



BC Cancer Agency

CARE + RESEARCH

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Getting Through

A guide for middle school & high school students
when cancer affects the family



When someone in your family has cancer

Do you find yourself feeling sad, worried or alone?

It's normal to have a wide range of thoughts and feelings.

Do you feel guilty or stressed about how it affects you?

Feelings can be overwhelming and stop you from doing the things you enjoy.

Do you feel unsure about the changes and answering everyone's questions?

Disruptions in routines and conflicts in relationships can occur as a result of new challenges.

Are thoughts of cancer affecting how you manage at school?

You may need some support to continue to cope at home and at school



Rena's mom has just started treatment for breast cancer

"I had a hard time focusing on my math exam this week – it was my last one. I only had a little bit of time to study since mom started chemo. I couldn't think of the answers, no matter how hard I tried. I kept looking around the room and my teacher noticed. She came over to tell me to focus on my own work. I felt so embarrassed and stressed out."

Dillon's grandfather has advanced lung cancer

"My grandpa used to come to all my games, he's in hospital now, It feels weird not to see him there. Lately, I don't feel like playing anymore so I quit the team. My buddies keep going on about me quitting so I've been avoiding them."

When the workload gets too heavy

What happens when you have many courses and can't keep up with them? If you are in high school, it is best to keep as many courses as you need to graduate or qualify for post-secondary education. You may need extra help or time to complete assignments. Your very last resort would be to drop courses, because you will still have to do them later.

What about exams?

If you want to qualify for post-secondary education but are having difficulty focusing on your studies, make sure your family doctor knows. The school may be able to apply for special circumstances or might allow you extra time and/or alternate seating for writing your exams. You may also need a letter from your doctor.

Friends and fun

Talking with your friends about cancer can be difficult. Remember, you decide who you choose to tell; and you don't have to answer questions you are not comfortable with. You may want to think about telling a couple of close friends and keep them updated so they can support you. Keep doing your usual activities as much as possible. It is important to stay connected and balance school work with fun activities.



What you can do?

Talk with your family, school counsellors & teachers

If you have a school counsellor, make an appointment and discuss your situation. A counsellor can help you create a plan, provide helpful suggestions, and communicate with teachers, coaches and principals. You may want to take a parent or other family member with you.

If you don't have a school counsellor, choose a teacher that you get along with to be the first teacher you tell. Discuss what information your teacher can tell others and who they can share it with. Choose a time when your teacher is not busy with other people or activities.

Your family and school staff can work with you for any unplanned absences, talk about ways to cope, and make suggestions for additional support.

Check these out!

Facts 4 teens has web resources dealing with the facts as well as your feelings when cancer affects the family. You can even share your artwork, poems or stories about your cancer experience. Check it out!



A Patient & Family Counselling Services counsellor can meet with patients and/or family members to talk about questions and concerns. Ask your parent or guardian to call and make an appointment at a cancer centre.

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre is BC's online information source for children, youth and families struggling with their thoughts and emotions. Take an emotional health quiz!

When a parent has cancer is a great booklet especially made for teens by the National Cancer Institute. Download a free copy.

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide call the crisis line at 1.800.784.2433