

SOMEONE I LOVE HAS CANCER

A GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 13-17

Someone in your life has cancer.
That's a lot. This is for you.

LITTLE RIPPLES

littleripplesuk.org.uk

Are you a parent or carer? Scan here for a short guide
on supporting your child through this booklet.



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1. YOUR BOOKLET, YOUR PACE

There is no right way to use this. Some young people read everything in one go. Others dip in when they need to. You might want to go through it with someone you trust, like a parent, carer, sibling, or a trusted adult at school. Or you might read it on your own first, and share it later, or not at all. Some never open it again - and that is their choice to make.

What you will find inside: information about cancer, ideas for handling difficult feelings, ways to talk to people about what is going on, and where to get more support if you want it.

Not everyone has a quiet space, spare time, or privacy at home, and that's not your fault. Some of the ideas in this booklet might not be possible for you right now, and that's okay. Take what works, leave what doesn't, and know that none of this is a set of rules you have to follow.



Who might you share this with?

(tick any that feel right, or none at all)

- ☐ A parent, guardian, or carer
- ☐ A brother or sister
- ☐ A grandparent or another family member
- ☐ A teacher or trusted adult at school
- ☐ A friend
- ☐ Just me, for now

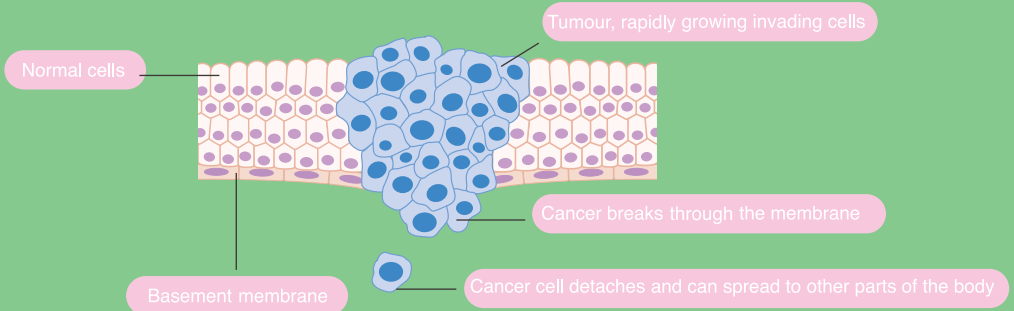


YOU ARE
NOT THE ONLY
ONE GOING
THROUGH
THIS.

Many young people across the country are dealing with cancer in their family right now. This is not something you have to figure out on your own.

2. WHAT IS CANCER?

Cancer is a word that covers a huge range of illnesses. It can help to understand a bit about what it actually is.



© By Cancer Research UK

How it starts

Your body is built from billions of tiny cells. Normally, cells grow and divide in an organised way to keep your body working. Sometimes a cell starts behaving differently - it grows when it should not, or copies itself out of control. When these unusual cells build up, this is what doctors call cancer.

In some types of cancer, the unusual cells form a lump in the body called a tumour. In other types - like leukaemia - the unusual cells are in the blood and do not form a lump.

Had you heard these words before?

(tick any you already knew)

- ☐ Cell
- ☐ Tumour
- ☐ Leukaemia
- ☐ None of these, they're all new to me

Two types of tumours

BENIGN

not cancer.
Benign lumps
stay where they
are and do
not spread.

MALIGNANT

this is cancer.
Malignant tumours can
grow into nearby parts
of the body or spread to
other areas. This is why
doctors treat them.

You might hear your family talk about the "grade" or "stage" of the cancer. These are terms the medical team uses with adults in the family, to help decide the best treatment plan.

Grade describes how the cancer cells look compared to normal cells, and how quickly they might grow. Stage describes the size of the cancer and whether it has spread to other parts of the body. Doctors use both to help work out what treatment is likely to help most.

There are over 200 different types of cancer (Cancer Research UK). Each type is named after the part of the body where it begins - for example, breast cancer starts in the breast, and bowel cancer starts in the bowel.

You are safe to be close to them

Cancer is something that happens inside a persons body. It cannot move to anyone else.

Is it safe to?

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|
| Hug them | ✓ | Hold their hand | ✓ |
| Share food or a drink | ✓ | Kiss them on the cheek | ✓ |
| Sit close to them | ✓ | Use the same bathroom | ✓ |
| Play or watch something together | ✓ | Sleep in the same house | ✓ |

Every answer is yes. Cancer stays with the person who has it, and none of these can pass to you.

3. WHAT HAPPENS DURING TREATMENT?

After a cancer diagnosis, the medical team works out a treatment plan. What that looks like depends on the type of cancer, where it is, how far it has spread, and the person's overall health. Treatment for one person can look very different from another.

Some common treatments



Surgery

an operation to remove the cancer.



Chemotherapy (*often shortened to chemo*)

medicines that target cancer cells. Because chemo can also affect healthy cells, it often comes with side effects.



Radiotherapy

high-energy beams aimed at a specific part of the body to destroy cancer cells in that area.



Other treatments

there are also newer types of treatment, including immunotherapy and targeted therapies, that work in different ways. Hormone therapy is used for some cancers too.

Not all of this may apply to you. The person who is ill might have one of these treatments, several, or none of them, and treatment can change over time. If something here doesn't match what you're seeing, that's normal too.

How long treatment lasts?

Treatment can last weeks, months, or longer. It often happens in stages - perhaps a period of intense treatment, then time to recover, then another stage. The person you love may have good days and harder days, and their energy and mood can change a lot during this time.

Some changes you might notice in the person who is ill

-  Hair thinning or hair loss
-  Tiredness or low energy
-  Feeling sick or being sick
-  Changes in appetite or weight
-  Difficulty concentrating
-  Lower resistance to infections - they may need to avoid crowded places when their immune system is low
-  Pain or soreness

If your loved one looks different because of treatment, that can feel strange to see. That's a normal reaction, and it doesn't change who they are.

*Side effects often improve when treatment finishes or changes.
Not everyone gets all of these, and some people barely have any.*

Something your wondering about? Write it down here.
You can ask someone you trust when your ready

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ONE PERSON HAS CANCER, BUT
THEIR WHOLE FAMILY FEELS IT.
YOU MIGHT FEEL WORRIED OR
UPSET TOO, AND THAT IS NORMAL.



What about the future?

Cancer treatment in the UK has improved a lot over recent decades, and it keeps improving. Researchers across the country are working on new treatments all the time, and outcomes today are better than they were even a few years ago. How well treatment works for any one person depends on lots of things - the type of cancer, how early it was found, and how the person responds to treatment. Every situation is different.

Most of what you find out about what is happening will come from the person you love or other family members, rather than from doctors directly. People deal with their cancer in different ways. Some want to know every detail and ask the medical team lots of questions, getting really involved in decisions about their treatment. Others prefer to leave the detail to the doctors and follow their recommendations. Neither way is right or wrong - it is whatever feels manageable for that person.

You can ask the person who is ill, or another trusted adult, any questions you have.

Some questions won't have a clear answer yet, and that can feel hard. If the answer is "we don't know yet," it doesn't mean something bad. It can mean the doctors are still finding out.

4. HOW YOU MIGHT BE FEELING

Finding out that someone you love has cancer can bring up a lot of different feelings. Some you might have expected. Others might catch you off guard.

There is no right or wrong way to feel.

**You might feel some of these
- or all of them, at different times:**

- Scared or anxious
- Sad
- Angry - at the situation, or at no one in particular
- Numb, like none of this is real
- Guilty
- Distant from friends whose families are not going through this
- Lonely, even when other people are around
- Relieved - especially if you had been worrying something was wrong
- Confused
- Hopeful
- Like you want to pretend everything is fine
- Nothing at all, it might be hard to name what you're feeling



What if I do not feel sad - is that wrong?

No. Some young people feel numb or carry on with life more normally than they expected. That does not mean you do not care. People process difficult news in many different ways.

Is it okay to feel angry?

Yes. Anger is a normal response to something that feels frightening or unfair. Try to find ways to express it that do not hurt you or other people. Movement, writing, music, or talking to someone you trust can all help.

Big feelings, big swings

Your feelings might shift quickly - calm one moment, overwhelmed the next. That does not mean something is wrong with you. It is a response to a genuinely difficult situation.

If the news hits you hard at first

When you first find out, you might feel shocked. Shock can feel like being detached from what is going on around you, or it can show up in your body - your heart racing, breathing fast, feeling shaky or dizzy.

If that happens, it does not mean it will keep happening. Your body was responding to something hard. If these feelings continue or come back often, talking to a trusted adult or your doctor is a good next step.

Trying to protect the people around you

Going through this can be exhausting, especially if you are also trying to protect the people around you from worrying about how you feel. You do not have to carry that on your own.

Having at least one trusted adult who you can talk to honestly is one of the most important things you can do for yourself right now. That might be a relative, a teacher, a school counsellor, a social worker, a youth worker, or your doctor. They are there to listen and to help.

If anything is happening at home that is making you feel unsafe, or you are worried about yourself or someone else, please tell a trusted adult straight away. You can also call Childline on 0800 1111 (free, 24/7) - they are there for any worry, big or small.

5. YOU DID NOT CAUSE THIS

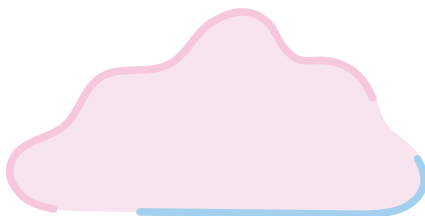
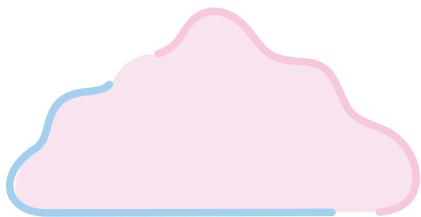
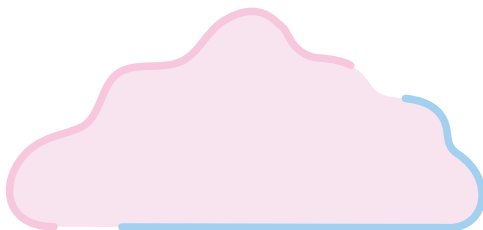
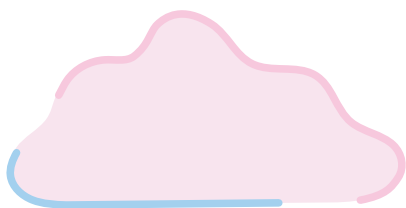
WHATEVER YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING
– YOU DID NOT CAUSE THIS.

Some young people quietly wonder if something they did, said, thought or felt might have caused the person they love to get ill. If that is going on for you, here is what you need to know: it is not true.

Cancer happens because of changes in cells. According to Cancer Research UK, these changes can be random, can be linked to genes passed down through families, or can be linked to things in the world around us. None of these are something you can cause or control.

If you have been carrying around guilt, you do not need to. You did not bring this on.

If you've been carrying something like this, you don't have to write it down. But if it helps to get it out of your head, this space is yours.



CIRCLE OF CONTROL

When someone close to you has cancer, you might worry about lots of things. This activity helps you sort your worries into two groups: things you can control, and things you can't.

Outside the circle: put the things you can't control here. These are things you can't change. Inside the circle: put the things you can control here. These are things you can change if you need to.'



THINGS I CAN'T CONTROL

THINGS I CAN CONTROL





6. LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

When something serious is happening in your family, it is easy to put your own needs at the bottom of the list. But looking after yourself is not selfish. You matter too.

Things that can help

Different things work for different people. Take what feels useful and leave the rest.



Moving your body

The NHS recommends regular physical activity to support mental health and reduce stress. You do not have to take up running. A walk, dancing in your room, kicking a ball, cycling, swimming - anything that gets you moving and that you enjoy can help.

Creative outlets

Drawing, writing, music, gaming, making things, journalling. Creative activities give your feelings somewhere to go without you needing to find the right words.



Slowing your breathing

When anxiety builds up, slow breathing can help calm your body. One method to try: breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 4, breathe out for 6. Repeat a few times.

Time with friends

You do not have to talk about cancer all the time. Spending time with friends - laughing, watching something, doing nothing in particular - is part of looking after yourself, not a betrayal of your family.

Some routine

When home life feels less predictable, having parts of your day that stay the same can help. Even small things - a regular bedtime, the route to school, a Friday night thing - can give you something steady to hold onto.

Letting yourself have fun

Having fun does not mean you do not care. Watching a film, playing a game, being outside, seeing your friends, all of this is okay. You are allowed to laugh and enjoy things, even now.

Things that help me *(fill in your own, or circle any from the list)*



7. TALKING ABOUT IT

Talking to the person who is ill

It's okay to not know what to say. Sitting in silence, or talking about ordinary things, counts too. If you want to ask about their illness, you could try: "Is it alright if I ask you something about your treatment?"

Talking to other adults you trust

Having one adult outside the immediate situation who you can be honest with can really help. This might be a teacher, a school counsellor, social worker, a relative, a youth worker, or a family friend. You do not have to manage this alone.

Talking to friends

You decide what you share and with whom. Some young people feel better being open. Others prefer to keep things private. Both are fine.

If you do tell friends, you can also tell them what would help you. "I just needed someone to know" or "It actually helps when we still talk about normal stuff" can take the pressure off them having to guess.

If a friend says something clumsy or unhelpful, it is usually because they do not know what to say - not because they do not care.

YOU GET TO DECIDE WHAT YOU SHARE, WHO YOU TELL, AND WHEN. YOUR STORY IS YOURS.



8. SCHOOL LIFE

School can feel complicated when something big is happening at home. Concentrating, keeping up with work, and acting like everything is normal can be tiring.

Letting your school know

Your parent or carer will usually be the one who lets the school know what's happening. You don't have to manage that conversation yourself.

It can still help to have one adult at school who you trust, a form tutor, head of year, school nurse, or counsellor, someone you can go to directly if you need to. You can ask your parent or carer to help set that up, or do it yourself if you'd rather.

Schools can put support in place once they know, extra time on assignments, a quiet space when you need it, or someone to check in with. They can't offer support if they don't know.

Your studies

Stress and worry can affect your concentration. That is a normal response to what you are dealing with - not a sign that something is wrong with you. Try not to put extra pressure on yourself. If you are falling behind, speak to a teacher you trust. Most will want to support you.

Keeping up with the things you enjoy

Hobbies, sport, clubs, time with friends - these things still matter. They are part of staying well, not a distraction from what is happening.



THINGS I'M GOOD AT



PEOPLE I LOVE



HOBBIES I ENJOY



WHAT MAKES ME LAUGH

MY NAME:



WORDS THAT DESCRIBE ME



PLACES I FEEL SAFE



9. WHEN THINGS FEEL LIKE TOO MUCH

There is a difference between going through a hard time and struggling in a way that needs more support. Some signs that it might be time to reach out:

- Feeling low, anxious or hopeless for a long stretch of time
 - Big changes in your sleep - sleeping much less or much more than usual
- Pulling away from friends and the things you usually enjoy
 - Big changes in your appetite
- Feeling like things are never going to get better
 - Thoughts of harming yourself

If you are having thoughts of harming yourself, please reach out now. You can call Childline on 0800 1111 (free, 24/7), or text YM to 85258 for the YoungMinds Crisis Messenger. In an emergency, call 999.

Asking for help is a good thing to do.
Nobody has to deal with hard stuff on their own.

Your doctor is a good first step for ongoing mental health support
- they can refer you to a counsellor or other services.
Your school may also have a counsellor available.



10. QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE

Will I get cancer too?



Cancer Research UK estimates that around 5 to 10 in every 100 cancers (5 to 10%) are linked to inherited gene changes that can be passed down through families. Most cancers are not. If you have specific worries about your family's situation, your doctor can give you accurate information based on what is going on for you.

Did I cause this?

No. Nothing you did caused this. There is more on this in Section 5.

What if the treatment does not work?

This is one of the hardest things to think about. The uncertainty of not knowing what will happen is genuinely difficult. It is okay to feel scared about this. If you want to talk it through, a counsellor or trusted adult can help you sit with these worries instead of carrying them alone.

Should I ask the doctors questions?

You have every right to understand what is happening to someone you love. Depending on your age, your family, and what the person with cancer is comfortable with, you might be able to attend appointments, send questions through a parent or carer, or speak to a member of the medical team. Writing down what you want to know can help.

11. WHERE TO GET SUPPORT

The first call or message is often the hardest part. It's okay to say you don't know where to start. You do not have to go through this alone. These services in the UK can help.

An adult you trust

A teacher, school counsellor, family friend, relative, youth worker, sports coach - anyone you feel comfortable with. You do not have to know exactly what to say. Just letting one person know is a place to start. For some young people, their faith, or people in their religious or spiritual community, can be a source of comfort and support. If that's part of your life, those people can be there for you too.

Childline

Free, confidential support for anyone under 19. Available 24 hours a day, every day. You can call, chat online, or send an email.
Call: 0800 1111 | www.childline.org.uk

YoungMinds

Information and advice on mental health for young people. Their crisis text service is free and available 24/7.
Crisis text: Text YM to 85258 | www.youngminds.org.uk

Shout 85258

Free, confidential text support 24/7 for anyone in the UK who needs to talk. Text SHOUT to 85258

Macmillan Cancer Support

Information and support for anyone affected by cancer, including families. Open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm.
Call: 0808 808 00 00 | www.macmillan.org.uk

Your Doctor

Your doctor is a good first port of call if you are struggling with how you are feeling. They can refer you to a counsellor or other NHS support.

Support can look different in different communities. Some young people find help through community or cultural organisations local to them. Your GP, school, or a service like Macmillan can help you find support that fits your family and background.

12. WORDS YOU MIGHT HEAR

Some medical words that might come up. Knowing what they mean can help you feel less in the dark.

Benign

Not cancer. Benign growths do not spread to other parts of the body.

Biopsy

A small sample of tissue taken from the body so it can be looked at under a microscope. This helps doctors find out if there is cancer and what type.

Chemotherapy

Medicines used to treat cancer. They work throughout the body and can have side effects.

Diagnosis

When doctors identify what illness someone has.

Immune System

The body's defence against infection. Some cancer treatments lower it for a while.

Leukaemia

A type of cancer that affects blood cells. It does not form a lump.

Lymphoma

A type of cancer that starts in part of the immune system called the lymphatic system.

Malignant

A word that means cancerous.

Metastasis

When cancer spreads from where it started to another part of the body.

Oncologist

A doctor who specialises in treating cancer.

Palliative Care

Care that focuses on managing symptoms and helping someone feel as well as possible. It is about quality of life. People can have palliative care at any stage of an illness, not only at the end.

Prognosis

The doctor's best estimate of how the illness is likely to go. It is different for every person.

Radiotherapy

Treatment using high-energy beams to destroy cancer cells in a specific part of the body.

Remission

When tests no longer show signs of active cancer.

Tumour

A lump made of unusual cells. Can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).



WORD SEARCH

This one is just for fun. Find the words below if you want to, or come back to it another time.

F	E	A	E	S	O	Z	U	E	T	T	A	P
P	R	O	G	N	O	S	I	S	V	M	L	E
R	B	E	N	I	G	N	R	E	O	A	Y	A
Z	X	U	D	Q	X	E	N	H	G	S	G	A
I	G	J	Q	H	Y	S	P	K	P	I	R	N
E	B	X	L	O	V	M	S	O	Q	N	Q	E
R	E	Q	Q	A	Y	O	I	Y	F	T	A	Y
Z	E	F	E	L	P	B	T	X	D	R	B	K
V	Q	Q	O	N	C	O	L	O	G	I	S	T
R	R	E	M	I	S	S	I	O	N	P	Z	Y
D	D	I	A	G	N	O	S	I	S	R	B	H
G	I	T	U	M	O	U	R	B	Y	D	Q	O
R	A	Y	C	O	K	T	Q	T	Q	G	W	I

Words to find

Benign	Biopsy	Tumour	Remission
Lymphoma	Diagnosis	Prognosis	Oncologist

Words go across, down, and diagonally.

13. ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This booklet is part of the work Little Ripples does to support young people who have a family member or someone close to them with cancer. It is written for young people aged 13 to 17. Little Ripples is also making a separate resource for younger children aged 5 to 12, because what helps at 8 is different from what helps at 16.

Where our information comes from

Information about cancer in this booklet draws on publicly available guidance from Cancer Research UK and the NHS. Wellbeing and self-care guidance reflects general mental health advice from established UK organisations including the NHS, YoungMinds, and Mind.

Made with young people

This is a working draft. As an interim resource, it has been developed using an evidence-based approach. It will be reviewed and refined with our Family Experience Panel - a group of young people and family members with lived experience. The Panel's input will shape the language, content and design of the future updates.

Tell us what you think

If you have ideas that could make this booklet better, we would love to hear them. You can get in touch at www.littleripplesuk.org.uk.

A note on getting things right

This booklet provides general information only. It is not a substitute for medical advice. For information specific to your family's situation, please speak to the medical team caring for the person you love, or your doctor.





Supporting children and young people affected
by cancer in their family or close community.

www.littleripplesuk.org.uk

*This resource is provided free of charge. Please share
it with any young person who might find it useful.*