

Your parents

Cancer is almost certainly going to change your relationship with your parents. In some ways it could become much better, as it can bring you closer and help you work as a team.

But it can also cause rows that put a strain on the whole family, however close you usually are. This is normal.

If your parents are separated, there may be a dilemma over who should take you to appointments and who should 'be there' for you. And there may be a step-parent's role to consider too.

If you've a lone parent, they may find it particularly hard to shoulder everything. But then again, they may feel more in control.

Trying to protect you

When a parent is told their child has cancer, it comes as a terrible shock. They've probably always believed that protecting their children is their most important task in life. So now they worry. They may blame themselves. They may think 'What could I have done to prevent this?' and ask themselves 'Why wasn't it me instead?'

And that means they're probably going to be even more protective and anxious about you than usual.

Which can be very annoying.

Treating you like a little kid

You may be at the age where you're keen to become more independent – maybe you've even left home already and have a place of your own. So it's frustrating to find that your parents are trying to treat you like a kid again.

Thank them for their love and concern, but remind them that you're old enough to consider your own decisions.

And that it's important for you to keep a positive mental attitude.

Finding someone to blame

If you feel angry about your cancer, you may be looking for someone to blame. This is normal - and of course your parents are the easiest people to pick on. But it isn't their fault. There's no scientific evidence to show that your cancer is linked to their behaviour or the way they've brought you up.

Keeping everyone in the loop

Some young people with cancer think their consultant and nurses are only talking to their parents, and they feel left out. But the opposite can happen, too. You may feel that your consultant and nurses are discussing everything with you but leaving your parents out of the process.

You may not want your mum and dad to make decisions for you, but try always to let them know what decisions you are thinking about making.

Let them help

Your parents want to help. They feel powerless because they can't cure you themselves. They want to be with you. They want to feel useful. So give them things to do for you.

Remember, they're not psychic. If you want or need something, even if it's just to be left alone for a while, tell them. Don't expect them to guess what you want and then wonder why you feel grumpy when they get it wrong.

If you're in hospital, tell them if you need phone cards or things to read. Ask them to bring you in food treats.

Your parents

Talk to them

Try not to shut your parents out. Tell them how you feel. Tell them when you're miserable, frightened, angry, lonely or just in a bad mood. Tell them when you're happy, optimistic or feeling a bit euphoric.

Let them know if cancer or your treatment seems to be affecting you emotionally. Then they'll be able to understand better if you have mood swings, sudden 'lows' or 'highs'.

But if you don't want to talk, say so. There are some things you might prefer to share with your friends or other people you trust. And it's important for you to have time on your own, too.

Don't try to protect them

Just as your parents want to protect you, you may find you're trying to protect them. You may not want to worry or distress them, but it's still best if they know the truth – about your feelings, your anxieties, and the things that confuse or embarrass you. That way they'll be more likely to give you the help you need.

Useful contacts and information for your parents

Your CLIC Sargent Youth Worker or Social Worker will be able to give your parents a selection of booklets to help them understand what you may be feeling and needing from them. They can also find lots of information on our website at clicsargent.org.uk and from:

Cancerbackup
cancerbackup.org.uk
0800 800 1234

Cancer Research UK
cancerresearch.org.uk
020 7009 8820

Teenage Cancer Trust
teencancer.org
020 7387 1000

Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG)
cclg.org.uk
0116 249 4460