

Words of wisdom from a teenager

Friends

In terms of social life, maybe you find that going to parties is a good way of coping. Personally, I found it mentally exhausting to try to be social despite the way I was feeling. My friends were very understanding--however, they had their limits. It can be hard to explain to a friend why you don't feel like doing the same activities as you usually do, or why you find it difficult to laugh at the same jokes. You should know, though, that they are trying their best to help. Be patient with them and explain to them how you're feeling; they'll still be around when you're feeling like your regular self again.

If you have friends who you trust, then you should by all means talk with them. They can be an invaluable resource. I had a group of friends that stuck with me through those years, and who I'm still friends with today.

Family

Personally, I regret hiding my feelings from my mom and brother as much as I did. I wanted to appear strong for them, but trying to pretend that I was happy only created tension between us. I wish that I had done my part to create an atmosphere of honesty, in which we could have coped with the problem together.

Perhaps the most confusing thing for me was my feelings toward my dad while he was sick. It was a conflicting mess of anger, confusion, bitterness, and sadness. If you have these feelings, then you should recognize that they're natural, and that you shouldn't feel guilty. At the same time, though, try to understand what your family member is going through, and be forgiving if he or she is more short tempered or irritable than usual. Perhaps you can even use this time as an opportunity to bond and become closer, and be there in a time of need.

Don't try too hard to be 'strong for your family'. The burden of comforting and supporting your family and dealing with your own issues is too much to bear. Recognize that you need and deserve help dealing with this problem. Even if your family member is the one who is sick, that doesn't diminish how much pain you feel from the ordeal.

Teachers and school work

As understanding as teachers and peers can be, you might find that their understanding has its limits. If your teachers are like mine were, then they'll give you many breaks when it comes to homework, and assignments. However, eventually they'll expect you to perform to your regular standard once

again (on this point, every teacher is different), and maybe you won't be ready. Just remember that only you know when you're ready, and what you're capable of doing in this situation. If you feel that a teacher is being unfair, don't hesitate to talk to them or your counselors; and if your grades slip a little, know that that's okay too.