

Talking to friends about cancer

When your friends find out you have cancer, they may react in different ways. Some will be incredibly supportive – these will be the friends you can talk to about your feelings, and their friendship may become very important to you.

However, you may notice that other friends seem to be avoiding you, because they don't know what to say or how to help. They may also feel they're intruding, and that you'll only want your family around.

It's important to let your friends know you're still the same person, and that you want to spend time with them and be part of what's going on.

This information sheet deals with some of the changes you may experience in your relationship with your friends, and how you can help them to support you in the best way possible.

Tell your friends what's new

When you're in hospital or recovering from treatment, it can be great to have visitors or catch up with a close friend on the phone.

But sometimes you may find it's less emotional or tiring to communicate by text or email, by keeping a blog or using sites like Bebo or Facebook. You can send out short updates to let people know when you are going into hospital and when you're back home again. You can also use them to tell your friends you are feeling well and would really like visitors, or an outing to the shops or cinema.

When you don't want to talk about cancer

Some days you may find that you don't want to talk about cancer with your friends, or answer their questions on the subject.

Thank them for their concern, but explain that you don't want to talk about it at the moment/anymore. If they don't respect your wishes, you might want to pull back for a while and focus on other friendships.

What to tell your friends

If your friends want specific medical details about the kind of cancer you have, it may be easiest to go to www.clicsargent.org.uk/Aboutchildhoodcancer/Conditions and print copies of the page about your cancer type. You can give these to your friends to read. You can also download a copy of our information sheet for friends called *Answering your friends questions about your treatment* and give it to them. If they want to know more, they can always visit the website for themselves.

If your friends are worried about intruding and think you would rather be with your family, reassure them. You'll sometimes want a break from your family, to catch up on all the gossip, watch DVDs, go to the cinema or go shopping.

If they are worried about saying the wrong thing, let them know that you still want to hear from them and find out what's going on in their lives. They may say something that upsets or annoys you – but that can happen in any friendship.

If they treat you like a superhero, try to enjoy it. Sometimes friends will go on about how much they admire you and how strong you are. If this annoys or embarrasses you, try to tell them gently, and explain that you'd much rather they treat you like they used to.

If a friend asks...

How can I help?

Tell them! Let them know if you want company, magazines, certain foods, CDs or just a friendly text message every now and then. If you're in hospital, ask

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them to visit you, bring your favourite takeaway or load some new music on your iPod. If you're at home but feeling very tired, ask them to do the washing up for you. Friendship is all about helping each other out, so don't hold back.

How do you feel? Are you frightened? Are you angry?

Tell them as much as you are comfortable with. If you'd rather not discuss something – or anything at all – say so. You don't have to give all your friends every detail of your treatment or your feelings. However, if you find it helps to talk about your emotions, take advantage of this opportunity to express how you feel. The most important thing is to do what is right for you.

Why did you get it? How long will it last?

Your friends may have all kinds of questions about your condition or cancer in general. If you can answer them easily, and you're happy to, then give them whatever information you can. However, if you can't answer their questions, or simply don't want to, tell them to visit www.clicsargent.org.uk, where they'll find all kinds of information about cancer.

You may want to download our information sheet 'Answering your questions about your friend's illness' and print out copies for your friends and classmates, or ask your care worker if they can recommend a book or leaflet to give to them.

You could also ask one of the team of people caring for you if there's someone at your hospital who can visit your school or workplace to talk about cancer.

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'.

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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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