



INTERNATIONAL
MYELOMA
FOUNDATION

CELEBRATING
35 YEARS

Defying Boundaries, Redefining Possibilities

OUR VISION:

A world where every myeloma patient can live life to the fullest, unburdened by the disease.

OUR MISSION:

Improving the quality of life of myeloma patients while working toward prevention and a cure.

IMF Core Values:

These are the core values we bring to accomplishing our mission each day.

Patient Centric

The patient experience is the focus of everything we do. Every interaction is an opportunity to establish a personal connection built on care and compassion which is the basis for continued support.

Respect All

As a team, we value honesty and transparency while creating a culture of mutual respect. We foster a myeloma community built on sincerity, authenticity, and kindness.

Excellence and Innovation

We value accountability, personal responsibility, and a steadfast commitment to excellence. We respect the legacy and reputation of our organization while seeking new solutions and advancements to improve outcomes, quality of life, and access to the best available resources for everyone impacted by myeloma.

Honor differences

We recognize each team member's skills and talents through collaboration and cooperation. Our programs aim to celebrate and support the diversity of our patients and their communities.

THE UNSEEN IMPACT OF MYELOMA: TAKING CARE OF YOUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH

IMF Support Group Directors



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AGENDA

- Background
- Initial Emotional Reactions
- Coping with your Emotions
- Grounding Exercises
- When & Where to Seek Help
- Wellness Tips & Resources for Support
- References
- Questions

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BACKGROUND

About Katie

- Master of Social Work (MSW) from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2010
- Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) since 2012
- Specialized in oncology social work since 2018
- Certified Oncology Social Worker (OSW-C) since 2021
- Skilled in providing therapy to individuals, couples, and families coping with cancer.





**THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF MYELOMA:
NAVIGATING THE HIDDEN STRUGGLE**

Myeloma is often seen through the lens of physical symptoms, treatments, and survival rates.

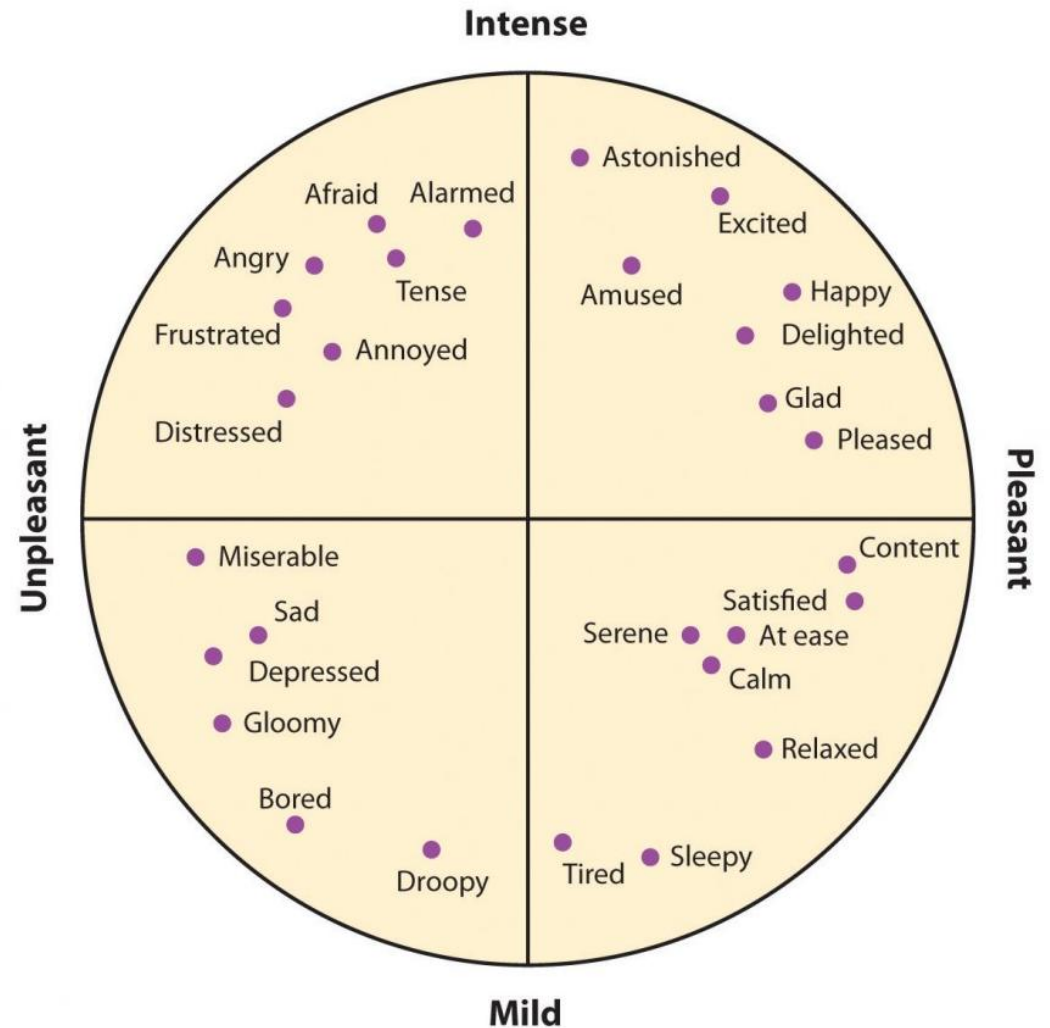


Beneath the surface of this medical battle lies a profound emotional journey that affects not only the person diagnosed but also their loved ones.

Initial Feelings

Getting a diagnosis of cancer can feel like getting the wind knocked out of you.

All feelings are normal!



<https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontopsychology/chapter/10-1-the-experience-of-emotion/>

Shock of Diagnosis

The word “cancer” can carry with it a lifetime of associations — mortality, pain, suffering — which can instantly alter a person’s self-image and sense of the future.



Shock & Disbelief

Some patients describe a feeling of numbness or surrealism after a cancer diagnosis; unable to fully grasp the weight of the news.

- Confusion
- Disconnection
- Denial



Anger

It is completely normal to experience anger towards:

- Doctors
- Healthcare team
- Yourself
- God



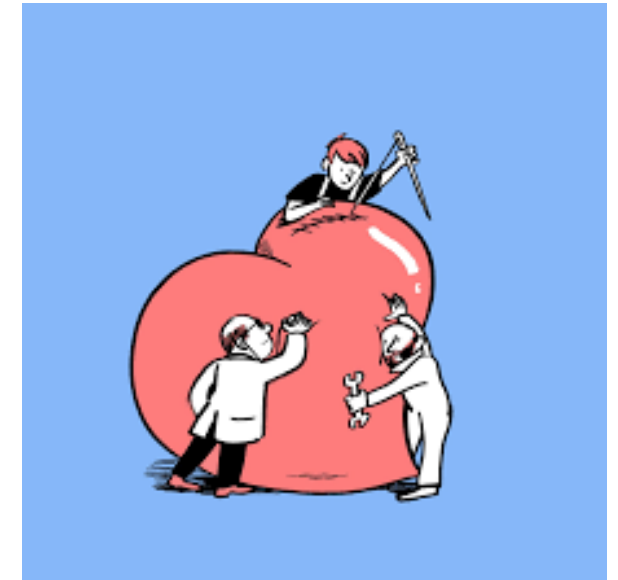
Changes in Identity



- Side effects like fatigue, hair loss, nausea, and cognitive changes can strip away one's sense of normalcy and identity.
- Some people feel isolated as they withdraw from social activities, work, or relationships due to physical limitations or emotional distress.
- The loss of independence and routine can be demoralizing and defeating.

Relationship Challenges

- Cancer can significantly impact relationships with partners, family, friends, and coworkers.
- Some people may not know how to respond or offer support, leading to awkwardness, discomfort, or distance.
- Care partners can also experience emotional exhaustion, guilt, and helplessness as they witness their loved one's suffering.



Anxiety

Symptoms of anxiety include:

- ruminating about a specific fear
- sleep disturbance
- feeling restless or edgy
- irritability
- being easily fatigued or overstimulated
- difficulty concentrating or forgetfulness



<https://www.medcentral.com/behavioral-mental/anxiety/assessment-diagnosis-adherence-anxiety>

Depression

Symptoms of depression include:

- Sleep disturbance
- Loss of interest/pleasure in activities that used to feel exciting (anhedonia)
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Changes in energy or excessive fatigue
- Appetite/weight changes
- Psychomotor disturbance
- Suicidal thoughts
- Depressed mood



<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression/what-is-depression>

Prevalence of Depression

- In the US, 23.1% of the general population meet criteria for a diagnosis of a mental health disorder.
- Over 56% of patients living with blood cancers experience anxiety and depression

[NAMI Mental Health Statistics](#)

[Blood Advances: Anxiety and Depression](#)

Depression is Serious

Please take these symptoms
seriously
AND
seek help as you need it!

988 Lifeline

Possible Treatment Options for Anxiety and Depression

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Logotherapy or Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy
- Supportive Counseling and/or Support Groups



Finding Value in the Challenge

- This is never about suggesting the illness itself is “good” or that someone *should* suffer.
- Rather, it’s about recognizing that within extremely difficult or unwanted experiences, people sometimes discover forms of meaning, strength, connection, or clarity.



Emotional and Spiritual Growth

Research in psycho-oncology shows that post-traumatic growth is surprisingly common. People sometimes describe:

- A greater appreciation for life's small moments
- New or deepened spiritual beliefs
- A sense of inner strength they didn't know they had
- Increased empathy or patience

Suffering forces confrontation with vulnerability and uncertainty, and some individuals emerge with a transformed worldview.

Hope & Empowerment

Cancer strips away control, but in that loss, people often find a different kind of agency:

- Choosing how to spend meaningful time
- Choosing how to speak about their experience
- Choosing how they meet uncertainty emotionally and spiritually

The struggle becomes a teacher of resilience and presence.



Purpose Through Helping Others

A powerful source of meaning comes from turning personal suffering into support for others:

- Advocating
- Volunteering
- Leading a support group
- Sharing one's story
- Helping someone newly diagnosed



The idea of “I can use what I’ve been through” gives suffering a sense of direction.

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COPING WITH YOUR EMOTIONS

Coping with Heavy Emotions



As you sit with news of a cancer diagnosis, allow yourself to experience *ALL* of your feelings.

Coping with Heavy Emotions

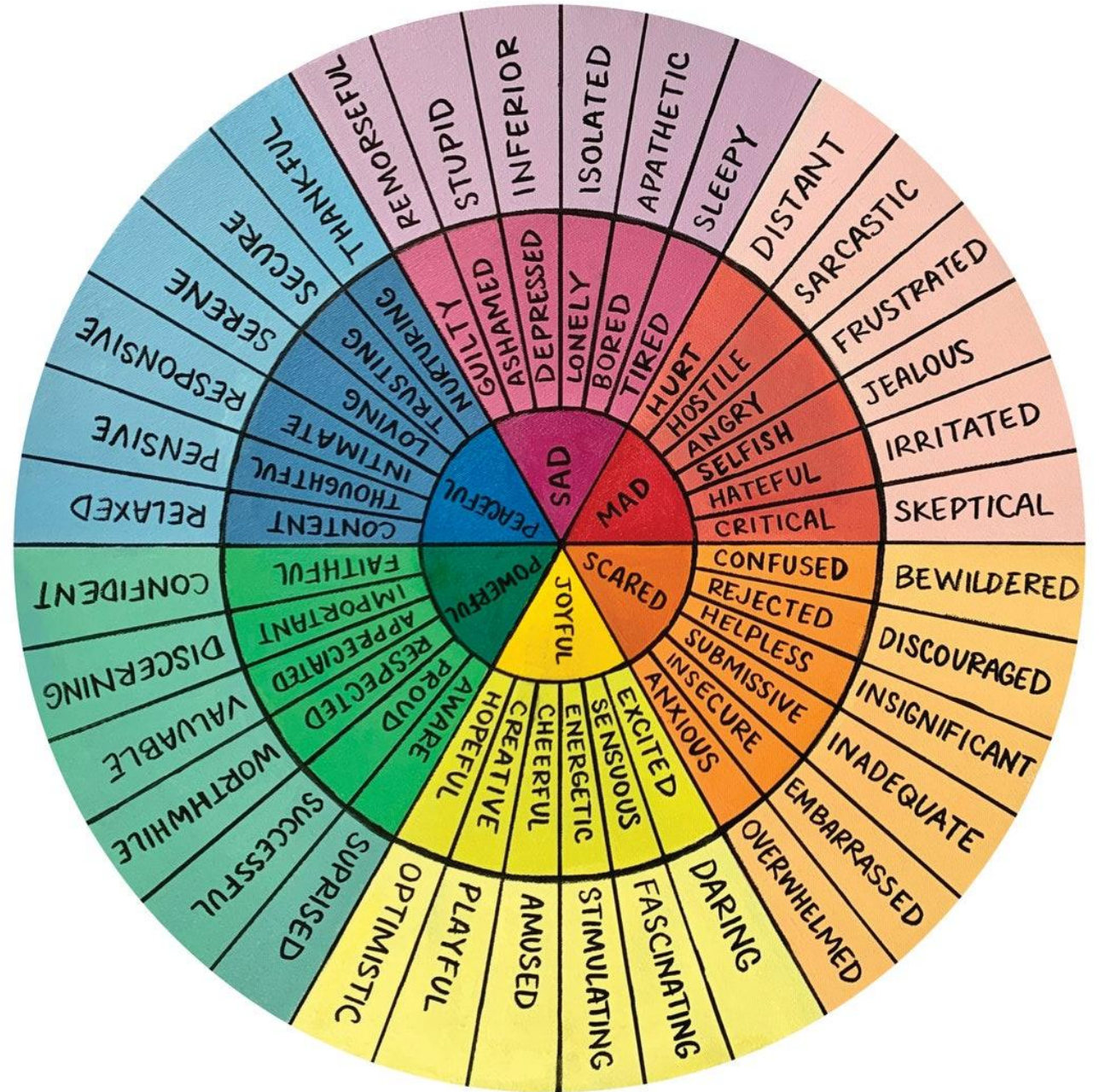
Think about what you need. Lots of people will want to help but don't know how.

- Practical needs
- Financial help
- Emotional support



Coping with Heavy Emotions

- Awareness
- Identify
- Accept
- Recognize
- Stay Curious
- Let go



Coping with Heavy Emotions

Don't feel that you have to be "strong."
If you feel tired, lonely, anxious, depressed, angry, etc.,
acknowledge your feelings and talk about them.
If all you want to do is cry, then go ahead.

Crying is a natural catharsis.



Coping with Heavy Emotions

“The work of the mature person is to carry grief in one hand and gratitude in the other and to be stretched large by them.

How much sorrow can I hold? That’s how much gratitude I can give. If I carry only grief, I’ll bend toward cynicism and despair. If I have only gratitude, I’ll become saccharine and won’t develop much compassion for other people’s suffering.

Grief keeps the heart fluid and soft, which helps make compassion possible.”



-Francis Ward Weller



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GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

Emotional Grounding Techniques

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise

The “Pretzel” or other bilateral stimulation exercises

Mindful Walking

4 Square breathing

Categories (i.e. Colors, college football teams, etc.)

Aromatherapy

Hold a piece of ice

Eat a small bite of food with intention and mindfulness



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WHEN TO SEEK HELP

When to Seek Help

Your mental health is as important as your physical health!

Tell your healthcare team or another medical professional if you need support.

Ask if your hematology/oncology clinic employs a clinical social worker or counselor. Emotional support and therapy services are available at many clinics.



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WELLNESS TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT

Wellness Tips

- Be aware of your emotional health
- Talk to friends and family, and others you trust
- Ask for help and be specific about what you need
- Join a support group
- Get education and information only from reliable/reputable sources
- Live in the present moment/practice mindfulness and/or meditation
- Take time for yourself
- Go to church or engage in a spiritual practice



Wellness Tips

- ❑ Get plenty of quality sleep
- ❑ Eat a well-balanced diet
- ❑ Move your body every day (walking, yoga, cycling, etc.)
- ✅ Spend time with supportive friends
- ❑ Break down big goals into smaller tasks
- ❑ Find a creative outlet (journaling, music, visual arts, etc.)
- ❑ Be kind to and gentle with yourself
- ❑ Celebrate every victory!



Support Groups Provide a Sense of Belonging

- Included
- Welcomed
- Connected
- Accepted
- Involved
- Supported
- Heard
- Valued
- Seen
- Hopeful



Resources

Talk with your doctor to determine what plan of action works best for you. Medications could potentially be part of a treatment plan that you and your doctor work on together.

If you think therapy/counseling could be beneficial, ask for a referral or check out websites/platforms such as:

- [Psychology Today](#)
- [BetterHelp](#)
- [Headway](#)
- [CaringBridge](#)



PLEASE call 988 if you ever have thoughts that you may want to hurt yourself. There is a professional available 24/7 to talk with you!



REFERENCES

References

National Library of Medicine. (2025). National center for biotechnology information. Nih.gov; National Library of Medicine.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

The Emotional Effects of Cancer • Coping with your feelings • Talking about your cancer. (n.d.).

https://www.cancer.ie/sites/default/files/2020-12/The%20Emotional%20Effects%20of%20Cancer%202020%20FOR%20WEB_0.pdf

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QUESTIONS???

Follow up Questions or Discussion?

Please feel free to reach out to us!

**IMF Support Group
Team: SGTeam@myeloma.org**





THANK YOU!