

Brothers and Sisters

Helping your brothers and sisters deal with your cancer

When someone is diagnosed with cancer it can be very difficult for their sisters and brothers too. This factsheet deals with some of the issues your sisters and brothers may have, and how CLIC Sargent can help them.

Most people will expect their family to be loving and supportive. But in reality sisters and brothers may react in unexpected ways. They may:

- behave strangely because they're so worried about you
- become over-anxious about their own health
- feel lonely because you are at hospital a lot
- feel left out or jealous because you're getting so much attention
- feel angry that this has happened, or because they think the hospital and doctors aren't curing you fast enough
- not understand that you get tired or cross and are not the same with them as usual
- feel awkward and embarrassed with you
- think they are somehow to blame for you getting cancer
- feel guilty for feeling these things!

If they're younger than you, they will sometimes have to be looked after by a mixture of friends, neighbours or relatives while your parents are with you at the hospital. This can stress them out and make them more clingy and demanding than usual.

This is typical of what brothers and sisters tell us:

"I can't do anything, I feel useless"

"It's so scary having a sister who's got cancer."

"I was always picking on my brother and now that he's ill I sometimes feel guilty as if it's my fault somehow"

"Matthew's illness affected the whole family, and I used to think 'what about me?' but then I'd feel

really selfish. I feel people didn't understand what it's like for me."

"I felt unhappy for months while Ellie was in hospital, but it's fine now that I know she'll be OK"

"Mum's always got time for Jamie, he gets all the attention now"

All these feelings are completely normal, but that doesn't make them easier to deal with, for you, your brothers and sisters, or your parents.

These feelings can affect how they behave

You may find your sister or brother's feelings affect other aspects of their life. They may find it hard to sleep, or to concentrate at school. They may stop eating or start to feel ill themselves.

These things are not your fault or your responsibility. However, if you think that your parents or your carers haven't noticed what's happening, you could talk to them about it or ask someone you trust to mention it to them.

Someone to talk to

It's very important for your sister or brother to have some outlet for their feelings: someone to talk to, or somewhere they can write down what they feel.

Encourage them to talk to friends and relations, or ask your CLIC Sargent Youth Worker or Social Worker to put them in touch with groups of other people their age.

Why not suggest they write their feelings down in a book, keep a diary or share their thoughts online at CLIC Sargent's website (remind them to read the message board rules).

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Asking questions

Your brother or sister may not want to bother you or your parents with questions, so it's important they have someone else to talk to – someone who knows exactly what's happening. Otherwise they might get all sorts of wrong information from their friends, or from misunderstanding something they've heard, read or seen on TV.

Friends and relatives may be able to help, or ask your social worker or nurse to talk to your sister or brother or to suggest someone else who could help.

How CLIC Sargent can help

- Your CLIC Sargent Social Worker can talk to your sister or brother about what's happening to you.
- It may be possible for your CLIC Sargent Youth Worker or Social Worker to arrange get-togethers with other people of a similar age who are going through the same thing, either in local groups or on weekends away. It's a chance for them to talk about their feelings and ask other brothers and sisters of people with cancer how they're coping.
- CLIC Sargent has books for children and young people of all ages, explaining cancer.

Helpful websites

Siblinks is a network for people aged 13-25 who have a sister or brother with cancer. Visit www.siblinks.org

CLIC Sargent can help them to understand what's happening, visit www.clicsargent.org.uk

Books that could help

Your CLIC Sargent Youth Worker or Social Worker can provide some special booklets – or you can order them from the [Child Cancer Helpline](http://www.childcancerhelpline.org.uk) on 0800 197 0068 or at www.clicsargent.org.uk/publications. Some are also available in Punjabi, Gujarati and Bengali; and if you need a version in Braille, large print or audio, just let us know.