

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 dealing with cancer can also cause rows that put a strain on the whole family, however close you usually are.

Particular family situations can lead to extra stresses, in some cases. If your parents are separated, for example, there may be a dilemma over who should take you to appointments and who should 'be there' for you. If you have a step-parent, they also may be unsure what their role should be.

If your mum or dad is parenting alone, they may find it particularly hard to shoulder everything – but then again, they may feel more in control.

This information sheet aims to help you understand how your cancer can affect your parents, and gives some tips on how to maintain a good relationship with them during this time.

Trying to protect you

When a parent is told their child has cancer, it comes as a terrible shock. They have probably always believed that protecting their children is their most important task in life. Now, just like you, they're likely to be experiencing a whole range of emotions. They may blame themselves. They may think 'What could I have done to prevent this?' and ask themselves 'Why wasn't it me instead?'

This means they're probably going to be even more protective and anxious about you than usual. This is perhaps understandable – but at the same time, it can be very annoying.

Treating you like a child

You may be at the age where you are keen to become more independent – maybe you have even left home already and have a place of your own. However, it may be that, as a result of the cancer, your parents are treating you like a child again.

If you would prefer them not to, 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 it's understandable that some of this anger may be directed towards your parents. It is important to keep in mind that the cancer isn't their fault. There's no scientific evidence to show that your cancer is linked to their behaviour or the way they have brought you up.

Keeping everyone in the loop

Some young people with cancer feel left out because they think their consultant and nurses only talk to their parents. 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 always try to let them know about the options you are considering.

Your parents

Letting them help

Your parents are probably feeling fairly powerless right now. They will want to spend time with you and support you as much as possible – but they might not know how. You can help make them feel useful by giving them things to do.

If you're in hospital, tell them if you need phone cards or things to read. Ask them to bring you in food treats. Let them know if there's something you want to discuss, or even if you just want to be left alone for a while. Remember, they're not mind readers – and if they have to guess what you want, then there is a chance they'll get it wrong.

Talk to them

Keeping up a good relationship with your family while also dealing with your cancer can be really difficult, but 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 or optimistic.

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 about something with them, you're perfectly entitled to say so. There are some things you might prefer to share with your friends, partner or other people you trust. It's important for you to have time on your own, too.

Ref: SER040

Version: 2

Reviewed and updated: August 2011

Next review and update: 2013

For information about the sources used to put this publication together, or if you have any comments or queries about it, please contact us on 0300 330 0803 and ask to speak to the information manager.

www.clicsargent.org.uk

Registered charity number 1107328 and registered in Scotland (SC039857)

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. You might have tried to talk to them in the past, and found that they started crying because they love you so much and they're overwhelmed by what is happening.

This can be really difficult to cope with but it's still best if they know the truth about your feelings, your anxieties, and the things that confuse or embarrass you. Having these honest conversations with your parents on a regular basis means that they'll be more likely to give you the help and support you need.

Do you have more questions, or need some help?

CLIC Sargent has been working with young people for over 20 years, and we understand what you're going through. Our care professionals include social workers, youth support workers and nurses, who provide clinical, practical and emotional support. Talk to your CLIC Sargent care professional, or call us on **0300 330 0803*** and we'll put you in touch with someone who can help.

You can also visit our website at www.clicsargent.org.uk or email us on info@clicsargent.org.uk

* Calls to 03 numbers are charged in the same way as calls to a geographic (01 or 02) number. Check your phone contract to see how much you pay for this type of call - it may be included in 'inclusive minutes'.

