



SHARSHERET®

The Jewish Breast & Ovarian Cancer Community

## Helpful Hints When Cancer Touches the Lives of Jewish Communal Leaders

Here are some helpful tips for when Jewish public figures, such as clergy or those in leadership positions in the community, are living with a cancer diagnosis or caring for a loved one who is living with cancer.

**Recognize that relationships with Jewish communal leaders are often professional and private at the same time.** Your relationship with your rabbi or someone in a leadership position is layered. You may feel close to your rabbi, spiritual leader, or teacher. You share personal details about your life, and it works because boundaries exist on all sides. It's natural to want to reciprocate the kindness, support, advice, and presence that your Jewish leader has shown you in challenging times. Keep in mind, that as you prefer your Jewish leader to respect boundaries with you, it's important to understand, that as a person, a public figure would like to share their personal journey in a space and time that is comfortable for them.

**Respect decision making.** When someone is diagnosed with cancer, they may feel like circumstances are beyond their control. In the areas where the person can maintain control, let them do so. Remember that each of us handles challenging situations differently. It is reasonable to assume that your Jewish communal leader has access to proper health care and is making responsible decisions. After speaking with treatment teams, whichever approach a person takes, it is the right one for them and their family. You may not agree with their surgical or treatment decisions, but these decisions are theirs to make. Most people feel overwhelmed by unsolicited advice, yet feel deeply grateful for your care and support.

**Follow their lead.** People often set the tone for how they want to be treated. Let your communal leader share information as he/she chooses. It is not necessary to ask a lot of medical questions. What is important is being a good listener. There are no expectations that you have to give advice. Listening is a caring gesture that offers tremendous support.

**Communal leaders also have communal leaders.** Your rabbi, spiritual leader, or teacher has mentors to whom they turn when facing challenges. Know that they have people to speak with and are in good hands.

**Those touched by a cancer diagnosis often seek distraction, routine and normalcy.** When your communal leader or family member is in a public space, they may welcome the distraction, or simply want routine or normalcy in their life, a place that

is a cancer-free zone. Your communal leader chose a life of service and wants to continue to provide guidance, wisdom, and comfort.

**Let kids be kids.** When people choose to be public figures, particularly in close-knit Jewish communities, we adopt their children as our own. It's tempting to ask the child about the parent or to send well-wishes via the child. It's important to keep in mind that when family members, particularly kids, are out of the house, they are most likely also seeking cancer-free zones. Children feel emotionally safe when their lives remain routine and familiar.

**The power of prayer.** As a Jewish community, we can turn to prayer and draw strength from each other. Prayer can be personal or communal. Having a person in mind when saying tehillim (psalms), tefilat hacholim (prayer for healing), or private prayer, can generate a positive energy and contribute to the healing of the mind, body, and soul for the person living with the diagnosis and those who care about them.

If you have any personal questions or concerns, please contact Sharsheret's clinical support team at [clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org](mailto:clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org) or visit Sharsheret's website at [www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org) to learn more about our resources.

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