

Brothers and sisters

If you've got brothers or sisters, they may end up being a great source of support – or a welcome distraction – during your time with cancer. However, your diagnosis and treatment can be very difficult for them too.

This information sheet outlines some of the issues and worries that your sisters and brothers may have, and how you and others can help.

How they may feel

It would be wonderful, of course, if your family were loving and supportive all the time. But, in reality, your siblings may react to your cancer 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 in 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 why you get tired or cross and don't have the same relationship 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!

Young siblings will sometimes have to be looked after by friends, neighbours or relatives while your parents are with you at the hospital. This can cause extra stress and make them more clingy and demanding than usual.

Typical comments we hear from brothers and sisters include:

"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. Unfortunately, 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 that 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.

None of this is 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.

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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 social worker or youth support worker to put them in touch with groups of other people their age.

They could also try writing their feelings down in a diary.

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 about your cancer. This needs to be 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 on the internet, or seen on TV.

It may be that you have a friend or relative who can answer their questions. Alternatively, you could ask your social worker or nurse to talk to them, or to suggest someone else who could help.

How CLIC Sargent can help

- Your CLIC Sargent care professional can talk to your sister or brother about what's happening to you
- It may be possible for your CLIC Sargent care professional to invite your brother or sister to get-togethers with other people of a similar age who are going through the same thing, either in local groups or on weekends away. This will give them a chance to talk about their feelings and ask other siblings of people with cancer how they're coping
- CLIC Sargent can also provide books that explain cancer for children and young people of all ages.

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'.

Ref: SER030

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.

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Registered charity number 1107328 and registered in Scotland (SC039857)

