

Does a child in your class have cancer?

Here's how to... handle their return to school

When a child has cancer, treatment usually begins straightaway. So they could be in class one week and in hospital the next. As treatment for cancer can last a long time, they may be out of school for many months.

The rest of the class may wonder where their classmate has gone, what has happened to them and when they will be back.

As the UK's leading children's cancer charity, CLIC Sargent has put together a series of factsheets for teachers – to tell you what to expect, make it easier to answer questions and help you to offer the best support to a child with cancer.

Please note: it is important that you speak to the parents of the ill child *before* you speak with the child him/herself or their fellow pupils.

When a child is off school

- Arrange to meet the parents early on in the treatment and then on a regular basis for updates.
- Discuss the basic medical facts about the child with a member of the hospital team.
- Ask the hospital what to do if the child becomes unwell at school. Also ask what to do if other children at your school develop infectious illnesses such as chicken pox, measles or shingles (as a child with cancer can easily pick up infection).
- Meet the hospital teacher to discuss and hand over a schedule of work you have prepared for the child.
- Visit or keep in contact with the child when they are in hospital or at home.
- Ask the parents how much the child knows about the cancer and how much information they and the child want others to have. Check what vocabulary they use with the child when talking about the illness (eg they might refer to a 'tumour' as a 'lump') and use the same terminology when talking to the child yourself.
- Meet with the child's CLIC Sargent Nurse or Social Worker to discuss how treatment may affect the child when they return to school.
- Arrange a return to school health plan with the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator).



Talk to classmates about what is happening

Why has Jamie been off school for so long? Why hasn't he got any hair? Will we all catch cancer when he comes back?

These are the sort of questions you may be asked. It is best to make your answers clear and simple – for example: cancer is not contagious and you can't catch it from Jamie.

- CLIC Sargent's factsheet **Talking to primary school children about cancer** has tips on how to answer questions, areas you may want to cover and how to open up discussion.
- CLIC Sargent produces a range of storybooks – **Mary Has a Brain Tumour**, **Joe Has Leukaemia** and **Lucy Has a Tumour** – which help explain children's cancer to children.
- **Chemotherapy, Cakes and Cancer** is an A-Z of coping with cancer treatment, through the eyes of a 14 year-old girl.

These are available free of charge from CLIC Sargent, and are available to download or to order now on our website www.clicsargent.org.uk. For information, support and teaching resources, please contact our free helpline, **Child Cancer Helpline on 0800 197 0068** or helpline@clicsargent.org.uk

Other helpful tips:

- Encourage the children to send a card or a letter so the child does not feel isolated from school.
- Listen out for any rumours going around the class about cancer and correct any wrong beliefs or assumptions (eg that the child will definitely die).
- If you teach the sibling of a child with cancer, find out what the sibling knows and feels about the situation. The **Child Cancer Helpline** can provide you with information about how siblings might be feeling at this time and how you can support them.

When the child returns to school

- Try to establish normality and set achievable goals, even if the child's prognosis is poor.
- Ensure the child will have easy access to classrooms, toilets, the school hall and playground.
- Be flexible about visits to the toilet, snacking, wearing a hat etc.
- Be on the look out for any bullying or teasing.
- Arrange a Mufti day when other pupils can wear hats or wigs.



Call the FREE Child Cancer Helpline
0800-197-0068
9am - 5pm Monday to Friday

www.clicsargent.org.uk
Registered charity number 1107328

Returning to School: Primary school children with cancer

pg 1 2 3

Help and support for teachers

As the UK's leading children's cancer charity, CLIC Sargent is here for everyone who needs support and information about childhood cancer. Our website www.clicsargent.org.uk offers detailed information, and you can call our **Child Cancer Helpline** free for help and support on **0800 197 0068** or email helpline@clicsargent.org.uk.

If you'd like to meet someone in person, a CLIC Sargent Nurse or a CLIC Sargent Social Worker may be able to visit your school – to speak to you and/or pupils. Contact the **Child Cancer Helpline** for more information.

For further information, support and teaching resources, please contact the **Child Cancer Helpline** on **0800 197 0068** or helpline@clicsargent.org.uk

Other factsheets in this series:

Talking to primary school children about cancer

Returning to School: Young people with cancer



Call the FREE Child Cancer Helpline
0800-197-0068
9am - 5pm Monday to Friday

www.clicsargent.org.uk
Registered charity number 1107328

CLIC Sargent

Caring for Children with Cancer