



CANCERcare®

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# HELPING TEENAGERS WHEN A PARENT HAS CANCER

The teenage years are challenging for both teens and parents alike. Teens may strive toward independence, yet they still need a lot of love and guidance from their parents. Most teens are also concerned about fitting in with their peers. Having a parent with cancer can make them feel even more different. This fact sheet offers tips on how to help teenagers cope with changes that may come up when a parent is diagnosed.



## WHEN TALKING TO TEENAGERS

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

### **Teenagers are unpredictable.**

They may have a variety of different responses to any given situation. Teens may also be uncomfortable with some or all of their feelings and thoughts about their parent's cancer. Let your teen know that his or her emotions, while difficult, are normal.

### **Give your teen detailed, accurate information.**

This is especially true when it comes to information about the diagnosis, treatment and expected outcomes. They may feel particularly sensitive to information they feel is incomplete or inaccurate, so be honest. Your teen may also seek out additional information on his or her own.

### **Respect your teen's privacy.**

Teenagers may or may not want to talk about the experience with their parents. Reassure them that they can receive support from other sources. They may feel more comfortable talking about their feelings with a friend, an aunt, a friend's parent, a teacher, a clergy person or another member of the extended family.

### **Give your teen an outlet.**

Teenagers often write about and reflect upon their inner thoughts. They can also channel their energy into athletics, drawing, music or other creative arts. Encourage your teenagers to share their feelings and concerns.

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**Your teen 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 more in control about their parent's medical care. 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.

**Give your teen consistency.**

Make an effort to ensure that they will still attend normal activities and social events, and encourage your teenager to spend time with friends in age-appropriate activities.

**Your teen may benefit from additional support.**

To help your teenager understand that there are others going through a similar experience, you might research available support groups, peer-to-peer networks, or online chat rooms. Share the resources you find with your teen. CancerCare offers specialized support services for teens affected by cancer. Visit [www.cancercare.org/tagged/teens](http://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 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 professional oncology social workers.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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