



# Cancer affecting your students?

---

We can help you support them

## How many young people are affected by cancer?

Every year, another 23,000 young Australians aged 12-25 have their world turned upside down by cancer:

- 21,000 hear the devastating news that their parent has cancer
- 1,000 are diagnosed with cancer themselves
- 1,000 find out their brother or sister has cancer

## What impact does cancer have on a young person's life?

**CanTeen conducts leading edge research into the emotional and social impacts of cancer.**

Whether they're dealing with a close family member's cancer or their own, our studies show that young people experience high or very high levels of psychological distress, which in turn can significantly affect their educational outcomes as well as their behaviour at school.

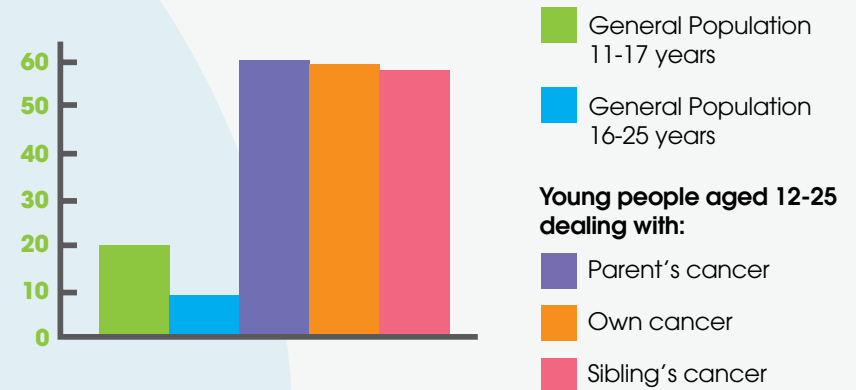
Young people often internalise their anxiety to try and 'stay strong' for their family or in an attempt to appear normal to their peers.

**In reality, their cancer experience frequently means they struggle with:**

- Poor attention and irritability during class
- Completing homework on time (they may for example be visiting a parent or sibling in hospital or taking on more duties at home while a parent is absent)
- Maintaining friendships within the school community

## Levels of distress

**Percentage of young people experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress\***

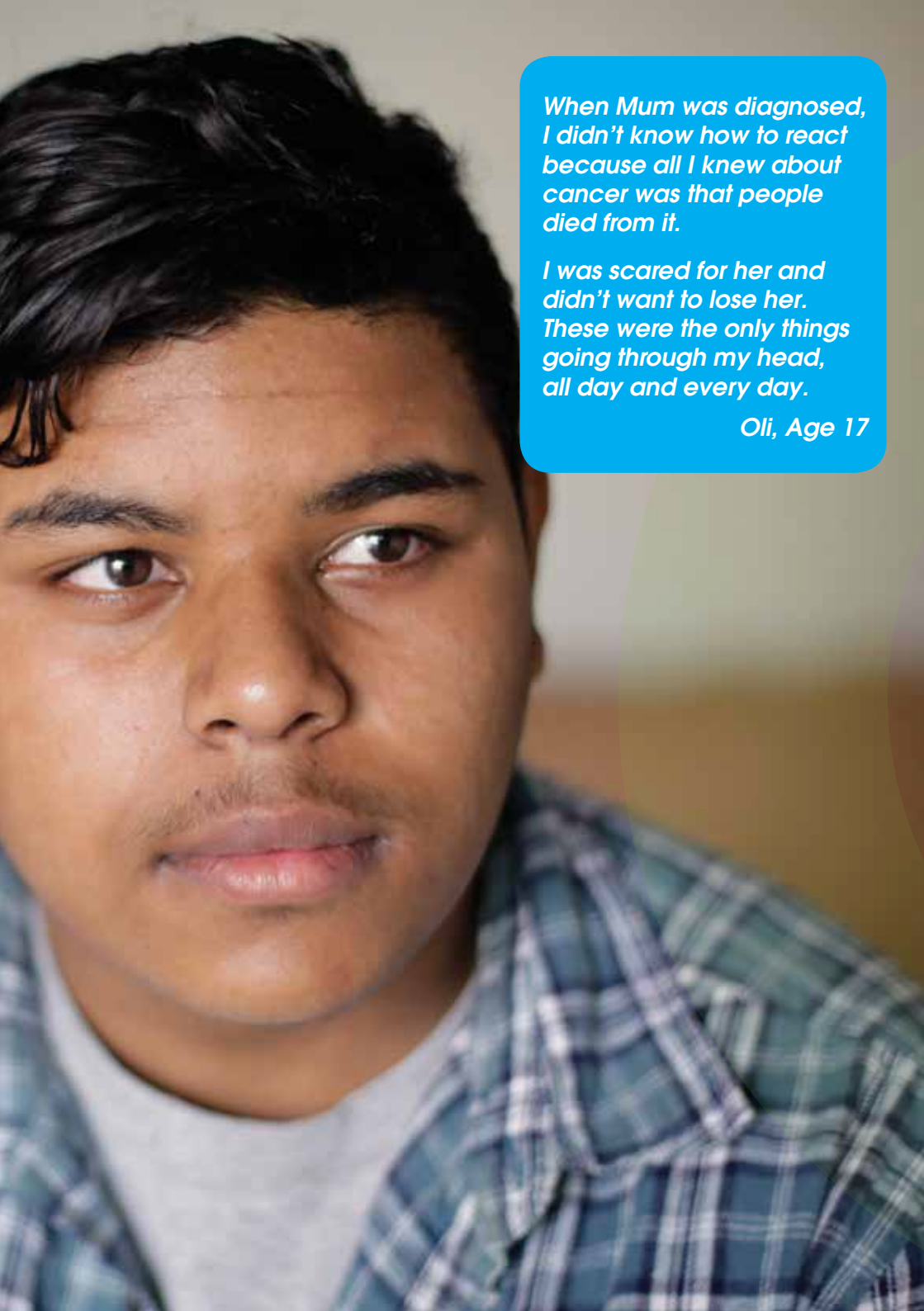


Without support, high levels of psychological distress can lead to difficulties at school or uni, problematic coping strategies such as drug or alcohol abuse as well as depression and anxiety.

Many young people affected by cancer feel very alone and become disconnected from their friends, which can lead to social isolation and an increased risk of mental health issues.

### \*References:

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) Young Australians: their health and wellbeing 2011. Cat. no. PHE 140 Canberra: AIHW.
- Lawrence D, Johnson S, Hafekost J, Boterhoven De Haan K, Sawyer M, Ainley J, Zubrick SR (2015) The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Department of Health, Canberra.
- McDonald FEJ, Patterson P (2015) Evaluation of a resource for adolescents and young adults diagnosed with cancer. J Ped Oncol Nurse, doi: 10.1177/1043454214563408.
- Patterson P, McDonald FEJ, White KJ, Walczak A, Butow PN (2017) Levels of unmet needs and distress amongst adolescents and young adults (AYAs) impacted by familial cancer. Psychoonc, doi: 10.1002/pon.4421



*When Mum was diagnosed, I didn't know how to react because all I knew about cancer was that people died from it.*

*I was scared for her and didn't want to lose her. These were the only things going through my head, all day and every day.*

*Oli, Age 17*

## How you can help

---

Adolescents demonstrate lower levels of help seeking behaviour, overall health literacy and mental health literacy than adults.

Your students are therefore unlikely to reach out for support when cancer comes into their life, but you can look out for warning signs that they're not coping.

**If you notice changes in behaviour, study habits or appearance, ask the young person how they're doing and about what's happening at home. It may also be useful to identify a staff member who can check in with them regularly.**

Many young people describe dealing with cancer as an emotional rollercoaster so they're likely to have good and bad days. It's also important to remember that the challenges of cancer don't end when treatment finishes as there can be long term side effects and the risk of relapse.

## What does CanTeen do?

---

**CanTeen is a national charity that has been supporting young people living with cancer for more than thirty years.**

Through CanTeen, young people develop skills to cope with the impact cancer has on their life and connect with others their age who are in the same boat.

We work with 12-25 year olds who are dealing with:

- A parent or sibling's diagnosis
- The death of a parent or sibling
- Having cancer themselves

## How can CanTeen help you?

CanTeen is here to help you and the wider school community support students who are affected by cancer. We can:

### Visit your school

Depending on your location, CanTeen can deliver a tailored session to staff or students about the impact of cancer and how to support a young person affected by their own or a loved one's cancer. Call us on **1800 835 932** to arrange a visit.

### Send free resources

CanTeen provides resources to help friends and class mates better understand what a young person goes through when cancer crashes into their world and how they can help. Download and order free copies at [canteen.org.au/resource](http://canteen.org.au/resource)



### Provide counselling

CanTeen counsellors specialise in supporting young people affected by cancer. They can either work with your students directly or provide consultation to school counsellors regarding cancer specific needs.

Online and phone counselling is available seven days a week and, where geographically possible, students can meet a CanTeen counsellor face to face. Call us on **1800 835 932** or email [schoolsupport@canteen.org.au](mailto:schoolsupport@canteen.org.au)

### Cancer education program for schools

CanTeen also runs a comprehensive cancer education program for students in years 9 and 10, called When Cancer Comes Along. It looks at cancer and its impacts and matches key physical education criteria from the ACARA curriculum.

For more information visit [www.canteen.org.au/schoolawareness](http://www.canteen.org.au/schoolawareness)

## Refer a young person to CanTeen

If a student needs help dealing with their cancer experience, you can connect them with a CanTeen social worker who will develop an individually tailored care plan with them.

### Refer the young person by:

- Suggesting that you and the student call CanTeen together on **1800 835 932**
- Getting permission to pass on the young person's details to us (we will call them)
- Encouraging the young person to join CanTeen's online community at [canteen.org.au/join](http://canteen.org.au/join)



## Contact us

---

For more information about CanTeen or to organise support for your school community, contact CanTeen's Online Support Service who can put you in touch with the most appropriate staff member to support your needs:

**Call** 1800 835 932

**Email** [schoolsupport@canteen.org.au](mailto:schoolsupport@canteen.org.au)

**Visit** [canteen.org.au](http://canteen.org.au)

-  [facebook.com/CanTeenAus](https://facebook.com/CanTeenAus)
-  [@CanTeenAus](https://twitter.com/CanTeenAus)
-  [youtube.com/canteenaustralia](https://youtube.com/canteenaustralia)
-  [@canteen\\_au](https://instagram.com/canteen_au)

