

Walking Alongside Stephen Ministry: What to Expect FAQs

What kinds of challenges are Companions equipped to deal with?

Companions support care receivers who are dealing with all sorts of life challenges. These include, but are not limited to: The loss of a loved one, divorce or separation, failed relationships, family stress, hospitalization, serious or chronic illness, aging and dying, recovery after an accident or disaster, birth, adoption, miscarriage, infertility, unemployment or job crisis, financial concerns, relocation, etc.

Are there any issues Walking Alongside cannot manage?

Companions are not equipped to work with minors, those who are at risk of hurting themselves or others, or those who need mental health treatment, therapy, or medication. When necessary, Companions may refer their care receivers to health professionals or counselors.

Do I get a man if I'm a man and a woman if I'm a woman?

Yes, care receivers are always paired with a Companion of the same sex.

My spouse and I have the same issue. Can we work with a Companion together?

While you may be facing the same issue, you are probably processing it differently. Therefore, it's beneficial for each of you to have a unique individual to talk with. Furthermore, Companions are trained to work with a single care receiver at a time.

Will I get a Companion who's been through something similar?

It is possible, but not a requirement, as Companions are trained to listen and help process all sorts of issues.

When, where, and how often will we meet?

You and your Companion will decide on these details together. Meetings typically occur once a week and last an hour or so. The location could be at a church, in your home, at a restaurant, or on a park bench—wherever you feel most comfortable. Phone calls sometimes supplement the meetings, but face-to-face contact is usually most effective, especially early in the process.

What exactly will we do when we meet?

Talk, listen, laugh, cry, pray — whatever you need that day. Companions are trained to listen well, not to try and solve the problem.

That sounds a lot like friendship. What's the difference?

Friendship is a two-way relationship with each person supporting the other. Your Walking Alongside Companion is there for you. This is a one-way caring relationship focused on helping you and listening to you. That being said, some relationships do evolve into friendships over time, as healing happens, and this is okay.

What if my Stephen Minister and I don't click?

Sometimes this happens. First, we encourage you to explore why this may be the case with your Companion. Also, your Companion may explore the difficulty in bi-weekly supervision. If all else fails, a new Companion will be assigned.

How long will my Companion meet with me?

As long as you feel the need to meet.

How long do these caring relationships usually last? How do they end?

These caring relationships last anywhere from a few weeks to several years. As things improve, the care receiver and Companion begin to talk about closure, ending their formal relationship when the care receiver is ready.

My problem seems small. Can we just meet once or twice?

Caring relationships last as long or short as needed. Keep in mind, however, that it usually takes more than a couple of meetings to establish a trusting relationship.

How can I be assured of confidentiality?

Confidentiality is a cornerstone of Walking Alongside Stephen Ministry and is emphasized in both training and supervision. Companions do not share what is discussed in their caring relationships. Only the Stephen Leaders in charge of referrals know who is receiving care. If anyone else finds out, it will only be because you chose to share your experience — which you are certainly free to do if you wish. The only exception to the confidentiality rule would be if a Companion must share confidential information in order to save a life.

Is there any cost involved?

No. Walking Alongside is a gift to those in need.

What if my neighbor is going through a rough time? Can he or she also have a Companion?

Walking Alongside is a community outreach, open to people from all walks of life. We will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, or age.

What if I have more questions?

Please contact Sue Eldon at seldon@nccumc.org or 919-454-5669.