

Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness

for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities



American Cancer Society Circle Of LifeSM
Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

Wellness along the Cancer Journey:

Treatment

Revised October 2015

Chapter 5: Celebrating Life

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Celebrating Life

| Group Discussion | | True | False | Not Sure |
|------------------|--|------|-------|----------|
| 1. | Celebrating one's unique gifts and setting new goals are helpful ways of coping. | | | |
| 2. | Talking to other survivors can be a helpful way to cope. | | | |
| 3. | It is no longer important to make any plans for the future. | | | |

One aspect of surviving is learning to live in the moment and celebrate life. Each person will have their own definition of what it means to be a survivor. Each person will find their own way to continue along their journey. Below are a few ways to describe a survivor.

A Survivor Is Someone Who ...

Finds a Purpose: Each of us has unique gifts. Unfortunately, most people don't take the time to figure this out. By looking deep inside, someone can often discover their gifts and find ways to share these gifts with others.

Has Specific Goals, and Makes Plans for the Future: Someone with cancer may have a new concept of the word "future." But survivors don't give up on plans and goals. They adapt their plans to fit within the framework of a more uncertain life.

Identifies Something to Live for: To live in order to be there for support, and teach family members/grandchildren, etc.

Is Open and Expresses Feelings Honestly: If a person feels bad, they need to say so. If they need help, they should ask for it. Fight loneliness by seeking the support of others being treated for cancer. Survivors have a bond that can help build up themselves and each other.

Accepts Uncertainty by Putting Life and Death into Perspective: Accepting mortality is a big challenge. Someone with cancer confronts this reality sooner

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rather than later. Some work through it faster than others. But everyone must accept this idea before they can thrive.

Thinks about Living Each Day: We all want to think we're living for the day. But are we? Unless we think about it, we often lose sight of the goal. The words of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross sum it up well: "When you fully understand that each day you awaken could be the last day you have, you take the time that day to grow, to become more of who you really are, to reach out to other human beings."

Reaches Out to Help Others: It is in giving that we receive. It is in service to others that we truly feel useful. Volunteers are the backbone of the American Cancer Society. They provide a lifeline for facing a cancer experience. Getting involved makes the healing process easier.

Gains Strength from Faith: Paul Tillich said: "Faith means being grasped by a power that is greater than we are, a power that shakes us, and turns us, and transforms us, and heals us.." If someone finds their faith is limited, they may want to accept the prayers of others.

Sees a Rainbow through the Shower of Tears: Call it making lemonade out of lemons or spinning straw into gold. After going through a cancer diagnosis and treatment, survivors often find a new meaning to life that is unique to them.

(Excerpt taken from the American Cancer Society I Can Cope® program materials.)

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Activity

View a video of a cancer survivor sharing their story (visit cancer.org/circleoflife for the videos). After viewing the video, share your own story about cancer. You may find the table below helpful in shaping your story. As you share your story, it's also important to remember to celebrate your life! Share your hopes and dreams and discuss one step you can take to bring you closer to one of your dreams.

| | |
|--|--|
| How has cancer touched your life or the life of someone you care about? | |
| What are some things that helped you get through your cancer experience? | |
| What were some things that you didn't have access to that would have helped you? | |
| What did you learn through your cancer experience, and how do you think your experience can help others? | |
| What are your hopes and dreams for the future, and what can you do to make them come true? | |

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Story of Hope

*“To be a survivor is to –
Celebrate every day that both feet hit the floor and you can take a step.
Celebrate every time we get together with friends, no matter what the reason.
Not assume that tomorrow will come; cherish this day for what it is.
Just smile; everything is so much better with a smile.”*

Mike, cancer survivor

(Silver, J.K. (Ed.). (2009). *What Helped Me Get Through: Cancer Survivors Share Wisdom and Hope*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society.)

Key Messages

- Everyone defines their cancer journey in their own way.
- Talking to or reading about other cancer survivors can help someone who is finishing cancer treatment find strength, courage, and ways to cope.
- Thriving after cancer treatment means learning to live in the moment and celebrate life.