



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

HELPING TEENAGERS WHEN A PARENT HAS CANCER

Adolescence can be a challenging time for both teens and parents. Teens may seek more independence, but continue to need parental love and guidance. Many teens are concerned about fitting in with their peers, and having a parent with cancer can make them feel even more different. This fact sheet offers tips on how to help teenagers cope with these changes.

WHEN TALKING TO TEENAGERS

Keep the following points in mind as you support a teenager whose parent has cancer:

Teenagers can express emotion in unpredictable ways. Teens may have multiple different responses to a given situation. Teens may be uncomfortable with some or all of their feelings and thoughts about their parent's cancer. Encourage emotional expression and make space for complex emotions.

Give your teen detailed, accurate information that reflects the reality of the medical situation. This is especially true when it comes to information about diagnoses, treatment plans and expected outcomes. Teens deserve honesty and may not trust information they feel is incomplete or inaccurate. Teens may also supplement information with research of their own.

Respect your teen's privacy. Teenagers may or may not want to talk about the experience with their parents. Affirm that they can receive support from other sources, and help them seek resources for support. They may feel more comfortable talking about their feelings with friends and their parents, non-immediate relatives, teachers, social workers or other helping professionals.

Give your teen expressive outlets Teenagers often write about and reflect upon their inner thoughts. Engaging in athletics, drawing, music or other creative arts may also prove to be useful in enabling adaptive coping and channeling energy.



Encourage teenagers to share feelings and concerns in ways that account for who they are.

Teens may want to be involved in their parent's care. Some teenagers may want to accompany their family member to treatment in order to see the facility and meet the health care team. This can help them feel a degree of control and take responsibility in their parent's medical care.

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Teenagers who want to contribute to caregiving should be allowed to participate in tasks that respect that they are no longer young children, but not yet adults. Be flexible with teenagers as they navigate how much they want to and can take on.

Give your teen consistency. Make an effort to ensure that they still attend normal activities and social events. Encourage your teenager to spend time with friends in age-appropriate activities.

To help your teenager understand that there are others going through a similar experience, you might look in to support groups, peer-to-peer networks or online chat rooms. Share the resources you find with your teen. CancerCare offers resources for teens affected by cancer. Visit www.cancercare.org/tagged/teens to learn more.



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.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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