

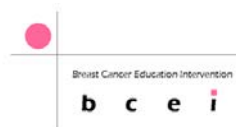


## MEANING IN ILLNESS

The search for meaning is an effort to understand breast cancer, why it has happened and its impact in your life. Making meaning of one's life after facing cancer can be a good experience. Yet, be aware that coming to terms with breast cancer, its meaning, and finding a purpose in your life takes time. There are no recipes or set ways to attend to this part of your life. However, here are some ways that others have found meaning in having breast cancer.

A good way to think about this is that, just because something doesn't feel good, doesn't mean it's bad for me. Going through difficult times is never what we want to do, but we can learn and grow from them and come out stronger on the other side.

- **Take time to think** about the meaning of having breast cancer and its impact in your life. Know that the search for meaning involves looking at yourself, and your relationships with others.
- **There is nothing like cancer** as a wakeup call in your life. Take this opportunity to reprioritize and refocus your energy on what is important, and don't sweat the small stuff.
- **Talk to others with breast cancer.** Seek support from others who have had breast cancer and are willing to talk about what has helped them.
- **Practice relaxation exercises** (See Tips on Relaxation)
- **Think about building and leaving a legacy.** What do you want to be known and recognized for? Come to terms with the good things you have done in your life. Begin a life review and look back over your life.
- **View breast cancer as a challenge** that you have done well dealing with. Think about the strengths that you have found or used during your treatment for breast cancer. Use these strengths. Think about how breast cancer has affected your life for good.



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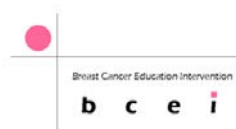
- **Be aware of and build up inner resources** such as self-worth, humor, coping, drive and self-determination. Focus on the good outcomes of breast cancer.
- **Express your thoughts and feelings**, keep a journal or diary of your feelings and thoughts about breast cancer. Use journal or diary writing as an activity to help in the search for meaning. (See Tips on Journaling).
- **Finding purpose in life** may flow from having breast cancer. Think about helping others who have just found out that they have breast cancer. Join in support activities, or volunteer for another cause you would like to support. Others may shy away from breast cancer activities and put that purpose into other passions, such as teaching, caring for others, etc.
- **Know that talking about finding meaning in life** after breast cancer may not always be easy with your family or friends.
- **It's OK** to grieve the loss of your life before cancer, but don't forget to appreciate your life now.

### When Do You Need to Seek Help?

You need to be able to talk openly about your concerns. If you have continued problems in communicating, think about seeing to a counselor or support group that talks about these issues.

### Useful websites:

- <https://www.livestrong.org/we-can-help/coping/finding-meaning>
- <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/facing-forward>



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