

## **Be an Encourager!**

As you are on your walking journey, don't forget the power of encouraging others. Encouragement can come from friends, family, and the least likely sources – complete strangers – and you may make another walker's day by your kind words or deeds.

If you have a friend or family member walking, be sure to be there for them. When I walked my first half-marathon with my friend, her husband and his friend (who also had a wife in the race) waited for us at the top of the first hill. After we passed them, they jumped in the truck and went a couple more miles down the road. They did that for three hours. It made it fun for us, because it was a distraction. We were always trying to find them. It sounds so silly, but that support can mean the world to someone!

If you and your friend enter a race together but agree to go at your own pace, you can still support the other person. If you finish first, wait at the finish line for the other person, or, if possible, walk back along the sidelines until you spot your friend and walk the rest of the way with him or her. If it's a really hot day, take a cold wet towel with you to give to the person!

I remember completing my first trail half-marathon. I had told my mom what time I expected to finish. It was a cold rainy day. As I approached the finish line, I had to wind my way through a parking lot. I spotted her car and got a jolt of energy at the site. As I neared the finish line, there she was with her sister - the only spectators. Mom told me later they could have sat in the car and waited until they saw me emerge from the woods. They had plenty of time to exit the car and get to the finish line once they saw me, but that wouldn't do. They stood in the cold rain and waited. That's support!

A complete stranger gave me one of the best bits of encouragement I've received. I was walking a very hilly road in a state park. Vehicle traffic was light, and they traveled slowly. I noticed a pick-up truck drive past me. I kept trudging along. A little while later as I reached the top of a hill, I looked over my shoulder. That same pick-up truck was approaching again. I noticed it was an older gentleman with an oxygen tube going to his nose. I waved. He gave me a thumbs-up! A goofy smile must have spread across my face – he had made my day! Here it is a couple years later, and he still makes me smile. I wish I knew who he was, so I could tell him.

Encourage the walkers around you. Give them an “Atta girl!” or “Atta boy!” Give them a thumbs-up when they pass. Be an encourager – you could brighten someone's day. If walking is the best medicine, encouraging someone else is the second-best medicine.