



CANCERcare®

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SUPPORTING A CHILD WITH CANCER

Cancer has a significant impact on anyone, but especially on children who have been diagnosed. Children face unique challenges and adjustments, but can be very resilient. It helps to talk to your child about what they can expect and encourage them to share their feelings. Here are some tips on how to support your child during this time.

Talk to your child. Give age-appropriate and honest information about their diagnosis. Don't be afraid to use the word "cancer." While adults often associate fear with the word, children feel secure knowing what their illness is called.

You can be realistic while remaining hopeful. Encourage your child to ask questions throughout their treatment. If you do not know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say "I don't know. That's a good question and I will try to find out." Hospital social workers will have examples of appropriate language to use, and may be helpful when explaining details about the cancer.

Prepare your child. Go over the treatment plan and how it will affect their life. Prepare your child for physical changes they may experience during treatment (for instance, hair loss, fatigue or weight loss). Make a list of questions they have and bring them to the medical team if you do not have the answers at the time.

Reassure your child. Let your child know that their medical team will take care of them and you will provide support. During this time they may ask for or need more reassurance since they are feeling vulnerable. Continue to let your child know that you are there to take care of them and that you and their doctors will be working to help them.

What to say. Discuss ways your child can respond to questions from their peers. Your child's classmates and friends may ask them questions about their illness.



You can prepare your child for this by discussing how they are most comfortable responding. While some children would rather not discuss their diagnosis with classmates, others may wish to be more open. Respecting your child's specific wishes can help them maintain a sense of control over who knows their story.

Encourage your child to express their feelings. Explain that feelings can be expressed in many different ways such as talking, writing in a journal, drawing or sports. All feelings are acceptable and understandable. Let them know that it's also okay to say, "I don't want to talk right now," and that you'll still support them.

It's a team effort. Work with your child's teachers, school social worker and nurses. Meet with them to discuss your child's medical and educational needs. A school liaison help coordinate information about your child's school work and health matters.

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The school liaison can also be in contact with your child's medical team. Speak with the school about the necessary process should your child become sick. Explore remote learning options, if they are available.

Support for you. As a caregiver, it can be easy to forget about your own needs. Remember that in order to be there for your child, you need to take care of your own physical and emotional needs. Find time to practice self-care, even in small ways such as taking a walk, talking with a friend or wearing your favorite clothes. By caring for yourself, you will also be modeling healthy behavior for your child, and can share in some of those self-care activities together.

Reach out. Help your child identify the adults who can offer support. These people may include your spouse or partner, relatives, friends, clergy, teachers, coaches and members of your child's health care team. You may also want to speak with your hospital social worker about local counseling and support services for children with cancer. Talk with your child about ways they want to be supported, and things they find helpful.



Support options. Connecting with other children who have cancer can help your child feel less alone with their diagnosis. Some organizations have peer-mentoring for children diagnosed with cancer, as well as caregivers caring for a child with cancer. Joining a support group for parents who have a child with cancer can help you feel less alone in your journey as well. Speak to your hospital social worker about local support groups or call 800-813-HOPE (4673) to speak with a CancerCare oncology social worker about support services available to you.

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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