



*A roadmap* for  
supporting someone  
through a crisis

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# welcome!

Someone you love has received scary news or is facing a crisis and you want to know how to help, what to say, and what not to say. This is for **you**.

There is not a one-size-fits-all recipe for showing up for the people we care about.

I have had several people ask me recently how to help a friend with a child recently diagnosed with cancer.

That is why I created this. It is based on my own experiences blended with advice from many others who have walked through trauma and trial.

Everyone reacts differently and has unique needs but the underlying principle is to err on the side of reaching out. Even if your friend or loved one has no strength left to text you back - they will like to know they are not alone.

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*Life is not all hope and it is not all heavy. Hopefulness and heaviness can exist together.*

# five-step roadmap



## **SHOW UP**

Send a text, call them, mail a card, or show up in person. Go and sit with them. Offer to watch their kids. Leave a basket of supplies or some food. Pray. Just be there.

## **BRAINSTORM**

Make a list of **all** the things you can think of that *might* be helpful. Be creative! Practical things/acts of service can be super helpful.

## **CHECK-IN WITH PERSON IN THE CRISIS**

Instead of saying, "Let me know what you need," tell your friend, "I'm not sure what you need, but I'm going to do \_\_\_" and share what you have brainstormed. They can tick off from the list what is helpful or choose to say, "None of the above."

## **EXECUTE**

If you are the coordinator of "Project Support" (because of your list of beautifully brainstormed helpful acts of kindness), execute/delegate all of the things your friend said would be helpful. And keep doing them until they are no longer needed.

## **STAY THE COURSE**

A lot of people reach out on day 1, and in the first few days/weeks of the crisis/diagnosis, etc. Be the person who keeps showing up, bringing meals, or just sending a thoughtful text.

# STEP ONE

## show up

### BREAKING IT DOWN

They are processing and overwhelmed. Give them space but still reach out with a small note to say you are there, you love them, and you will be in touch with ways you hope to help. You can offer yourself as someone who will be there to listen to them when they are ready, but don't question them too much yet.

See the 'three mistakes to avoid' page for tips on what not to say/do.

### CHECKLIST

- Reach out
- Tell them you love them
- Pray (if you're into that)
- Visit briefly if appropriate
- Bring them a coffee
- Drop off a meal, card, etc
- Don't have expectations of them

### NOTES



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5

## STEP TWO

# Brainstorm

### BREAKING IT DOWN

Think of the crisis like a project. Tell your friend you are going to show up with a list of things that may be helpful and you are going to take action. Don't sit on the sidelines and tell them to let you know what they need. They likely won't ask for help and probably need it!

**See the 'creative ways to help' page for some ideas.**

### CHECKLIST

- Assign a coordinator
- Do they need communication sent out?
- Make a list of ideas
- Do they have a deep freeze for meals?
- Think about children, grandparents, etc.
- What food places are near their home/hospital for gift cards, etc
- Is there a financial impact?

### NOTES



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5

## STEP THREE

# Check-In

### BREAKING IT DOWN

Find an appropriate time to connect with your friend - via email/text/in-person. Share with them that you intend to take action, but don't want to overstep. You can say, "Here is a list of things I was thinking of helping you with." Let them know you will do it all, they can also choose, "None of the above," or pick and choose. It's about them, not you.

Take the initiative to do/delegate everything your friend wants.

### CHECKLIST

- Do you have a list of ideas?
- Chat briefly with your friend
- Give them your list of ideas
- What is helpful to THEM?
- Take action!

### NOTES



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5

## STEP FOUR

# Execute

### BREAKING IT DOWN

In a crisis, it is so helpful to know the everyday details are getting taken care of.

Take the appropriate action to minimize stress and logistical juggling for your friend/loved one.

### CHECKLIST

- Create a way to track the actions
- Manage tasks like a project
- Tell your friend they can always change their mind about what is helpful
- Keep checking in. Are there new things they need?

### NOTES



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5

## STEP FIVE

# Stay The Course

### BREAKING IT DOWN

Don't just show up on day 1.

Your friend will need continued support. Depending on the crisis there could be years of hard days or healing from trauma/grief.

On day 300 when the freezer is no longer full of meals, and "Project Support" has naturally concluded, keep showing up with hugs, kind words, and ways you can help.

### CHECKLIST

- Send a text
- Send an e-card
- Offer to take them to lunch
- Order food in
- Drop off or mail a card
- Give a hug
- Remind them you're still there and you love them!

### NOTES



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



# three mistakes to avoid

## TIP NUMBER 1 - TRY NOT TO SAY

- "At least \_\_\_\_ (it's the good kind of cancer)."
- Cliches such as, "Everything happens for a reason."
- "How can I help?" (Just take action)
- Reminders about how advanced science and technology are.
- "This is hard on me too."
- "I get it because \_\_\_\_."
- "I know it's not the same but \_\_\_\_."
- "You're so strong."

## TIP NUMBER 2 - TRY NOT TO DO

- Try not to overstay your welcome if you are having an in-person visit. They are likely tired.
- Try not to ask too many questions. They may be struggling with information overload and just trying to process things themselves.
  - You can ask, "Do you want to talk about it?" as a simple way to find out if talking is helpful or tiring.

## TIP NUMBER 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

Don't attempt to understand by shifting the focus back to yourself and your problems or past crisis.

Even if it is hard on you don't unintentionally minimize their suffering by shifting the spotlight to your struggle with it.

# creative ways to help

## BRAINSTORM THEIR NEEDS, BUT FOR SOME IDEAS (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER) ....

- Don't underestimate the financial impact. Taking a collection or starting a go fund me may be appropriate.
- Gifts to pass time such as books, sudoku, crosswords, scratch and wins, magazines, movies, etc.
- Mow the lawn, shovel snow, put up/take down Christmas lights, shop for their kids school supplies, buy/wrap presents for birthdays or upcoming occasions, help with big home projects they may not have time/energy for, etc.
- Be the communication person who can share updates and save the friend from having to say the same thing over and over again.
- Make sure children are taken care of with activities/playdates, haircuts, childcare, etc.
- Laundry service or offer to do it.
- Gas cards, and food gift cards.
- Make a list of local resources that might help them, especially if they are uprooted to a new city (medical resources, therapists, groups, etc).
- Use an app or website to start a meal train.
- Set up a house cleaner.

# three quick tips



**one**

It is easy to stop yourself from reaching out if you aren't sure how it will be perceived. But a text as simple as, "If you ever need a coffee text me" will mean a lot. And just be there to listen. You don't need to offer advice. You can't fix it. Just listen.

Often the waiting is endless. Some of the best gifts will help them pass the time such as books, crossword & sudoku puzzles, scratch & win, easy snacks, magazines, etc. You can show support by just dropping by with a coffee or a gift to help pass the time.



**two**

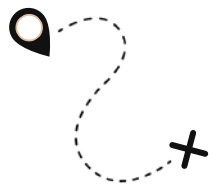


**three**

Try to demonstrate empathy and don't make them feel rushed to answer your questions. Be genuinely interested, but not pushy. Recognize that exhaustion and fear can lead to all sorts of emotions and they may just need you to keep showing up but have little left to give in return.

NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

# Reach out to me



**You finished the roadmap.**

Connect with me if you have more questions, or want me to reach out to your loved one. I would happily send them an email (or even snail mail card) to offer some encouragement.

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