

Keeping up with your education

Having cancer doesn't mean you have to give up school or college. With some treatments, you may simply need to miss a couple of classes once a week — others may be more time-consuming and mean you can only drop in to school or college occasionally.

As well as helping you keep up with your education, going into school or college as much as you can helps you keep on top of what your friends are doing and gives you a sense of normality.

While you're in hospital and at home

If you're in hospital for a while, encourage your school friends to stay in touch with you regularly by email, text and phone, and by visiting you — if you feel up to it.

Your hospital teacher, youth worker or a nurse will arrange with your class teacher or head of year to plan and provide work for you to do while you're in hospital or at home. Staff from your school can also arrange to deliver work and textbooks to you, and for completed work to be returned to your teacher for marking.

If you're in compulsory education, but not well enough to go to school, you should be able to get home tuition. Depending on where you live you may be offered on-line learning. Contact (or get your parent, carer or social worker to contact) your Local Authority about this.

If you go to an independent school, you will need to ask your head of learning support whether home tuition is available to you.

Your hospital teachers or home tutors will help you with your work. They will encourage you to do as much as you can manage. However, they will be sensitive to how you are feeling and won't expect you do anything you are not up to.

While you are in hospital, let your teacher know who at school you want to know about your cancer. You may feel that you don't want anyone to know; however if people are aware, it can help avoid awkward situations such as being told to take off your baseball cap in a lesson. Do what feels right for you.

If you want, your social worker or nurse may be able to talk to your teachers about what you are going through, and how they can best help you.

Some young people find that having cancer makes them want or need to rethink their future and you may decide to make some changes to the courses you're taking. If this is the case for you, it makes sense to talk to someone who can give you the support and advice you need. Your teachers at school will probably know you best and may be able to help you. If you'd prefer to speak to someone outside school, your CLIC Sargent Social Worker or Youth Worker will be happy to talk things through with you, or you could speak to a Connexions Advisor by calling 08080 013 219 (free from a landline).

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Returning to school or college

It's natural to feel anxious about going back to school or college — particularly if you've been off for some time. You could be feeling awkward and ill-at-ease about meeting your friends again, and not sure whether you'll be able to keep up with work. You may feel that you look or feel different, and be unsure how people will react to this.

School or college can sometimes feel very noisy and overpowering when you're used to being alone at home or in a quiet hospital ward. You may worry that you won't be able to concentrate on schoolwork or cope in these surroundings.

All this can affect your confidence, so it's a good idea to talk to one of your health professionals, your CLIC Sargent Social Worker or Youth Worker who can help you find the best way to deal with going back.

What your school can do to make returning easier for you

A special educational needs coordinator, inclusion/learning support manager, head of learning support, your form tutor/head of year, or an outreach nurse may liaise between your school and the hospital to arrange a 'return to school' plan for you. Who does this will depend on your age, where you live, and whether you go to a state or independent school.

Your form teacher will be up to date with your progress, as they will have been coordinating the work you've been doing at home or in hospital.

Your school may also have learning mentors who can support you and talk to other people on your behalf.

When you're ready to return, your teacher, learning mentor, or a member of support staff can make the arrangements that will help you adjust to life back at school or college more easily. Talk to them about what you need. For example:

- If you don't feel ready to go back full time - going back part-time, or for a few lessons each week, while continuing to get help at home.
- Easy access to classrooms, toilets, the dining room and the playground.
- Flexibility if you need to make extra trips to the toilet, eat snacks to keep your energy levels up, or stay indoors during breaks or lunch hours.
- Help getting from one classroom to another or permission to leave a class early to get to the next one.
- Flexibility about coursework and homework deadlines, particularly if you're still having to take time off to go for treatment.

Teachers should also keep an eye out for any signs of bullying, discrimination or rumours about you, and nip them in the bud. If you are affected by any of these, tell a teacher, family member or your CLIC Sargent Social Worker or Youth Worker so they can help you.

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) offers advice to parents and carers about education issues. If yours have any questions, you could suggest they **call 020 7704 3397** or **visit www.ace-ed.org.uk**.

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Taking exams

If you're due to take GCSEs or A Levels, the special educational needs coordinator, inclusion/learning, or head of learning support support can liaise with the exams officer to arrange any help you may need.

Changes to the way you take an exam are called 'access arrangements'. Some examples are:

- 25% extra time allowance
- Use of a laptop or specialist equipment if necessary
- Someone else to read or write for you
- Taking the exam in a separate room, apart from other candidates
- Rest breaks if you need them.

If you are unwell during the exam period and this affects your performance, your GP or consultant may be able to give you a 'letter of special consideration'. The exam board will then decide if it is possible to adjust your marks to take your situation into account..

What you can do to make returning easier

- Try to keep going to school or college as often as you can during your treatment time. You might want to go in for short periods or specific lessons (or even break time) at first, so speak to your teacher or CLIC Sargent Social Worker or Youth Worker about this.
- Stay in touch with your friends, so they can let you know what's happening in classes and socially.

- Keep up with your courses as much as you can — but don't exhaust yourself; it's more important to concentrate on getting well.
- Let your friends and teachers know how your treatment's going and how your health is, so they know what to expect when you come back to school.
- Let your school know in advance how you want to be treated when you get back there, whether you'll need special arrangements, and whether you want them to tell people about your cancer.
- If you're going back after taking some time off, you might like to arrange to meet some friends before school and arrive with them, to help you feel more confident.
- If you find it confusing, exhausting or overpowering to be back at school, don't beat yourself up or panic — take things at your own pace and do what you can when you can.
- If you're having problems, don't keep them to yourself. Talk to your teachers, parents and friends and tell them what you need.

Talking to friends and classmates

People at school may have all kinds of questions about your cancer and treatment. You may be happy to chat and answer them, or you may not want to.

Our Talking to Friends information sheet offers tips and suggestions for how to deal with friends, while our Frequently Asked Questions information sheet contains answers to many of the questions they might ask you. Just download and print off as many copies as you need, and give them to people to help them understand your experience.

If you would like to know how other young people with cancer have found going back to school, take a look at our short film at www.clicsargent.org.uk/youth

We've also produced a film to help teachers understand what you're going through and how they can help you. You might want to tell your teacher about it - they can view it at www.clicsargent.org.uk/aboutchildhoodcancer/forteachers

To see how your school can support CLIC Sargent, please visit:

www.clicsargent.org.uk/getinvolved