

How to support your child's friendships if they have Crohn's or Colitis

For a young person with Crohn's or Colitis (also known as Inflammatory Bowel Disease – IBD), having good friends can help them through hard times.

Young people with IBD told us they don't want their condition to get in the way, but sometimes it can be hard to maintain and make new friendships.



How could IBD affect your child's friendships?

- + IBD is unpredictable, your child might need to cancel or change plans which can be disappointing for them and their friends.
- + Tiredness or having to use the bathroom a lot may affect the social activities they feel comfortable doing.
- + Some medication can cause weight gain or 'moon face'. Your child may feel anxious about people noticing this and need time to get used to the changes.
- + They might be embarrassed or worried and find it hard to explain IBD to their friends. They might not want friends to know and might worry about friends finding out.
- + Your child might feel different from their friends, this can make them more reserved and might affect their friendships.
- + Your child may feel isolated, anxious, lonely, and/or depressed. It's normal for young people to feel upset from time to time about their IBD.



How might your child feel?

- + Your child's friendships are important to them and they may need your support to navigate any difficulties.
- + They may need help to recognise who their good friends are and to understand why some friends may not be supportive.
- + If they feel their IBD is making their friends drift away, you can help them understand that friendships come and go through life.
- + Your child may be frustrated at missing out on social activities and feel that sometimes their friends' lives are moving on without them.

How to help your child:

- + Be supportive and understanding.
- + Offer to be their advocate. If your child is comfortable with you talking to their friends' parents this can help friends understand what's happening.
- + Help them to feel confident – encourage and support them to focus on the things they can do.
- + Focus on the future – having small goals or something to look forward to can help them stay positive.
- + Help them make practical positive changes. For example, learning to drive an automatic car can be less tiring than driving a manual car.
- + If you're worried about your child, getting support from a counsellor can really help.

How to support your child's friendships

- ✦ Ask your child how they are feeling and about their friendships. Even if they don't want to talk they will know you're ready to listen.
- ✦ Help them arrange flexible plans and suggest activities where IBD won't get in the way. It may help your child to know where the toilets are when they go out.
- ✦ If they need to cancel plans encourage them to tell friends why and help them find ways to stay involved.
- ✦ Encourage your child to stay connected with friends even when they are feeling poorly, they may find it easier to stay in touch with just one or two close friends.
- ✦ It can be difficult if friendships drift or don't work out but you can help them manage these situations.
- ✦ Telling friends, teachers or employers about their IBD can be hard. Help your child talk through what to say and give them the chance to practice.



Help for you and your family



- ✦ **Talking to a friendly teacher/tutor** could ensure your child is supported in school/college/university. They can help keep your child connected to their education and to friendships. They may be able to help keep a watchful eye on your child and may be able to offer your child some additional emotional support.
- ✦ **Looking after your own mental health is really important.** Some parents have found it helped to talk to a caring friend or another parent who understands IBD. This can help you navigate life with a child with IBD.
 - ✦ **Balancing your child's needs with their siblings' needs can be tricky,** especially during difficult times. Siblings may need time to adapt, express their emotions and feel they are being treated fairly.
 - ✦ **Be careful of social media.** There are some excellent IBD forums, but some can provide overwhelming or incorrect information.
 - ✦ **Remember, things will improve!** There are many different IBD treatments, but it can take time to find the right treatment for your child.

Want to find out more?

- ✦ We have created an animation called '**Telling My Friends**' along with some related information sheets: www.ehu.ac.uk/crohnsorcolitis
- ✦ You can also use the immersive **In My Shoes** app; this app will allow you to experience first-hand what it's like to have Crohn's or Colitis. www.ittakesguts.org.uk/share/in-my-shoes-app
- ✦ There's lots of additional information on the Crohn's and Colitis UK website www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk, including a Talking Toolkit www.ittakesguts.org.uk/talk/talking-toolkit

