



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

SUPPORTING A CHILD WITH CANCER

A cancer diagnosis has a profound effect on anyone, especially when it is a child who has been diagnosed. Children face unique challenges and adjustments. 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 with cancer during this time.

Talk it Through. Give age-appropriate, accurate and honest information about your child's 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. Answer your child's questions honestly. 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. I will try to find out."

Prepare Your Child. Explain the treatment plan and how it will affect their life. Prepare your child for physical changes he or she may experience during treatment (for instance, hair loss, fatigue, or weight loss). This will minimize surprise and provide an opportunity for your child to ask questions and prepare for the changes he or she may face.

Reassure Your Child. Let your child know that he or she will be taken care of by their medical team and that you will continue to support them. While your child knows that you love them, during this time they may ask for or need more reassurance since they are feeling



vulnerable. As always, 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 feel better.

What to Say. Discuss language your child feels comfortable using when responding to questions from peers. Your child's classmates and friends may ask your child questions about his or her illness. You can preemptively prepare your child for this by discussing how he or she feels most comfortable responding. While some children would rather not discuss their diagnosis with classmates, others may wish to be more open with peers. Understanding your child's specific wishes can help inform the way you and the child's teachers support your child.

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Encourage Your Child to Express Their Feelings.

Let them know that all feelings are acceptable and that sharing their feelings can help them feel better. Explain that feelings can be expressed in many different ways such as talking, writing in a journal and drawing or by engaging in an active sport such as running or hitting a punching bag. Let them know that it's also okay to say, "I don't want to talk right now."

It's a Team Effort. Collaborate with your child's teacher, school social worker and nurse. Meet with them to discuss your child's medical and educational needs. Identify a school liaison. He or she can be the point person for you to speak with regarding your child's school work and health matters. The school liaison can also be in contact with your child's medical team to create a contagious disease plan. Once you have developed this plan, speak with the school liaison about informing classmates' parents about the necessary protocol should their child become sick.

Support for You. As a parent and 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 around the block, talking with a friend or doing something you enjoy. By caring for yourself, you will also be modeling healthy behavior for your child.

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 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 professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

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

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Reach out. Help your child identify the adults they feel most comfortable turning to for support. These people may include you, your spouse or partner, relatives, friends, clergy, teachers, coaches and members of your health care team. You may also want to speak with your hospital social worker about local counseling and support services for children with cancer.

Support Groups. Connecting with other children who have cancer can help your child feel less alone with their diagnosis. 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.

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