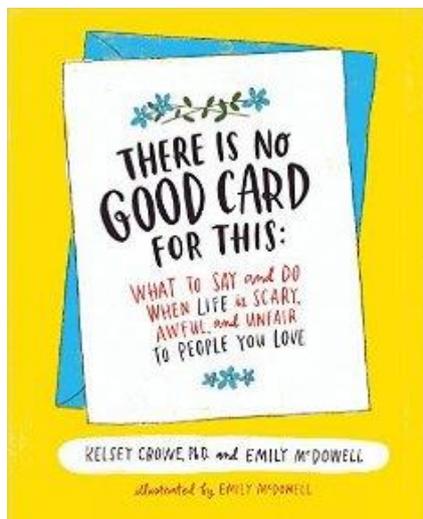


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**There is no good card for this:
what to say and do when life is
scary, awful, and unfair to people
you love (2017)**

Crowe K, McDowell E.
San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017.
260pp.
ISBN 9780062469991.
£16.99.

Average star rating 4.4 (out of 5)

**Macmillan Cancer Support
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7UQ**

These reviews were written by people affected by cancer and are their personal views and are not the views of Macmillan Cancer Support. These reviews, and the publications reviewed, should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this review or publication or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. For more information about the review process and how to get involved, please go to the end of this document.



I love this book and gave it to my mum to read when I finished She was struggling to understand me and talk to me on days when I couldn't express how I felt. Reading it helped her to know what to say, when it was appropriate to talk about certain things, and when it wasn't. I also used it to help me converse with a friend who had recently lost her child. It helped me to know what she would find comforting and what would not help. It isn't morbid or depressing and the tone is great.

It will be useful for anyone caring for someone with cancer or around someone with cancer or any sort of emotional turmoil. Excellent advice on how to approach, talk to, and be around someone suffering with any of life's hardships.

In remission – Hodgkin lymphoma (26-35) (January 2018)

I couldn't read this book fast enough! I have been on the receiving end of bizarre comments and some very useful ones too. This book looks at why people say the things they do and how they are received. It looks at what is going on without being too deep. It is easy to understand and relate to the examples and experiences.

It is easy to read and understand, at times almost like chatting with a friend! The authors clearly know what they are talking about. There are lots of examples and illustrations and the format keeps it moving quickly; it isn't repetitive or boring. The order is logical but allows you to jump to topics that interest you; in fact, the authors recommend this if you have limited time. It is presented in a "notebook" format and uses different typefaces to make points stand out. The smooth paper feels lovely. It is a hardback, which I really like, nearly square in size and quite small, a little unusual. There are many illustrations and summary sentences.

This is a good read for all. It is helpful for knowing what to say, or what not to say! I do try to think twice about what I say to others going through tough times, but I am sure I still get it wrong! This book is good for your confidence to just try – yes you will get it wrong and people will say odd things to you when you are going through difficult times – but trying speaks volumes; the tips help give you the tools you need.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (January 2018)

This book is suited to anyone trying to connect with someone in a difficult situation, whether a carer, health professional, colleague, friend, or relative. Even though we love someone very much, it can be scary to know how to respond when they tell you about their cancer diagnosis. This can lead to a feeling of isolation – when people avoid them or avoid the topic – and this is such a practical guide on how to reach out to someone in a way that they feel comfortable with, without saying the "wrong" thing.

For those caring for someone with cancer, the authors discuss how best to approach the topic of emotions and coping mechanisms in a simple and practical way. Each person feels differently about how to communicate with people with illness, so the book gives lots of tips on how to let the other person know they are being thought of; this does not have to be in a deep emotional conversation (although some people are comfortable with this), it can be as simple as an email or text saying "I'm sorry", or it can be as practical as maintaining a neighbour's garden if you know they are having a rough time. No gesture is too small is the overall message of this book – one that I have already implemented into plenty of situations since reading it.

The authors discuss situations and issues simply, without being patronising, and it is a very interesting read. Each section is illustrated well with further simplifications and tips, so a reader could glance at them without reading the whole book and still pick up useful information. I did not notice any factual inaccuracies and was impressed by the amount of research and references, which are detailed at the end. This book is not based on personal experience alone, the advice is interwoven with real research.

Although the concept of how far we go as friends, colleagues and relatives to support someone with cancer can be difficult and overwhelming, this book is very clear, with relatable examples, and well-illustrated tables and drawings to help the reader process the information in different ways, rather than read a continuous block of text. The layout and design are appealing, and the illustrations capture and summarise the text, making the tips and explanations easier to process and remember. The illustrations also use humour to emphasise the point, so it is not a "heavy" read.

I love how openly the authors discuss the various points and analyse how human beings really feel about certain gestures. It is portrayed as common sense that can be applied to lots of situations; even in small ways, it has changed how I have connected with people who are struggling. It doesn't focus on cancer, it covers other difficulties such as divorce or job loss as well, but the principles are basically the same, and very simple – reach out to people in whatever way you are comfortable with. It empowers the reader to do good in other people's lives, by addressing why we want to reach out, and how we can best utilise our individual skills to do this.

I would recommend this book to people who may be struggling to know how to connect with the person with an illness, although it would be a good read for anybody and the principles should be applied to daily life. It is not geared at a specific cancer diagnosis, yet it explains principles and ideas that are so essential in reaching out to people who may feel isolated and terrified by their situation. There is nothing I dislike, I think it gives very useful advice in an understandable format, using humour and appropriate illustrations. I have implemented some of the tips already!

Healthcare professional (Under 25) (October 2017)

This practical guide for dealing with emotions when the unthinkable happens will appeal to anyone affected by trauma. It provides advice on how to handle the emotional aspect of illness and trauma. It can be applied to cancer but also to other situations, such as bereavement and other illnesses.

It details in a logical order how to help someone who is suffering. The author initially explains that to be kind to others, we need to be kind to ourselves – when we understand how we are, then we are empowered to help others. She also talks about listening skills: we need to identify what type of listener we are, and we should focus on what the person is saying, not simultaneously think about how to respond.

It is easy to understand and doesn't contain many medical terms – it focuses on the emotional state. It is a hardback colourful book with different fonts and sized writing which make it easy to read. It is an attractive book that I am happy to leave out on the coffee table (some cancer books are not!). My 14-year-old daughter even remarked on how good it looks and took it to her room to read!

I love this book; its practical compassionate advice has changed the way I think and how I approach helping others and helped me to understand myself better. I like the list of Go-To Phrases and the checklist telling us when we need to listen and what to say. It is frank and honest with very useful advice on how to offer emotional support to someone with cancer and I recommend it to carers, relatives and friends. A review on the back encapsulates how I felt, “At last, a book for the vast swath of us who really care but don't know how to show it sometimes. Kelsey and Emily made this enormous and complex issue accessible and so wonderfully helpful. It is just right for any human being who ever plans on being close to another human being”. I will be recommending it to my friends and will refer to time and time again.

Breast cancer diagnosed June 2015, treatment completed and awaiting reconstructive surgery (46-55) (September 2017)

This is more for people who are talking to people with cancer. It is directed at how to talk to people going through a hard time – what to say and what not to say in certain situations. It would be useful for initial diagnosis and reaction. When you are told about someone's diagnosis, there can be shock and panic about what to say in that moment. This book helps guide you, gives examples, and offers reassurance that everyone panics. It's also important for those who aren't that close to the patient. If you are very close, you may know how to respond – you are experiencing it at close quarters and may have a better relationship – but if you are a work colleague or acquaintance, you may not know what to say.

There isn't a logical order, but that's no bad thing – there's no order to responding to bad news or the issues that arise from it. Saying this, it flows well and is a joy to read. There aren't many technical terms; it covers a range of topics such as divorce, bereavement, job loss, or serious illness so there is no need for confusing technical language. Anyone could read it; not young children as they have their own way of responding, but adults/teens, professionals/casual workers/unemployed, young/old, man/woman, experienced/unexperienced.

I like everything about this book. It shines a humorous and positive light on difficult situations; people going through divorce, illness, bereavement don't necessarily want to spend all their time feeling depressed and down, and like humour and triviality on occasion. It doesn't talk down to the reader but doesn't confuse or overwhelm them. It is lovely to read and makes you laugh. It makes you feel less alone. Its main appeal is how positive it feels. Even the cover, with its bright colours, fancy font, and jokey feel, shows that there can be positives amongst negatives and that it's not always serious. It's a hardback, with 260 pages, but never feels overwhelming. The simple, but engaging, images are very like Emily McDowell's greeting cards, which shed a little humour and light on hard situations. It is a joy to read.

I have read everything there is about oesophageal cancer since my father was diagnosed five months ago, and everything about caring for him. Whilst these leaflets and books are informative and important, they can be dry, technical, confusing, and, if I'm honest, tend to focus on the negative. This is the complete opposite. It gives you advice without being patronising but doesn't assume you know everything and guides you in the right direction. It is a beautiful book, including the cover, text, and the images. I recommend it to anyone. I love Emily McDowell's greeting cards, and this has a very similar feel. I would have given it ten stars if I could.

Carer of father who has Stage 4 oesophageal cancer that has spread to liver, stomach and lymphs (Under 25) (August 2017)

The creator of the viral hit "Empathy Cards" has teamed up with a compassion expert to produce a visually stunning and ground-breaking illustrated guide to help you increase your emotional intelligence and learn how to offer comfort and support when someone you know is in pain. When someone you know is hurting, you want to let them know that you care. But many people don't know what words to use—or are afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. This thoughtful guide, blends well-researched, actionable advice with the no-nonsense humour and the illustration style of McDowell's popular "Empathy Cards", to help you feel confident in connecting with anyone experiencing grief, loss, illness, or any other difficult situation.

Written in a how-to, relatable, we've-all-been-that-deer-in-the-headlights kind of way, this isn't a spiritual treatise on how to make you a better person or a scientific argument about why compassion matters. It is a helpful illustrated guide to effective compassion that takes you, step by step by step, past the paralysis of thinking about someone in a difficult time to doing something (or nothing) with good judgment instead of fear. It features workbook exercises, sample dialogs, and real-life examples from Dr. Crowe's research, including her popular "Empathy Bootcamps" that give people tools for building relationships when it really counts. Whether it's a co-worker whose mother has died, a neighbour whose husband has been in a car accident, or a friend who is seriously ill, this book teaches you how to be the best friend you can be to someone in need.

Friends with several breast cancer patients, caring for father with prostate cancer. Professional working with Macmillan and joint Independent Peer Advocacy Programme across 12 sites in England and Wales (56-65) (August 2017)

This book provides practical advice for anyone who encounters someone who is dealing with bad news or having a difficult time, so in that respect, it's relevant for everyone and anyone. It helps you to understand the emotional process that people go through when dealing with a difficult situation, and therefore how best to support them. It is probably not suitable for someone with cancer or going through a tough emotional time, as it may just highlight that others perhaps aren't supporting them in the best way and create unnecessary upset or frustration.

It is very appealing, with a brightly coloured cover and many illustrations. Different typefaces help make the content fun and easy to read and highlight key things to remember. It has a logical order, but each chapter contains much information, and their titles don't necessarily reflect this; this makes it hard to dip in to find a specific piece of information. It's better to read it through as it often refers to earlier points (useful in helping to ground your understanding). Overall, it is easy to understand. The earlier chapters discuss grief, compassion, and empathy; this is explained well, but requires a bit more focus. It is written in a very encouraging way, and you very much get the impression it is written by "normal" people.

I like that it begins by focusing on your feelings (as well as helping you understand the emotional process the other person is going through), and how and why you can often feel awkward around other people's situations, but more importantly helps you break this down and get beyond it. However, although the introduction has valuable discussion points, it is long-winded, and I was keen to get to the practical advice. The examples and quotes from real-life situations, along with explanations as to why they are better or worse ways of handling a situation, make you realise that it doesn't take much to make a difference and there are many ways to support someone. It recaps key phrases and rules to have up your sleeve – as well as never use – with a handy summary of suggestions for specific situations (e.g. illness, loss, divorce).

This book provides practical and useful advice about how to show you care and be the most supportive friend, colleague, or relative you can be to someone who is going through a tricky time, be it cancer, divorce, or miscarriage, for example. It also has advice on how to provide support based on the relationship you have (e.g. close friend versus neighbour you see occasionally). I recommend it to anyone who wants to have more confidence in being able to act supportively and say the "right" things to those going through any emotionally tricky time.

Daughter of bladder cancer patient (26-35) (August 2017)

As the subtitle states, this book is about "what to say and do when life is scary, awful, and unfair to people you love", which covers all of us. The authors don't focus on one type of traumatic event, such as cancer, but give numerous examples of a range of traumas. It opens with an excellent example of someone reacting to a friend's cancer diagnosis and suggests what their thought process could be in that moment. Although it isn't aimed at people with cancer, or those caring for them, it does make it immediately relevant to cancer as an issue. The insights into the likely process of working out what to say in response to comments about cancer may help patients understand people's comments more fully, and others more aware of what to avoid.

It is clear and easy to understand, with many illustrations and graphics to emphasise points. The bright yellow cover and casual fonts and illustrations all create a light feel. The paper is bright white and good quality, and it is a very pleasing volume to use. The conversational style is bright and feels almost real; the subject matter is delivered in a chatty style rather than coming across as too serious or preaching.

The three chapters, after the Introduction, flow logically: 1. Laying some groundwork; 2. The three touchstones of showing up; and 3. Just help me not to be a disaster. The reader is guided through the concepts the authors use to explain the terror most of us feel when confronted with bad news from someone we love. The first chapter starts with a realistic description of what it can be like when a co-worker has suffered a bereavement and you find yourself avoiding them because you don't know what to say or do. The authors sum up brilliantly the sheer awkwardness of what it can be like, not knowing whether to say anything, and if so, what to say and when. The section on what the authors call "empathy roadblocks" (p. 24) is a useful insight into why we may avoid reaching out to someone having a difficult time, for example: fear of doing the wrong thing; fear of saying the wrong thing; fear of not having time/bandwidth. These appealed to me as useful explanations for why people don't say something to me about my cancer, and why people I have previously given support to at difficult times in their lives have avoided the issue. There are some great (unattributed) quotes, things like "in order to receive, we must notice what is given" (p. 34), which is a good reminder that we may not hear what we would like to hear from someone, but that they are doing the best they know how to do.

I'm not convinced that someone who makes blunders when dealing with someone else's crises will reach for a book like this. In my experience, the people who make the worst mistakes are those least aware of it. A scaled-down version could make a good gift for someone who needs educating about the impact of their unfortunate words. However, overall, it is very useful: for those dealing with a crisis and wanting to get a better understanding of why people are so clumsy around them; and for those who are unsure what to do in such situations. I recommend it; it's not specific to cancer, but certainly gives food for thought about relationships around us.

Living with stage 4 tonsil cancer (56-65) (August 2017)

This is useful for anyone, from any walk of life, at any time. We could all learn from it and it is a great tool for training health professionals. It is very well written, in a style that is easy to understand. The examples of different situations make absorbing the information effortless. The hardback has a lovely soft feel with an attractive cover that makes it very visible. The use of colour throughout is perfect, giving it great appeal. The content is arranged by different situations, with examples of the point being made and reminder quotes in a different typeface and colour to make them stand out. This and the illustrations make the book very striking.

This book offers emotional support, not necessarily for those with cancer, and I will go back to it again. It brings a light-hearted humour to a subject that is so often ignored. It gives us permission to say what we really need to in a tricky situation.

Two-times sarcoma survivor (66-75) (August 2017)

This book does exactly what it says on the cover – it provides you with the tips and confidence to be there for anyone in a bad situation who needs you. Those living with cancer could pass it to someone who keeps saying the wrong thing, even though they genuinely want to care. It will also be useful for anyone who wants to help but is scared they'll say the wrong thing and keep their distance instead.

It is incredibly easy to understand. The authors write in everyday language and there are no technical terms. They are very good at describing different behaviours people exhibit in scary situations, so everyone can relate to them. The background colour is yellow, perfect for the uplifting feeling that the book gives you as you realise you can be there for anyone who needs your help. The hardback is a good size and there are lots of wonderful illustrations throughout, which make for very easy reading.

The topics are wide ranging – cancer, bereavement, miscarriage, divorce – so it is very useful in any situation but not specific in providing advice on living with cancer. I recommend it to anyone who worries what to say. It focusses on active listening and how to offer support this way. It is therefore useful to the support network of anyone who diagnosed. The patient could also use it to help them guide any of their support network who aren't quite hitting the mark with saying the right things to support them.

This book gives you confidence. It is so easy to relate to – we've all avoided situations for fear of saying the wrong thing. It provides a lot of suggestions for ways to help based on the relationship you already have with the person you wish to help and the available time you have.

Daughter of father living with prostate cancer (26-35) (July 2017)

This book offers behavioural advice that is practical, helpful, and reasonable. It will help with “What do I say when I don't know what to say”. I was very surprised how much I liked this treatment of a worrying problem: how best to be supportive to family and friends who are going through a bad time.

It is a small- to medium-sized and well-prepared hardback of 250 pages, illustrated with many cartoons, some even showing information as diagrams. The tone is serious, informal, helpful, and friendly. The style is very informal and youthful. The language is American English and so will not suit everybody. I expected to dislike the jokey, cartoon-style presentation, but in fact this works rather well, even for a much older readership than that apparently addressed.

This book is more for carers, family, and friends than for those personally affected by cancer. It offers help with emotional support but not facts and information about managing cancer. I shall keep it to hand as we cannot know when our family and friends will need our support. I am not naturally good at choosing acceptable behaviour to others and I think that there is much here that will help me.

Living with breast cancer (Over 75) (July 2017)

This is aimed at those supporting others and is most useful for emotional support. It is useful for learning how to communicate in difficult situations and help, rather than make the person feel worse. At first, I found the style too chatty and quirky, or maybe just too American, but I began to enjoy it as I read more. Teenagers might find it useful (or they might find the tone patronising, all depends I suppose).

I like that it is based on sound research. It is bright and colourful with illustrations to get serious points over in a way that, although not fun, is quite light. I could compare it a little to the “black humour” that you get in a group of cancer patients; laughing about the serious stuff helps. I took a while to get used to the style but ended up feeling I knew the authors a little and enjoying it, so, nothing I really disliked.

I will recommend it to cancer patients, and their friends and family. It will be useful in many different situations for those who want to offer support but are unsure how.

Former cervical cancer patient (56-65) (July 2017)

I was drawn to this book. It seems to convey lightness about a difficult, sensitive subject and may prevent people falling into a pattern of sympathy or horrified anxiety. The language is straightforward with no technical jargon. The typeface is a good size and there are a lot of drawings creating white space, which makes it easier to read.

I like that there are only three sections and the practical information on what not to say or do. It is easy to use our own stock phrases and this book gives many options. I like the empathy directory – so useful. There is nothing too dislike but, as the authors are American, some of the language is a bit alien.

Endometrial cancer survivor (66-75) (July 2017)

We can all relate to this topic and often question if we did the right thing. This helps us to reflect in a positive manner. Most importantly, it can help bring comfort at a difficult time. It looks at life in general and the needs of the person, regardless of the cause; miscarriage, illness, or loss, the impact is equally painful, scary, distressing. It could be used at any time; it will depend on the individual, just like the person in need of support, the provider/giver must be ready too.

It is easy to read with lots of illustrations and key messages. You get the feeling that you are speaking to a friend. There is no glossary but there are references for further reading. It is an attractive book, particularly the cover. The layout is great: warm-coloured pages separate sections; the font is good; and there are boxed messages to consider or refer to. The tone is very caring and assertive, boosting confidence.

There are lots of things I like, such as the key messages on a separate page making it easy to refer to. I also like the empathy tips. The wonderful illustrations make it a manageable read and allow difficult situations to feel normal; it demonstrates that consideration and genuineness go a long way.

Living with the consequences of breast cancer (56-65) (July 2017)

This is useful for all aspects of living with cancer and for other illnesses and how to manage situations and respond. It is very easy to understand. The bright and quirky illustrations make it easier to understand, dip in and out, or read in full. While the subject matter is quite heavy, the tone is quite humorous, and the author writes in such a way that it feels more like a conversation with a close friend; the illustrations enable the reader to break down the information in to digestible chunks and process these without being bombarded with page after page of technical terms etc.

I love everything about this book: the layout; how it handles each topic; and the humour and illustrations throughout. It is one of those books that we should all have on our bookshelf for when times aren't so great in our own lives or those close to us.

Relative of breast cancer survivor (26-35) (June 2017)

This could offer a lot to many people. It is best read by those who know someone in a tricky situation as it is a guide on how to approach anyone going through a hard time. It could go on anyone's bookshelf and we could all benefit from it. There is almost too much information to take in and remember! However, it has a logical order and takes the reader on a journey and can also be dipped into for specific situations.

It is a nice shape, easy to hold and good quality. It is permeated by small illustrations which, together with large colourful statements that break up the text, make it easier to read than other "helpful" books. Although I did find that my eye was drawn to the large colourful statements and skipped to these rather than reading the normal text.

I didn't know what to expect from this book and so embarked upon reading it with a neutral mind. It gives advice to those who know people who are going through tough times and situations when it is sometimes difficult to know what to do or say without putting your foot in it. The advice is clear and simple and covers situations such as illness, job loss, bereavement, and miscarriage. There are examples from real life and I could easily identify with some of the gaffs, e.g. comparing my cancer to that of someone they know and, my pet hate, "You look well". Aaargh. But, as someone who knows others who are going, or have been, through tricky situations, it makes me realise what I could have said and can say in the future. Listen, and ask how the person is feeling, rather than interject with examples, comparisons and anecdotes.

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (May 2017)



This covers how to talk to someone going through a rough time, be it cancer, divorce, fertility issues, or bereavement. It focuses on what the person needs and how you can help. It has ideas on using your empathy and compassion to offer support. It covers common pitfalls and is very honest in admitting that no one is perfect – trust your concerns, values and behaviours in what to say and do.

It is informal without being childish – a bright hardback, with many illustrations and typefaces, and a nice flow and colours for dealing with a difficult subject. The topics are well laid out with examples. The information is collected from the author's research and organisation (Help Each Other Out).

This is a useful book for friends, family, and carers, but it is not specific to cancer and could help anyone. I like the key messages of compassion, empathy, and helping others. Everyone knows someone going through a rough patch and this book can help you support the people you care about. It acknowledges that everyone makes mistakes with good intentions but has tips on how to prevent these.

Patient supporter (26-35) (September 2017)

Anyone could benefit from reading this upbeat book. It's not just relevant to cancer, it covers all aspects of communication for anyone struggling with what to say or do. It is easy to understand with serious and light-hearted content and easy to dip into. It's a lovely hardback with great illustrations, quality paper, and clear but varied typefaces.

It's a great resource for advice and for reflecting on life's experiences. It's easy to identify and empathise with scenarios that all of us will have experienced to some degree. At first, I was distracted by the layout and seemingly immature sketches, but in context it works well and it's easy to engage with this bright, appealing book.

This is a book I shall keep on my bookshelf for reference for when I am faced with difficult circumstances and unsure how to respond. We can all learn from this book and employ it when dealing with others.

Health professional (46-55) (September 2017)

This is a colourful book, with great illustrations. It's a bright book to read, not one of unhappiness. It covers a range of topics, not just cancer. It has useful tips on empathy, what to say, what not to say, how to offer support, how to show patience, how to act when life is a little bumpy. It's useful for anyone supporting family, friends and loved ones through difficult times and has some useful tips and scenarios.

I like the examples of how to talk to someone; the authors describe a scenario then give examples of how best to manage, what to say, and how to say it. The book focuses a lot on empathy, which can be quite complex depending on the situation, but the authors give lots of examples and useful tips. The only thing I don't like is the American vocabulary, e.g. freaking, dumbass, mom.

This book is not just for anyone affected by cancer, it's an all-round book for anyone going through a difficult time in their lives, and anyone caring for them.

I cared for a parent through cancer (36-45) (August 2017)

This book is most useful for anyone who knows someone who is affected by cancer. I think it is also useful to cancer patients as it shows the dilemma that people go through when they want to help but don't know how.

The authors have a great deal of experience of cancer and both deal extremely well with the topic and handle it in well-thought-out and logical order. The language is easy to understand, and the authors present the topics in a way that even a reader with a short attention span can follow. The design, illustrations and layout very cleverly draw readers in and allow them to engage with quite difficult topics in an entertaining and forgiving way. It is very appealing and non-judgemental.

I like that the book gives real advice for real situations, in a non-judgemental and supportive way. It takes the fear out of feeling awkward or thinking that the supporter needs to say something profound or technically correct when confronted with bad news. It allows the supporter to recognise their flaws and yet still be incredibly useful to someone who needs them. After completing counselling courses, I recognise many of the techniques used in counselling.

It is a bit repetitive, but this helps if you want to dip in rather than read it all. It is also contradictory and confusing at times, especially, for example, when it is explicit about which words to use when someone tells you that they have cancer. It specifically says when to say "sorry" but then says you shouldn't say "sorry". Basically, it comes down to how developed your interpersonal skills are, how well you know the person, and how deep the trust is between you. There is no set script that anyone can use, but it may help the unprepared or those lacking empathy or social skills.

Relative of a brain tumour patient (46-55) (July 2017)

This is best for those caring for patients. It is quite a relaxing book to read. It is very easy to understand and appropriate for every age group. The cover and the contents are visually very attractive due to the colours and the format of the text.

I like how it's not too formal. You read each chapter, which are not too long, and reflect on your actions. It is useful for anyone and every age group. It can change a reader's thoughts, make us more positive and further encourage us to help people.

Medical student (Under 25) (July 2017)

This is a great read for anyone, not just those dealing with cancer, for self-reflection and how to handle different situations. It's appropriate for people from any background going through a difficult experience. This makes it unique and refreshing.

The content is put across in a witty way, very down to earth and straight to the point. It is like someone talking rather than lots of technical terms and big words to sift through and understand, very human, and I love the sarcasm and witty banter. It would lighten the mood of someone living with cancer and make them laugh; it is almost like being inside the brain of someone dealing with something difficult. It speaks openly and honestly about what really goes on in your mind when you're

having a hard time; this makes it so relatable and that it is normal and fair to be thinking a certain way and that you're not alone – there is no fluffing things up in this book. It's also great for carers and family because it gives a clear indication of the must do's and don'ts when trying to comfort someone, what IS ok to say, and what someone who is suffering really does and does not want to hear.

The book is very appealing, in many ways. The vibrant, yellow cover is associated with happiness and things light hearted. The illustrations break up the text nicely, but also make it more comic like than a self-help book – this may make people more inclined to read it and finish it. The tone is the best part for me; it is so down to earth and feels genuine, making it so relatable.

I like that so much can be taken from one book. It is so much more honest than anything else I have read and it has really made me reflect on myself.

My mum was a lung cancer patient and I was her carer from diagnosis in November last year until she passed away in January (Under 25) (July 2017)

This is a very practical book that makes the reader think about how they can communicate more effectively and appropriately in difficult situations and avoid saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. It is not a book about cancer, although the authors draw on their experience of cancer; it is for anyone who wants to communicate with and show empathy with friends, relatives, acquaintances or colleagues who are going through difficult times.

For people with cancer, or other life-changing illnesses or situations, it provides a perspective of the issues that many people struggle with when they are trying to be supportive and explores why people sometimes say the most inappropriate and even hurtful things when they mean to be helpful. For friends hearing about a cancer diagnosis or other bad news, it shifts the focus of our thinking from our own discomfort about being uncertain about what to say, to what the other person needs to hear (or not hear) from us, and how we can respond to them more effectively. It does recognise that not everyone will wish to share their feelings about their cancer with people they don't know well, or even with people close to them, and that is a personal choice to be recognised and respected. For everyone, there are excellent explorations of how people react to someone else's bad news, and practical suggestions for what to say and do to be supportive without being embarrassing or overwhelming. There are also some great examples of what not to do and say taken from real situations, and straightforward reminders about how thinking before speaking can make a positive difference to a difficult conversation.

The book is based on the authors' research and a brief outline of their methodology is included at the end. As the authors are based in California, it is likely that the research subjects were other Californians, and there is a recognition that their findings may be culturally specific. However, for this British reader, most of the examples and themes of the book have a strong resonance.

The structure is simple and easy to follow. The book is accessible and does not use a great deal of technical language. There are a few references to American ideas

and brand names that are unfamiliar, but this does not destroy the overall sense. The authors have done a very good job of making the text applicable to a wide variety of people and situations. The hardback reflects the background of one of its authors as an illustrator and greetings card designer. It makes effective use of cartoon-style illustrations and coloured “hand written” sections of text. Overall, the effect is very visually appealing, although some readers might find the multicoloured text harder to read. The writing style is informal and gently humorous.

This book fills a gap in the literature very effectively. It provides insights into why we avoid talking about cancer, why some of us tend to say the wrong thing, but most importantly how we can train ourselves to say the right thing (including nothing), according to the person and situation facing us. It works from the assumption that we want to be kind and supportive to our relatives, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and strangers, but that sometimes we don't know where to start or are worried about saying the wrong thing and making a bad situation worse. The authors also recognise that we naturally have different levels of interaction with different people, and the level of empathy we can show will depend on the context. I like the style of presentation – no pseudo-scientific jargon, no miracle claims, no preaching, just a structured common-sense approach with many examples and gentle humour.

There is very little to dislike, although the use of graphics may not be to everyone's taste. Some people may also feel uncomfortable that a diagnosis of cancer is treated generically with other difficult and potentially embarrassing life situations such as divorce and fertility treatment. There could have been more discussion about the appropriate use of social media, email, and text messages; the brief section on this gives an almost unqualified endorsement of sending messages of support via these means without recognising any possible drawbacks.

This is a unique book. Its use of graphics is an effective way of putting over important messages with a light touch. I recommend it to anyone who has ever said the wrong thing to a friend in a crisis, to anyone who avoids people facing difficult situations, to anyone who cannot stop themselves giving well-meaning but unwanted advice, and to anyone who feels they could do better in showing care to people who need it. It should have a wide appeal, not restricted to people with cancer and their carers. It is not driven by an ideology but contains a great deal of common sense about how people can be kind to each other in a practical and non-sentimental way.

Breast cancer survivor, with friends and family members affected by other cancer types (46-55) (May 2017).



This is a good book for health professionals who want to develop their communication skills to ensure that they can deliver information in a professional way without appearing “too emotionless, or too formal, or just too didactic”. It could also be useful for someone caring for a cancer patient, or those who would like to talk more confidently to a friend who has recently been diagnosed with cancer.

The cover and design are great, making it a very attractive book! The illustrations are bright and help alleviate the serious mood when someone is working with patients with terminal disease like cancer. The language is simple and easy-to-understand but the organisation of the content could be better. Even though the content is separated using subtitles, each chapter is still loaded with too much information, resulting in a loss of emphasis on the main point that the writer is trying to get across.

This is a very nicely illustrated book that will attract anyone to pick it up and start reading. I think that the best way to use this book is to go to it for an answer for a specific thing you are looking for, for example, if you want to know what you should not say to a person who is grieving or going through a tough time in life, then you can go straight to a certain part of the book to learn about it. I don't think it is a book for a beginner (a person who has just started learning how to talk to grieving family and friends), it probably has slightly too much information that might overwhelm someone who just wants to learn the general approach.

Student doctor (Under 25) (October 2017)

This is more of a guide to how to deal with various situations, such as divorce, death or infertility. It is not one journey or process. It may be useful for carers, family and friends of a cancer patient for how to talk about the situation – do's and don'ts.

The hardback is bright and colourful and full of illustrations. It is easy to understand; there is nothing difficult, but the language is American and sometimes overfamiliar. The style feels like a children's book, but the language is not appropriate for children.

I like the fact that it is bright and colourful; the illustrations break up the text making it easy to read. There are no long chunks of text to get through and each section is manageable. However, the way it is broken down with examples and exercises makes it feel a bit like a student study aid.

Overall, it feels more of a self-learning guide to being a better person and dealing with different life situations. There is a lot about being better at empathy. It's not particularly useful for someone already going through cancer, or their family and friends, it isn't specific enough. It's more useful to those who want to become a better friend or colleague, rather than help someone through a difficult time.

Lost father to stomach cancer (26-35) (August 2017)

This is about how to talk to someone who has cancer and deal with scary situations; it is a guide to basic humanity. It is most useful for dealing with emotional aspects, helping you to talk and discuss things, and get past the awkwardness of what to say to someone with cancer.

The logical order builds on previous chapters and it is easy to understand. There's a list of suggested further reading and a conclusion. The cover isn't exceptional – I wasn't instantly drawn to it – but the typeface is good, and the text is interspersed with colour, “handwriting”, and hand-drawn pictures, so visually it's very interesting. I like the presentation and the straightforward style, but it is a little repetitive.

Carer/friend/relative (56-65) (July 2017)

This is a self-help book about saying and doing the most helpful things when a person we know is having a rough time (not necessarily cancer). It starts with a reminder (if we need one) that bad things can and do happen, but that being paralysed by inaction can be the worst thing for everyone involved.

First, it focuses on getting ready for providing an empathic response by dealing with the fact that we all make mistakes. The important conclusion by the author is that one continues to try hard instead of becoming side-tracked by feelings of inadequacy in meeting the challenges. The emphasis is on compassion, not pity; trust plays an important role in determining how to distinguish between the two emotions. There is a chapter on listening, as opposed to jumping in with advice and reactions. It ends with a “cheat sheet” of situational advice on topics from death to divorce.

It doesn't just address issues about cancer. It includes all situations “when life is scary, awful and unfair”. It will be most useful for family, friends and acquaintances who wish to do the right thing in terms of conversation, friendship, and general support, but are concerned about saying or doing the wrong thing.

It was compiled by an American author and graphic designer. Although there are no technical words, the reader is aware that it is written with American readers in mind. It is a hardback, with a mostly bright yellow cover. The graphic design on the cover – and copiously placed throughout the book – is bold and colourful. I think it is childlike and don't like it, but I think it aims to add a friendly tone and make the book more attractive and readable to many people. I guess many people would like it.

This book promises a lifeline to those who acknowledge that they need to think carefully about how they communicate helpfully with someone who is going through a tough time. It seems to address helping with major traditionally female concerns. It has a slightly patronising air, assuming that readers are incompetent and going to say the wrong thing and deals with self-forgiveness as an antidote to that. I would prefer a plainer, more factual, serious, research-based, and yet heartfelt guide on what to say and do, without the folksy illustrations; they seem to be there to keep readers' attention from wandering, and to bulk out the content.

Friend, carer, former health professional (56-65) (May 2017)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Being told ‘you have cancer’ can affect so much more than your health – it can also affect your family, your job, even your ability to pay the bills. But you’re still you. We get that. And, after over 100 years of helping people through cancer, we get what’s most important: that you’re treated as a person, not just a patient.

It’s why we’ll take the time to understand you and all that matters to you, so we can help you get the support you need to take care of your health, protect your personal relationships and deal with money and work worries.

We’re here to help you find your best way through from the moment of diagnosis, so you’re able to live life as fully as you can. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

© Macmillan Cancer Support, October 2018

Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SCO39907) and the Isle of Man (604).