and bad days, and many times people who are seriously ill have discussed their health with family, friends, doctors and colleagues so often that they are weary of their own story. Be attentive to cues that indicate people would prefer to rest or avoid inquiries. But don't take a no today as an excuse to stay away.
- 10) **Just sit and say nothing.** People with a serious illness spend a great deal of time and energy explaining how they are feeling and relaying the details of their illness to friends, family, co-workers and even strangers. Many have said that there are times when they just need to take a deep breath, sit down and be surrounded by quiet. Sometimes more can be communicated through silence than through words.

Survey Methodology

In June 2007, Aflac conducted a nationwide survey of unpaid caregivers in order to better understand how people with serious illnesses would like to be approached socially, as well as to provide insight into the challenges of those faced with daily caregiving. The Aflac Caregiver Survey was conducted online and received responses from more than 900 individuals prequalified as unpaid caregivers.

About Lori Hope

Lori Hope is an author, producer and public speaker with more than 25 years' experience as a communications professional. A former newspaper editor-in-chief and award-winning journalist who developed hundreds of medical news reports and documentaries for television broadcast, her dozens of honors include two regional Emmys and a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, National Associated Press Broadcasting Award, and Sigma Delta Chi Award. Hope's widely-read book, *Help Me Live: 20 Things People with Cancer Want You to Know*, has been featured in *Redbook* magazine, *U.S. News & World Reports*, ABC News' "Nightline" program, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the Hallmark Channel, and other prominent print and broadcast media. Hope, a lung cancer survivor, has written essays and opinion pieces that have appeared in a variety of publications and have been broadcast on hundreds of public radio stations nationwide.

About Aflac

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For more than 50 years, Aflac products have given policyholders the opportunity to direct cash where it is needed most when a life-interrupting medical event causes financial challenges. Aflac is the number one provider of guaranteed-renewable insurance in the United States and the number one insurance company in terms of individual insurance policies in force in Japan. Our insurance products provide protection to more than 40 million people worldwide. Aflac has been included in Fortune magazine's listing of America's Most Admired Companies for seven consecutive years and in Fortune magazine's list of the 100 Best Companies to Work For in America for nine consecutive years. Aflac has also been recognized three times by both Fortune magazine's listing of the Top 50 Employers for Minorities and Working Mother magazine's listing of the 100 Best Companies for Working Mothers. Aflac Incorporated is a Fortune 500 company

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*American Cancer Society, Cancer Facts & Figures 2007, Atlanta, American Cancer Society, 2007