

# Talking to family and friends

Telling family and friends about a cancer diagnosis can be hard. You may find the idea of talking about cancer upsetting or uncomfortable. But it is important to think about who needs to know and the best way to talk to them.

Although you may feel alone at this time, the cancer also affects people who are close to you. This is because you are an important part of their life.

You may be worried about how your family or friends will react. Or you may feel guilty about how the news will affect them. But when you talk with people close to you and include them in important decisions, it can make them feel valued. Talking to family and friends can help you get the support you need and cope better.

## Practical tips for talking with family and friends

- Make a list of family and friends you want to talk to and decide how much information you want to share. This could be the type of cancer and the treatment you need.
- Tell your family and friends in the way that feels best for you. Sometimes it is easier to give the news on the phone, in a letter or by email. If you decide to give the news in person, try to find a quiet and comfortable place to talk.
- It can help to introduce the subject slowly. If you are struggling, you could say: 'This is going to be difficult, but I need to tell you something.'
- Give the information in small parts. You could say a few sentences and then check that they understand before continuing. Ask things such as, 'Does that make sense?'
- Do not worry about silences. Sometimes you, or your family member or friend, may not know what to say. Holding hands, hugging or just sitting together can often say more than any words.
- If the other person avoids talking, you can tell them that they do not need to respond. Explain that you would just like them to listen.
- Try to be open about how you feel. You may want to be positive and cheerful to make your family member or friend feel better. But if you are anxious about the future, they need to know this in order to support you.
- Acknowledge the other person's feelings. They may be struggling to accept your diagnosis or not know the best way to help. Remember that they care about you.
- It is fine to take a break. Chatting about everyday things can help you feel that normal life still goes on.
- Write down any questions that they have, so you can ask your healthcare team.
- You may want to ask a family member or friend to come with you to hospital appointments. This can make future conversations about the cancer easier.
- Explaining the cancer diagnosis to people can be exhausting. You can ask someone you trust to tell other family members or friends. Let them know what information you are happy to share.
- Family or friends may offer their support. Don't be afraid to accept their help. If you cannot think of anything you need, thank them and say you may come back to them.

**Local resources:**

Resource	Contact details

**National resources:**

Resource	Contact details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (AFT)</li> <li>• British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)</li> <li>• UK Council for Psychotherapy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><a href="http://www.aft.org.uk">www.aft.org.uk</a></b> <b>Tel</b> 0192 544 4414</li> <li>• <b><a href="http://www.bacp.co.uk">www.bacp.co.uk</a></b> <b>Tel</b> 0145 588 3300 <b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:bacp@bacp.co.uk">bacp@bacp.co.uk</a></li> <li>• <b><a href="http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk">www.psychotherapy.org.uk</a></b> <b>Tel</b> 020 7014 9955 <b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:info@ukcp.org.uk">info@ukcp.org.uk</a></li> </ul>

**Further information**

**[macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/talking-about-cancer](http://macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/talking-about-cancer)**

**[macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/talking-about-cancer/if-someone-has-cancer](http://macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/talking-about-cancer/if-someone-has-cancer)**

Our booklets and leaflets are available to order free on **[be.macmillan.org.uk](http://be.macmillan.org.uk)**

- **Talking about cancer**

**More information and support**

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm, or visit **[macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

We produce information in a range of formats and languages. To order these, visit **[macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](http://macmillan.org.uk/otherformats)** or call our support line.