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Cancer and Your Family [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 07/2014

Key Messages:

- Cancer affects everyone in your family. As the family routine changes, your relationships with your parents and siblings may also change, often bringing you closer together.
- Your parents and your siblings can help you in different ways by offering practical help and emotional support.
- All families cope with cancer differently. Try not to blame yourself if you feel your family has more problems than usual during this time. Many hospitals and cancer centers have people specially trained to help you and your family cope with cancer.

Cancer and your parents

After your cancer diagnosis, you may feel that your parents are more overprotective. It's natural for your parents to want to protect and take care of you when you're sick ? they want to keep you safe. Try to keep in mind that when your parents ask you about how you are feeling or want to help you [keep track of your medications](#) [3]; these are just signs that they care about you and want to help you get better. If you need some time alone, don't be afraid to tell them. Some teens find that taking charge of their care, such as keeping track of appointments, helps build trust with their parents and often results in more independence.

How your parents can help

Tell your parents about what you're feeling and thinking. Let them know when you want practical help, a hug, or a shoulder to cry on. Some teens don't want to share their worries and fears with their parents because they feel guilty about worrying or upsetting them. It's important to remember that your parents want to help you, and opening up to them gives everyone the chance to support each other.

Here are some practical ways your parents can show support:

- Helping you learn about your cancer and treatment options
- Helping you arrange visits or phone calls from family and friends
- Keeping you company on trips to the hospital

- Making you meals when you are hungry
- Staying by your side when you feel sick
- Helping you [talk with your doctors and nurses](#) [4]
- Helping you talk with the school principal and your teachers about [changes to your school routine](#) [5]

Talking with your parents

You may find that your relationship with your parents has changed. Although it may be difficult, it's important to try to talk with your parents about these changes. Here are some tips for you:

- Make a list of the things that have changed in your relationships ? include both positive and negative changes.
- Decide what things on your list matter most to you and share them with your parents. For example, maybe you want more time with friends or more privacy.
- If your parents are reluctant to let you do things on your own, try coming up with a plan for how you'll be responsible. For example, if they don't want you to monitor your own medications, make a chart to track dosages and times to show that you are willing to take charge.
- Accept your parents' help and find ways to compromise, if necessary.

Talking with your siblings

Your brothers and sisters are probably experiencing a variety of emotions, including concern for your health and well-being. They may be unsure of how to help, or they may feel guilty that you have cancer and they do not. Younger siblings may not really understand what's happening ? they just know something is different. It's common for siblings to feel ignored or left out as the focus of the attention shifts to the person with cancer. They miss you, your parents, and the way things used to be. However, siblings of any age most likely will want to do everything they can to help you and want to feel included.

Talking with your brother or sister about what's going on can help you both feel better. If you are close in age, your siblings may be able to relate to your worries and fears better than your parents can. Siblings can also be great friends. They can entertain you during hospital visits, make you laugh when you're feeling down, and keep you up-to-date on what's going on in school. Learn more about [cancer and siblings](#) [6].

Getting some extra help

Cancer affects families in different ways. If you and your family are finding it more difficult to get along, consider talking with another adult, such as your doctor, a counselor, or a trusted teacher. Many hospitals and cancer centers have people who are trained to help families cope with cancer. Try not to blame yourself for any problems your family is having, and don't be afraid to ask for help in coping with these problems.

More Information

Communicating with Loved Ones [7]

For Teens [8]

Additional Resources

Teens Living with Cancer: Dealing with Others - Family [9]

SuperSibs! Sib Spot [10]

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/teens/family-friends-and-school/cancer-and-your-family>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31456>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25171>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25155>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25301>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25112>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25116>

[9] <http://www.teenslivingwithcancer.org/i-can-deal-with-it/dealing-with-others/family/>

[10] <http://www.alexlemonade.org/campaign/supersibs/sib-spot>