



CANCERcare®

800-813-HOPE (4673)
info@cancercaare.org
www.cancercaare.org

CancerCare
for
kids®

fact sheet

MOM OR DAD HAS CANCER... NOW WHAT?

If your mom or dad has been diagnosed with cancer, you may be feeling confused, worried, upset, sad or angry. You probably have many questions. Learning more about cancer and how it may affect your life can help. Here are some answers to questions frequently asked by children and teens just like you.

WHAT IS CANCER?

Our bodies are made up of trillions of cells. Normally, these cells grow and divide to form new cells and replace old ones. When a person has cancer, it means that this cell process is not working properly. This can cause a growth, called a tumor, which may be cancerous. Some types of cancer, such as blood cancers, do not form a solid tumor, but are still cancer.

Can I catch it?

Cancer is not contagious. This means that there is no way of catching cancer from another person. Sharing germs, hugging or kissing your parent will not cause their cancer to spread to you.

How will my parent's diagnosis affect my life?

When you first find out about your parent's diagnosis, you may feel shocked. As time goes on, you may feel angry, sad, worried or guilty. At other times, you may feel just fine. All of the feelings you're experiencing are normal, but they can be challenging. If you're having a hard time or want to talk about how you're feeling, talk to a parent or trusted adult or ask to speak with a counselor. While your mom or dad is going through treatment, they may need extra help around the house. For example, your parent may ask you to help with chores more often or to watch your siblings while they rest. If this seems hard for you, talk to them about how you are feeling.



How can I manage these changes and my feelings?

It can be helpful to let your parent know how you are feeling. Talking about your fears can help you feel less alone. Asking questions about their cancer can help you feel more secure. A journal may also offer a safe, private space for you to write about your parent's cancer diagnosis and how it is affecting you. Often, going for a run or playing a sport can help relieve stress. There are a lot of ways you can deal with how you're feeling. If you want help talking about it or finding ways to cope, talk to a parent, trusted adult or ask to speak with a counselor.

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I don't feel like having fun with my friends...is that normal?

Yes. Sometimes you may feel bad hanging out with your friends or having fun while your mom or dad is going through cancer treatment. However, remember that your parent want you to continue doing things that you enjoy, too. If you find yourself feeling this way often, speak to your parent or another adult you trust.

My friends don't understand.

You may find it easy to talk with some of your friends about coping with your parent's diagnosis. However, sometimes, your friends may not understand or know how to respond in a way that makes you feel comfortable. When your friends ask you questions that you don't feel like answering, it's okay to say, "Thanks for asking about my mom/dad but I don't feel like talking about that right now." Your friends may also be finding it difficult to know how to show how much they care.

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

Facebook: [facebook.com/CancerCare](https://www.facebook.com/CancerCare) | **Instagram:** @CancerCareUS | **Twitter:** @CancerCare

Who can I talk to?

You are not alone. Who do you feel most comfortable talking with about your parent's diagnosis? Is it your parent? Siblings? Some teens find it helpful to speak with their school guidance counselor, teacher or spiritual mentor. There are counselors who specialize in helping teens who have a parent with cancer. Speak to your parent if you are interested in talking with a counselor.

Am I the only one who has a parent with cancer?

Absolutely not. In fact, there may be opportunities for you to meet other teens just like you who have a family member with cancer. This can be through a group at a local cancer center or an organization like CancerCare. If you are interested in connecting with other teens, ask your parent to call 800-813-HOPE (4673) and a CancerCare social worker can help locate a support group that is right for you. More information about CancerCare's services can be found by visiting www.cancercares.org.

*Edited by Christine Calafiore, LSW
This fact sheet is made possible by Takeda Oncology.*



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National Office • 275 Seventh Avenue • New York, NY 10001

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