

MY CLASSMATE HAS CANCER...

HOW CAN I HELP?



WHAT IS CHILDHOOD CANCER?

Childhood cancer is cancer that happens in children from ages 0-19³. Cancer is a disease that happens when some cells in the body start growing and dividing too fast and do not stop, like normal cells are supposed to. These abnormal cells can form lumps called tumors and sometimes spread to other parts of the body, which can make a person very sick⁵.

There are several types of childhood cancer:

- leukemia, which is a blood cancer
- brain cancer
- lymphomas, which are immune system cancers

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY FRIEND WITH CANCER?

If my friend is in the hospital:

- If I miss my friend and they are not here, I can draw them a picture, send a message, or write them a letter to make them smile
- If it's okay with their parents, I can go visit my friend to make them laugh, have fun, and make them not focus on treatment².

When my friend comes back to school:

- I should be kind and say hello.
- I should let them choose if they want to join
- Treat them how you treated them before they got sick.
- Kids with cancer think friends are an important source of support².

REMEMBER: THEY ARE STILL THE SAME PERSON

They are still: A friend, a classmate, a teammate
Cancer is something they experienced. It does not
define who they are.



FACTS & MYTHS



Why might my friend look different now?

Cancer is often treated with something called **chemotherapy**, sometimes referred to as chemo. Chemo is a medicine that works to stop fast-growing cells, which can help cure, control, or relieve someone's symptoms⁵.

Chemo sometimes has a lot of side effects, like

- **Hair loss.** Some people who lose hair⁵ might come to school with a hat on or sometimes wear a wig.
- **Upset stomach.**⁵ Your classmate might not feel up to playing during recess or eating the cupcakes for your friend's birthday party.
- **Tiredness.** Some days, your classmate might not want to have a playdate or might need to take breaks during the school day¹.



COMMON MISINFORMATION

Myth: I will catch cancer from my friend

Fact: You cannot catch cancer²; it is not contagious like a cold or the flu. You can play, hug, and share with your friend just like before.

Myth: Cancer means my friends will die.

Fact: Many children will get treatment like chemo and survive. About 85%³ of kids will beat childhood cancer.

Myth: I can't ask any questions.

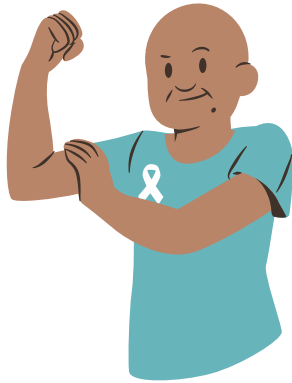
Fact: It's okay to have questions. Your friend might answer them, or you can ask your teacher, parent, guidance counselor, or school nurse.



OTHER RESOURCES

Having a classmate with cancer can be very difficult. It is important to remember to be a good friend.

Here are some additional resources you can look at with your parents or guardians.



Cancer.Org

Here are some more ideas of things you can do to help your friend

KidsHealth

KidsHealth en Español

KidsHealth has good information about cancer, treatments, and after-treatment.

References

1. Choquette, A., Rennick, J. E., & Lee, V. (2016). Back to school after cancer treatment: Making sense of the adolescent experience. *Cancer Nursing*, 39(5), 393-401. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NCC.0000000000000301>
2. Ingersgaard, M. V., Fridh, M. K., Thorsteinsson, T., Adamsen, L., Schmiegelow, K., & Larsen, H. B. (2021). A qualitative study of adolescent cancer survivors' perspectives on social support from healthy peers - A RESPECT study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 77, 1911-1920. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14732>
3. Miller, R. W., Young, J. L., Jr., & Novakovic, B. (1995). Childhood cancer. *Cancer*, 75, 395-405.
4. Nygren, P. (2001). What is cancer chemotherapy? *Acta Oncologica*, 40(2-3), 166-174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02841860151116204>
5. Ramirez, L. Y., Huestis, S. E., Yap, T. Y., Zyzanski, S., Drotar, D., & Kodish, E. (2009). Potential chemotherapy side effects: What do oncologists tell parents? *Pediatric Blood & Cancer*, 52, 497-502. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pbc.21835>
6. Stiller, C. (2004). Epidemiology and genetics of childhood cancer. *Oncogene*, 23, 6429-6444. <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.onc.1207717>

Created by Kaileigh Volker