Having someone with you during your cancer appointments and treatment:

A GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CANCER

The coronavirus pandemic has affected every area of life, including cancer care, how this is organised and managed to keep patients safe while treatment continues. To help stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), most hospitals have stopped or reduced the visiting. This means that some young people with cancer are having to have treatment and attend appointments on their own.

As we move into a new stage of the pandemic, we hope these restrictions can be reduced over time, it is helpful to look at what the NHS England guidance says: ‘NHS and other healthcare organisations should facilitate visiting, as far as possible, across healthcare inpatient settings... these principles can also be applied in outpatient and diagnostic service settings’

In other words, whether you’re getting diagnosed or having treatment, staying in hospital or just going in for an appointment, hospitals should do everything they can to make sure you have someone with you.

Teenage Cancer Trust and CLIC Sargent want all young people to have a #Hand2Hold – that’s why we have campaigned to raise awareness of this, and why we’ve now produced this quick guide to help you get the best out of your hospital visit or stay when it’s not possible to have someone with you.

And remember, if you ever have questions about your care, your appointments, or your treatment, it’s always OK to ask your treatment team.

1. IT’S OK TO ASK TO HAVE SOMEONE WITH YOU

- The first thing to remember is that the NHS themselves have said that, having someone with you for your appointments and treatment should be made possible where it can.
- As recently as 10 February 2021, NHS England publicly said it is: “absolutely clear that young cancer patients should be able to have friends and family supporting them at appointments, which is why the national guidance is explicit that this should be offered, in a Covid-safe way”. So the main message is that it’s ok to ask about having someone with you if it’s not been mentioned. You don’t need to feel guilty or like you’re asking too much of people –the guidance says it should be allowed wherever possible.
- In October 2020, NHS England published guidance about how hospitals should make these visits possible. If you have been told that someone can come with you, it might be good for that person to read this before you go, so that they can be sure what they need to do and help the visit go smoothly and safely.

2. ASK FOR MORE INFORMATION IF YOU’RE TOLD YOU CAN’T HAVE SOMEONE WITH YOU

If you’re told that you can’t have someone with you during your treatment or appointments, you have the right to ask the staff to explain why this is, and what alternatives are available.
6. ASK IF YOU COULD HAVE SOMEONE WITH YOU ON A VIDEO/PHONE CALL

- In some circumstances, it might not be safe to have someone with you in person, and some appointments can’t be done remotely.
- If this is the case for you, NHS England guidance says that hospitals should allow ‘virtual visits’ which means someone could join your appointments by video or phone call. If this is something that you would like and is not offered to you, you can ask if a parent, partner or friend can video or call in.
- It might be helpful to:
  - Explain to your team that someone calling in will help you remember the information you often forget and questions you want to ask too
  - You can also explain that the person will give you reassurance when you’re feeling scared
  - Check your phone or tablet is charged before your appointment to make sure the call doesn’t cut out
  - Ask if the area where your appointment will be has a good phone signal and/or 4G or Wifi, as that could affect how much the person can hear. If it doesn’t, you can ask if the appointment could be done in a part of the hospital that does get signal.
  - If the hospital is worried about protecting the privacy of hospital staff, let them know that you won’t film, record or live stream the health professionals and if necessary, offer to sign something to say that the call is only for your personal support.

If you need more support in asking for someone to be with you, talk to your nurse, youth support coordinator, social worker or your GP. You can also talk to family and friends, or someone you trust.

And remember, it’s always ok to ask for what you need during your cancer treatment. The people looking after you will always want to do everything they can to make you as comfortable as possible.