



# BRCA\* Positive Pack

\*Breast Cancer Susceptibility gene

## Possible Reactions of Family Members and Friends

After receiving your positive gene result you may decide to tell family members or friends about your result and what you plan to do.

Many people have not heard about the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes and may not understand the risks associated with having a gene change or the decisions you have been faced with.

Without knowledge or understanding, people can make uninformed judgments, which although 'well-meaning' may be extremely hard to deal with. Some of the hurtful reactions clients<sup>†</sup> have faced are:

*I had some "really good friends" who when I told them that I was having preventative surgery, thought that I was stupid!! They told me I should wait (Wait for what? To get cancer??), and then they talked to others about me saying that my decision was selfish and I was doing it for attention.*

*One was all jealous because I was going to have "great boobs – I have always wanted a boob job"... Oh yeah great, I have just had my breasts chopped off to save my life, and she was carrying on about boob jobs and jealousy!!*

If you find your family or friends are struggling to respect your decision then there are options available. These include:

- Get support from people who have been in similar situations (i.e. through the Pink Hope website).
- Give your friends information about the gene changes (i.e. the fact sheets in this pack can be copied).
- Explain preventative surgery is not carried out without medical consultations, including different specialists.
- Explain to them that your decision, whatever it may be, is right for you. It may not be right for everyone else.
- If your friends persist in acting negatively then you may need some time away from them or in a more supportive environment. Remember to take care of yourself.

Bear in mind that most people you talk to will want the best for you. It may be difficult for them to accept you are at an increased risk of cancer and a negative reaction to your situation may be due to denial or fear of your cancer risk. They may need time to understand what you are experiencing.

Finally, please remember you can call the Familial Cancer Program, Genetic Services of Western Australia on (08) 9340 1603 and speak to a genetic counsellor about these issues.

<sup>†</sup>Quotes supplied with consent from the clients of Genetic Services of WA.