

**If a young person in your school has cancer**

**Children and teens with cancer may have to cope with a number of concerns or issues at school. For example they may worry about changes in relationships with classmates  or about possible physical limitations.**

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If possible, it is helpful for the person with cancer to have a member of school staff they can talk to, confide in, and get support from when needed.

For children and young people affected by cancer, there can be various issues that arise.

**Relationships with classmates**

Young people with cancer are often worried about how their friends and classmates will act towards them, especially if they have had a long time off school or return with obvious physical changes such as hair loss. Friends can offer a lot of support to a person with cancer and most peers accept any changes. But they may have questions so it's a good idea to prepare for these and to consider possible answers.

**People's reactions towards you change when they hear of your illness. I just want to be treated as the girl I used to be.**

**Lisa, a schoolgirl with cancer**

Some people may ask the teacher to talk about cancer with the class. This should only happen if the young person with cancer agrees to it and they should know what their classmates have been told.

Giving classmates the facts about cancer will help them to understand and will give you the chance to address any misconceptions they may have, for example that you can catch cancer.

You could also request a representative from Macmillan to give a [general talk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Informationforteachersandschools/Schooltalks/Schooltalks.aspx) about cancer types, treatments and living with cancer.

**Physical appearance**

Side effects of cancer treatments can change the way a person looks. Some common side effects are hair loss, facial swelling, or weight loss or gain. When the treatment has finished, these side effects will go away.

There are possible long-term effects of treatment such as stunted growth, problems with fertility or related organs, and learning difficulties if the brain or central nervous system are affected. Some of these may not become apparent while the child is at school, but it’s important for the parent(s) or guardian(s), teacher, school nurse and doctor to be aware of these and to tell each other about any concerns if appropriate.

**Keeping up with school work**

Children and young people receiving cancer treatment may suffer from fatigue, drowsiness, tiring easily and losing concentration. They may also have long periods of absence. They should be encouraged and helped to keep up with school work as much as possible during these times. It may be possible for the child to attend school for half days when they first return and they should be allowed to have time to rest if needed. Children and young people who have been treated for certain types of cancer, for example [brain tumours](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Cancertypes/Brain/Braintumours.aspx), may need extra support in the classroom.

Some teenagers being treated for cancer have said they feel teachers do not want to push them as hard as other students. This can make them feel patronised or singled out. It can be difficult to find the right balance, but this is something to be aware of when considering the levels of work you are giving them.

Young people with cancer need to be aware of any possible short or long-term limitations that might be caused by their treatment and how this can affect their academic progress.

If a child is not able to return to school after treatment it may help for them to have home tuition. The family’s doctor can usually make a request for this to the local education authority.

**Physical limitations**

Being unable to take part in sports or other physical activities may make young people feel upset and left out. They may have physical limitations because of side effects like fatigue. Certain drugs used to treat cancer can also cause the child or teenager to develop weak muscles or joints. If the person needs limb sparing surgery or needs to have a limb amputated it will affect their ability to take part in some activities.

Young people with cancer often want to be treated as normal, like their peers. But it is important for both the teacher and young person with cancer to be aware of any physical limitations. The person’s medical team should give advice on this before the person returns to school.

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