

SUPPORTING FRIENDS WHO HAVE BEEN IMPACTED BY CANCER

Whether your friend has received a cancer diagnosis or it has impacted a loved one of theirs, you might be surprised at how much this situation affects you.

You might be shocked, puzzled, totally freaked out, or feel nothing at all. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Every person will deal with the news differently. You don't have to pretend to understand what your friend is going through, or feel bad for not being able to fix this for them. You are not the only person who can support them and you don't have to be there 100% of the time. It's OK for you to spend time doing your normal things too. Make sure you take some time out for yourself and get some support too if you need it.

“I think it would be good if friends asked more questions about it to show they really do care...And it gives me the opportunity to talk more if I want to or just give brief answers if I don't.”

Sarah

How can I help?



Stay in touch

Check-in regularly, even if they don't always return your calls or messages. Call just to say, "Hi", forward them funny links, send random texts.



Visit them

It can be really lonely and boring to be stuck at home or in hospital and missing out on things. Try to think of things to do together that aren't too tiring – like watching TV, playing video games, looking at photos, or reading magazines. But remember, they might not always be up for visitors. Check in first and just give it a go another time if they turn you down.



Talk to someone

If you're not sure about what you should be doing or worried that your friend is struggling with their feelings, talk to someone who can help – like a teacher, doctor, nurse, chaplain, or counsellor.



Invite them

Keep inviting them places even if they tend to turn you down. Keep them in the loop and make it obvious you haven't forgotten about them.



Offer to help in specific ways

Don't wait for your friend to ask for help - they probably won't. Suggest practical things you could do like, "I'll bring you your assignments" or "Want me to come over on the weekend and hang out?" Give them something nice to let them know you're thinking of them; A letter or card, flowers or a plant, chocolate, their favourite food, a book or magazine.



Don't feel guilty

That your family isn't going through something this tough. They won't be upset or jealous.

"One of my friends used to come to my house and just talk about all that was happening at school and just normal things...it reminded me that I was still a teenager, not just a patient."

Bailey



Other things to think about:

- Not talking about difficult stuff doesn't make it go away. Your friend might just find it a relief to get things off their chest.
- Putting feelings and worries into words can make them easier to understand and seem easier to handle.
- Your friend might feel isolated and lonely if they can't share what is happening.
- Talking can help a person see things in a different way, or be reassured that their feelings are normal.

Need support?

If you need to speak to someone right now, about anything at all, call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 or LifeLine on 13 11 14.

To find out more about Canteen support services, visit canteen.org.au or call us on 1800 226 833.