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Cancer and Your Friends [1]

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

Key Messages:

- Many of your friends never may have known someone their own age with cancer and may not know what to say or worry about saying the wrong thing.
- It?s likely that your friends will want to help but won?t know how. Let them know what they can do and how they can include you.
- Don?t be afraid to take the lead and invite your friends to visit you and plan activities that you feel comfortable doing.
- You may notice that your friendships change during and after cancer ? you may lose some friends, grow stronger with others, and make new friends.

What your friends may be thinking

Your friends may have never had a friend with cancer, and some may not know how to react. Here are some ways your friends may change and why:

- If they avoid you, they may not know what to say or worry about saying the wrong thing.
- If they avoid mentioning your cancer, they may be afraid of upsetting you.
- If they aren?t calling you, it may be because they think you won?t feel like talking.
- If they aren?t inviting you to be a part of activities, they may think you won?t be able to go or they may feel guilty about having fun when you?re sick.
- If they aren?t visiting you, they may think you don?t want visitors or worry about any potential awkward moments during the visit.

Don?t be afraid to take the lead and call your friends or invite them over. Plan activities that you feel comfortable doing, and your friends will probably have a better understanding of what you are able to do with them.

Talking with your friends

Because your friends probably don?t know much about cancer, you can begin by explaining your cancer and treatment. First, decide what you want your friends to know. You may want to tell your good friends a lot, but just tell your casual friends or people at school something simple like,

?I have cancer, but I?m getting treatment and will be okay.? Your friends might not bring up your cancer, so discuss it when you feel ready. The more open you are with your friends, the more opportunities they have to be supportive and accepting.

If you?re nervous about talking with your friends, decide ahead of time what you want to say. Remember that you are in charge of what you tell people. You don?t have to tell anyone until you?re ready or say more than you want. Answer your friends? questions with as much information as you are comfortable giving.

Ways your friends can help

Your friends may want to help you, but some may not know how. Be honest about what you need and what they can do to help.

- Ask them to keep calling you, even if you don?t always feel like talking.
- Ask them to keep inviting you to things, even if you can?t always go ? you?ll go to things when you can.
- If you can?t go out, ask some friends over to watch a movie or just hang out together.
- Ask friends to visit you in the hospital ? give them a heads up on what to expect, especially if you look a little different.
- If you can?t see your friends, ask them to keep in touch online, through texting, instant messaging, phone, or e-mail.
- Tell your friends that sometimes all you need is for them to listen.
- Remind them that even though you may look different on the outside, you?re still the same on the inside.

Accepting changes

Your friendships are likely to change, but many changes will be positive. You may be closer to some of your friends and find it easier to talk about important things. You may also find that the experience of cancer changes you somewhat ? you may become more serious about school or want to help other people. You may make new friends whose interests are more like yours. You may also make friends with other teens with cancer who are more likely to understand your experiences. Despite your best efforts, some friendships could fade. You may lose some friends but strengthen relationships with others or make new friends.

More Information

For Teens [3]

Cancer and School [4]

Additional Resources

2bMe [5]

Teens Living with Cancer: Dealing with Others [6]

Teens Health: My Friend Has Cancer. How can I help? [7]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/teens/family-friends-and-school/cancer-and-your-friends
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/25116
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25155
[5] http://lookgoodfeelbetter.org/2bMe/2bMe.html
[6] http://www.teenslivingwithcancer.org/i-can-deal-with-it/dealing-with-others/
[7] http://kidshealth.org/teen/diseases_conditions/cancer/friend_cancer.html?tracking=T_RelatedArticle