

# Dealing with difficult reactions from others



Support from family and friends can be very useful to help you cope with the stress of cancer. However, it's important to remember that your diagnosis will not only have come as a shock to you, but also to those around you. Unfortunately, when you tell some people, they might not react as supportively as you would like them to and the news may change your friendship. While it's difficult to know what may have caused this reaction from them, it's possible that they just don't know what to say, how to help, how to deal with changes in your appearance, or how to cope with their own feelings. They may even believe that cancer is contagious (which of course isn't true).

If you feel that some people are avoiding you because they are scared they might say the wrong thing, consider phoning them to 'break the ice'. You might also reassure them that they needn't talk to you about your health if they find it difficult, and that you would just appreciate their company. Another way to help them feel more in control of the situation is to give them a job (e.g. cooking your family a meal once a fortnight). It's likely that this will actually help both of you. People often feel privileged to be able to help.

On the other hand, sometimes people with cancer avoid their family and friends in an effort to minimise the chance that they will be asked about how they feel. You may need to be honest with yourself – are they avoiding you or are you in fact avoiding them?

Children are likely to worry about a family member and react in all sorts of ways, from being disruptive (often to hide their fear), withdrawn, or clingy. It's important to try to give children as much attention and to stick to their normal routine as much as practically possible. Enlisting help from a family friend or relative to give them extra comfort, guidance and affection may also be useful.

Other suggestions:

- Be **open and honest** with people about how you feel and how you would like them to behave. Although you might find this difficult to do, it's better to do it calmly in the early stages, rather than letting your frustration build up and angrily confronting the person at a later stage. Reading about [how to be assertive](#) may help you do this constructively.
- Consider **joining a support group or speaking to a cancer survivor** via [Cancer Connect](#). It's likely that other people have had similar experiences and may be able to offer some advice, or simply reassure you that you're not alone.
- Be aware that **people around you may have had to take on new responsibilities**.

- ☑ Let your family and friends know that you realise things have been difficult for them and that you **appreciate their support**.
- ☑ Remember that helping during difficult times comes easily or seems like an obvious thing for some people to do, but this isn't always so obvious to others. **Some people lack the confidence to offer to help, while others genuinely believe they have nothing to offer.**
- ☑ If you find that difficult reactions from others are making you feel angry, **consider reading about [managing anger](#).**
- ☑ If you feel that people don't understand the person that you have become, **consider reading about [how to talk to others about your priorities or values](#).**