Article Series Cancer in AYA

Staying Social As An Adolescent With Cancer

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Being a teenager is usually a time of discovery — figuring out who you are, building friendships, learning at school, and gaining independence.

But getting a cancer diagnosis during this time may change your routine, your energy, and the way you connect with others. One of the most common experiences among teens with cancer is feeling left out or forgotten — especially when treatment keeps you out of school, off group chats, or away from weekend plans. It can be painful to feel like life is moving on without you.

You can still stay connected, feel seen, and enjoy the things that make you feel like *you*. Here are some Microsteps to support you socially during cancer treatment and recovery. As always, talk to your care team about guidelines that are right for you.

Texting or messaging one friend today.
Even if it's just to say "hey" or send a funny video, this tiny check-in can keep friendships strong, even when your energy is low.

Asking friends to come with you to treatment sessions.
Having a friend with you may feel comforting, and your friends may be interested in learning more about your experience.

Making a list of simple things that make you feel supported and happy, and sharing it with your friends.
Your friends may tell you that they want to support you, but they may not know how. Be honest about what feels helpful — like checking in, sitting quietly with you, or just treating you the same as before.

Planning one low-energy activity you enjoy — like playing a computer game or board game, or having a movie night — and inviting a friend to join. It's easy for your diagnosis to become the thing people focus on — and sometimes it can feel like cancer has taken over your identity. But *who* you are hasn't changed. Cancer is just one part of your story. The rest of you — your personality, interests, and sense of humor — is still there.

Trying a teen support group.
Being a teen with cancer can feel incredibly isolating — especially if no one around you is going through something similar. Talking to other teens who are going through something similar can be comforting and even fun. Ask your care team for support group recommendations or look up a teen cancer support group or community online.

Taking a few minutes to think about what you want to say and share about your cancer experience with someone you like.
Write it down or practice with a best friend so you feel more confident when you're ready to share more about your experience. Living with cancer shouldn't stop you from pursuing a romantic interest, but it can make the early stages of a new relationship challenging. Whether you're talking to someone, just hanging out, or thinking about dating someone, you get to decide *if* and *when* you share your cancer

story.

Saying or writing one thing your body has helped you do today.
It could be something simple like walking, breathing, or laughing. Physical changes such as hair loss, scars, ports or weight changes can affect both how you see yourself and how you feel around others. Writing down something positive is a reminder that your body is still showing up for you, even as it changes.

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