



## TEACHING WOMEN WITH BREAST CANCER TO FLY FISH

**Important information for all staff—especially Fly Fishing Instructors and River Helpers.**

**Philosophy:** Retreats are about the participants. Your job is to be supportive, helpful, friendly and always positive. Ask questions, provide interesting information about the stream insects and fish and refrain from sharing too much personal information unless specifically asked - “be interested, not interesting.”

**Provide positive feedback and focus on having fun!**

- CfR welcomes women of all ages, in all stages of treatment and recovery. Some will require much more assistance than others.
- Some women may be fearful of the water or have problems with balance. Encourage the participant assigned to you to do as much as possible on her own while being constantly by her side, offering your arm for support if needed, both on land and while wading.
- **Please remember to ask before touching a woman’s wrist, hand, arm or shoulder to assist with casting.** Some women may have scar tissue, had recent surgeries or prefer not to be touched.
- Some women will be wearing a "sleeve" which is worn to prevent lymphedema, a condition that can result in dangerous swelling. Reminders to switch arms and take breaks from casting are very useful.
- **Any injury: insect stings or bites, hook sticks, bruises, etc. should be reported immediately to the CfR Medical Facilitator. Never attempt treatment yourself except in an emergency situation.**
- Some women may be experiencing "chemo brain," a condition that occurs after chemotherapy. Chemo brain can make it difficult for women to remember details. It's fine to repeat information several times.
- "Stream Amnesia": Participants receive basic casting instruction and many of them become competent at casting on the second day of the retreat. Oftentimes the skills learned on land do not translate when a beginning angler steps into the river. Participants may remember some terminology like "roll cast" but it is fine to review and repeat the casting instruction as many times as needed.
- **Please remember to be a good listener:** If a woman is sad or angry then it's important to reflect that back to her rather than trying to fix anything. **Example:** A participant says "I'm really sad that I have put my children through this ordeal." An appropriate response might be "I can't imagine but understand that it would feel sad to see your children getting scared or upset about what's happening to you."
- **It's NOT about Catching a Fish:** Many retreats offer several opportunities to fish including the final day one-on-one on the water. Be sure to keep the atmosphere light and don't get too serious and focused on catching that fish. Instead, give positive comments about the cast and anything else you can find to be enthusiastic about. Your goal is to support a meaningful and positive outdoor experience.
- **Barbs Should Be Removed From All Hooks.** Many women have expressed concern about harming fish. And it's much more damaging to try to remove a barbed hook from a fish or from a human. Remember that women who have had extensive surgery are at risk for lymphedema and **a wound from a hook stick can be the beginning of lymphedema. Don't take chances: NO BARBS.**
- **River Helpers should not take their own rods on the river.** River helpers should not fish except when specifically asked to demonstrate by the participant. If the fishing day is almost over and the participant has not hooked or landed a fish, it is fine to ask to take the rod and try to hook a fish, of course handing the rod back to give her the experience of playing and landing a fish.
- All participants and staff **MUST** wear sunglasses and a brimmed hat at all times while fishing.