



CANCERcare®

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# fact sheet

## CARING ADVICE FOR CAREGIVERS: CARING FOR YOURSELF WHEN YOUR CHILD HAS CANCER

**Parents of children diagnosed with cancer often put their own needs or feelings aside while caring for their child. Taking good care of yourself is an important part of being a caregiver. This can improve your quality of life and help you to be better equipped to handle your parenting responsibilities.**

### HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AS YOU CARE FOR YOUR CHILD

**Acknowledge your feelings.** When a child is diagnosed with cancer, it is common for parents to experience many feelings including shock, anger, disbelief, sadness, fear and guilt. Be honest about how you are feeling and share your feelings with someone you trust. Find ways to express your feelings through writing, art or physical activity.

**Organize help.** Decide which of your child's needs you can meet on your own and which ones you need help with. Then, ask family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers or professionals to share these responsibilities. People may not know how to act or respond when a child has been diagnosed with cancer. You may need to clarify specifically what may be helpful for you and your family. Loved ones may have good intentions but may not be sure how to help. Websites and smart phone applications provide calendars and other tools for coordinating care so loved ones can see what you or your child may need. Also, check with community agencies, religious institutions or your hospital social worker for information on volunteer and respite care programs.

**Become informed.** Learn about your child's diagnosis and treatment so you have a sense of what to expect. Speak with your child's doctor or nurse if you have any concerns or questions. Take notes or ask your doctor if you can record them during appointments. They can also recommend resources for learning more. Find out what other supports (such as an oncology social worker, oncology nurse or pharmacist) are available to you and your child.

**Understand your rights.** Under the Family and Medical Leave Act, most employers are required to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for family members who need time off to care for a loved one. For help with insurance rules and regulations, contact your insurance company. Many insurance companies will assign a case manager to address concerns, clarify benefits and suggest ways to obtain additional health-related services.



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**Create a support network.** Identify the people in your life whom you can turn to when you need support. These people may include your spouse or partner, relatives, friends, clergy and members of your child's health care team. Many parents find it helpful to talk with other parents caring for a child with cancer. Speak with your hospital social worker to find out if there is a parent peer-matching program or support groups for parents at your child's treatment center. Support groups provide a safe, supportive environment for sharing your feelings with others who are also caring for a child with cancer.

**Get individual help.** As a parent and caregiver, you may sometimes feel overwhelmed and need additional individualized support. Speaking with a counselor or social worker can help you cope with some of the emotions or concerns you may be facing. Many hospitals have social workers who help families process their emotions, initiate tough conversations and learn coping techniques. CancerCare for Kids provides free support services by oncology social workers who specialize in working with children and families impacted by a cancer diagnosis. Learn more by visiting [www.cancercare.org/tagged/children](http://www.cancercare.org/tagged/children).

### **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 master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/CancerCare](https://www.facebook.com/CancerCare)

**Instagram:** @CancerCareUS

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**Financial assistance.** For many families, a cancer diagnosis can raise financial concerns. Unexpected expenses may range from treatment costs to transportation and child care. If you're not sure what financial assistance resources are available, connect with the financial department at the hospital, a hospital social worker, a patient navigator or even your insurance company. CancerCare's professional oncology social workers can also help locate financial assistance options. Read CancerCare's fact sheet titled 'Financial Assistance for Children and Teens' or call 800-813-HOPE (4673) for more information.

**Take care of yourself.** 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. Continue to be aware of your own check-ups, screenings and medications. Take a few moments for yourself each day to do something enjoyable or relaxing, even if it's just taking a walk around the block. Find some consistency within your routine, no matter how minor. Give yourself credit for all you do as a parent and/or caregiver, and find ways to reward yourself for your hard work. By caring for yourself, you will also be modeling healthy behavior for your child.

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