

## Talking to classmates and friends

When children are old enough to attend school, they are old enough to have friends. The more their minds and emotions develop, the more important friends become. By the time children are teenagers, friends are the most important people in their lives. If the illness has been a long one, or the condition has seriously delayed development, friends may be less important than family. Still, if your child has been part of a regular school class, he will be missed. School mates will be concerned about their friend.

The school teacher will appreciate a call from you telling her about your child. When you make this call you can tell the teacher what information you, and your child, want her to give the class. You may feel able to connect with close friends of your child yourself. Some people ask the best friend or, for young children, his parents, to call the other friends. You can also give this job to someone who asks “can I do something for you?”.

### Ideas for what the teacher can say:

- \* *“ — is very sick. She is not able to come back to school or have visitors. We can help her by... I don't know anything more I can tell you. When her family has more information for us they will let us know.”*
- \* *“Everyone at the hospital has tried very hard to help — get well. — has taken lots of medicine and had lots of treatment. Almost all people who get sick get better. Sometimes there is not a way to make someone better. — may not get better.”*
- \* *“She is still very sick and we don't know if she can get well again. She wants you to know that she thinks of you. She would love it if you (phoned) or (wrote a card) or (visited). The best times are...”*
- \* *“His body is becoming weaker. He is not able to get out of bed/leave home/come to school. We are not sure he will recover.”*
- \* *“His body can no longer work well; he may die soon.”*
- \* *“Her lungs/kidneys/heart is getting weaker because — has a (disease/condition) called —. This is not the kind of sickness/condition you catch. — It is caused by ..... Her body may get too weak to go on working. She may die.”*

The students will probably ask the teacher more questions about your child's medical condition. Say if you are comfortable with her telling the children more. Make sure she explains that this is not something one can catch from others. If you prefer, you can give her the name of a health professional to contact for an explanation of the condition. You can, of course, ask the teacher not to give out any information from the school until you are ready.

If your child is part of a smaller group - soccer team or scouts - you may want to draft a letter to send to the group. There is a sample you can modify in this section. You can also ask one parent to let others know. Be specific about what you want him to say. Give this parent some suggestions of things the group can do for you or your child if they ask about this. For example:

- ♦ Make a photo album with pictures of each child and the group together. This can be a wonderful way for your child to relive happy times. It lets her know she remains part of the history of the group. It is a healing activity for the children who do it.
- ♦ Make a videotape of the group sending messages to your child.
- ♦ Make a giant card.

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## Sample letter

Dear friends of \_\_\_\_\_

We know that you have all been concerned about \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for your *(name what the group may have done cards, calls, gifts etc)*. — was so pleased to hear from you. This is what has happened. The sickness/condition *(name it)* that — has is now weakening his body. The doctors and nurses are still trying to fix things but the medications and *(name other treatments)* are not working too well. We hope very much that — will be well, but we understand that she may get so weak that her body will die. We don't want — to go on getting needle pokes or medicine if they are doing no good. Her life may be short and we want it to be as good as we can make it. We have decided to

*(bring her back home so we can all be together)*

*(move out of the hospital into a more homey place where there are nurses to help care for her)*

*(stop any treatment that is uncomfortable and does no good).*

If any of you want to send messages to \_\_\_\_\_ here is how you can do it. *(fill in)*

If you want to find out how she is doing you can call *(fill in)*

OR

Our family is sad; it is hard to talk to lots of people on the phone so we would prefer if you wrote notes rather than called. We will let you know through *(put in a name)* if we have other things to tell you.