



Changing Roles and Responsibilities

In this document, you will find strategies to help you cope with changing roles and responsibilities in your relationships.

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This tool has been excerpted from the TEMPO (Tailored, wEb-based, self-Management PrOgram) symptom self-management program. The content of this document has been reviewed and approved by healthcare professionals.

Stressed by the changes in our roles and responsibilities

"I felt that I was going stir crazy, I just wanted to be able to do the things that I'd done before I got this. My family were so supportive and took care of everything but all I wanted was to be able to look after my home and my family. I was lost without that."

Mavis, diagnosed with prostate cancer.

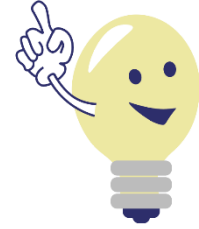
It can be difficult to adjust to changes in your abilities and responsibilities

You may find yourself having to do things you've not done before and that the demands on you have grown quickly. Or, as the person with cancer, treatment may mean you are not able to do as much as you used to. When roles and responsibilities change, how people interact may also change.



Suggestions for managing changes to roles and responsibilities:

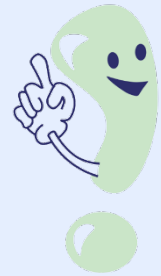
1. **Negotiate changes in role.** Don't assume that the other person will automatically be able to see what needs to be done.
2. **Seek out and accept** offers of help.
3. **Re-evaluate roles and responsibilities** often.
4. **Work better as** a team by being physically active together



We will now explain how these suggestions can help you and provide step-by-step guidance on how to use these suggestions.

TOP TIP: Find the suggestion right for you:

- ✓ Read the description of each suggestion that follows
- ✓ Choose the strategy or strategies that you prefer
- ✓ Make an action plan to help you fit your preferred suggestion into your daily life
- ✓ Set rewards for the progress you make toward achieving your goal.

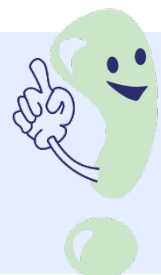


If you find one suggestion is not quite working for you, try one of the others.

What the experts have to say

A willingness to discuss changes in your roles and responsibilities shows that you are committed to the other person and your relationship, often at a time when they need to feel supported. Being flexible in the roles you're willing to take on also makes compromise easier and can reduce conflict. The new division of roles and responsibilities can provide a sense of accomplishment, and lessen guilt and anxiety.

TOP TIP: Set reasonable expectations and limits on what you can accomplish from day to day.



Suggestion 1: Negotiate changes in roles

Some changes in roles and responsibilities cannot be avoided, but you can have control how you are going to adjust to them. In planning, how to adjust to some of these changes, consider:

1. List the tasks for each day/week
2. Select the tasks that you feel able to take on
3. Talk openly about limitations that may prevent you from completing tasks. For example, tiredness, pain, late appointments or meetings at work.
4. Brainstorm ways to address these limitations together.
5. Take a closer look at the tasks that can't be completed:
 - Can these be changed to make them more achievable? For example, rather than doing a big grocery shop, just pick up a few essential items or, could you shop online?
 - Call in some help from family, friends and support services.

Suggestion 2: Seek out and accept offers of help

With a full plate and extra things to do and fit in, it's easy to get overloaded. One way of avoiding this is to ask for and accept offers of help. Your family and friends will probably want to help, but might not be sure how to go about it. Try the following:

- ✓ Be specific and direct about what you need (e.g. for the next two weeks we need someone to walk the dog).
- ✓ Don't make assumptions about who will be willing to help and what sort of help they'll provide. People may surprise you.
- ✓ Prepare a list of tasks you are and aren't happy to have people help you with (e.g. lawn mowing and grocery shopping are fine, but doing laundry isn't).
- ✓ Ask family and friends how long they can provide the support for. Is it a one-time offer or are they willing to do something once a week for a couple of months?

Another useful strategy is to keep a note of offers of help. An easy way to do this is to get family and friends to complete a checklist like the one below, **as suggested by the National Family Caregivers Association:**

Name:

Help I can offer:

- Mow lawns
- A meal prepared
- [...] nights a week/every two weeks/month
- Help with forms and other paperwork
- A shoulder to cry on
- Grocery shopping
- Babysitting
- Respite for spouse/partner/family member
- Visit you in hospital
- Help with laundry/ironing
- A regular ride (e.g. take children to school, take you shopping)
- Communication contact point
- A weekly phone call
- Research information for you
- Home maintenance
- Run errands
- Gardening
- Pick up medications
- Attend appointments
- Clean the house
- Take you out, do something social

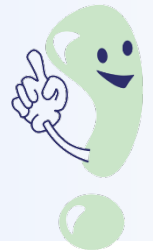
ROADBLOCK! Help from family and friends is important. But, there may be times where someone becomes too involved or overbearing. This is a difficult situation. While their intentions are good, their efforts are increasing your stress.



If this happens, it is important to let that person know. Tell them what you need and what you can tolerate. For example, *“I really appreciate everything you are doing for me, but I’m finding daily visits just too tiring. I’d love it if you’d come and visit maybe one or two mornings a week.”*

Using XYZ communication and ‘I’ statements can also help.

TOP TIP: There’s a big difference between doing and overdoing. To care for those around you, you need to care for yourself. Know your limits and rest when you need to.



Family and friends aren’t the only sources of extra help. When you’re clear about what help you need, find out whether there are services in your area that can assist. There are lots of ways to find out about local services, including:

- ✓ Asking your doctors or nurses
- ✓ Asking your social worker
- ✓ Asking friends and family
- ✓ Calling the Canadian Cancer Society at **1-888-939-3333**
- ✓ Looking through the local phone book
- ✓ Looking through the local newspaper
- ✓ Searching the Internet
- ✓ Contacting organizations that you know. Even if they don’t provide the service you need, they may know who does.

Suggestion 3: Re-evaluate roles and responsibilities often

Your physical and emotional needs will change so you might want to discuss roles and responsibilities on a set basis (e.g. weekly) or when you notice that a need has changed. Remember, changes in roles and responsibilities can bring up a range of emotions such as frustration, sadness or guilt. These emotions can make conversations about roles and responsibilities hard, so:

- ✓ Focus on the help that you need, rather than what the other person isn't able to do.
- ✓ Approach it as a team.
- ✓ Factor in down-time for each of you.

Suggestion 4: Work better as a team by getting physically active together

Remember to talk to your health care team before you begin any new physical activity plan. Ask about when you can start, and what type and intensity of physical activity is best for you.

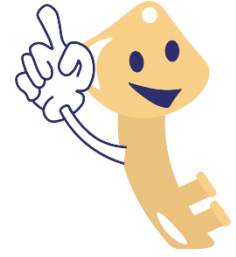
What others say about role changes

“Leearna tried to do everything for me, but in all honesty it started driving me nuts. So, I said, ‘No, look, I’ve got to judge this for myself. I will ask you when I need help’. That seemed to calm her down and take some pressure off. There were things I needed help with, but I was surprised by how much I could still do.”

Carlos, diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Key Points: Navigating changes in role

1. Changes in roles and responsibilities need to be negotiated through open and direct communication.
2. Negotiate changes in roles together, to ensure both partners have realistic workloads and meaningful roles.
3. Remember to recruit other sources of help, such as family, friends and external support agencies.
4. Roles and responsibilities need to be re-evaluated regularly as things change.



Resources included in fact sheet

- <http://www.cancer.ca/en/support-and-services/support-services/talk-to-an-information-specialist/?region=on>

Resources to help with stress by changes in the roles and responsibilities

Find a psychosocial oncologist

- <https://muhc.ca/psychosocial-oncology/profile/psychosocial-oncology>

Find a Counsellor

- https://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/?tr=Hdr_SubBrand

Communicating with your partner

- <https://psychcentral.com/lib/become-a-better-listener-active-listening/>
- <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/talking-with-family-and-friends/talking-about-cancer/talking-with-your-spouse-or-partner>

Changing roles

- http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/information_for_carers/changing-relationships
- <http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/dying-bereavement/caring-someone-terminal-illness/changing-roles-and-relationships>
- <http://www.cancercenter.com/community/newsletter/article/facing-cancer-as-a-couple/>
- <https://www.cancerandwork.ca/survivors/caregivers/changing-roles-of-a-caretaker-of-a-cancer-survivor/>
- http://www.prostatecancer.ca/getmedia/a3b5f098-1591-4547-ae02-cc6318c6de69/PCC_CaregiverBrochure_FINAL_HR_Bleeds_Crops.pdf.aspx