

How Schools Can Support Families Affected by Cancer

For most children, school is a place to learn and have fun. But a cancer diagnosis within the family can have a major impact. This fact sheet is intended to help speak with your child's school. It covers:

- How being at school can be hard for your child
- How to talk to the school's staff and administration
- The ways the school can help your child
- The emotions a child can go through



How School Can Become a Challenge

While school may seem like a place to keep busy and distracted from their worries, children may find it hard to handle their strong emotions. They may try to hide the situation from their friends or feel added stress about their assignments. Depending on their age, you may be able to come up with different strategies with the school to recognize these concerns.



Communicate With School Personnel

It can be hard to talk about your family's situation. Share only what makes you comfortable, but know that the school can help.

Contact the school as soon as possible. A cancer diagnosis can be especially difficult early on, but your child's school may help relieve some of the stress.

Be clear about what your child knows. Do your best to explain what your child knows and understands about the cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Determine who else should know. Try to be clear about who should know about the diagnosis, including teachers, counselors, coaches and other students.

Share relevant information. If cancer treatment will affect attendance, the school should know how routines and schedules will change.



How Can the School Support Your Child?

Good communication and support can help children cope. **School staff can help:**

- **Navigate** any classroom subjects that may be difficult for your child.
- **Discuss** changes to routines and schedules affecting attendance, homework or testing.
- **Provide** additional resources within the community available for your family.
- **Identify** different forms of communication that best supports the child at home and in school.



A Child's Emotional Health

School may become a way of 'running away' from emotions, or your child may struggle with their emotions in many new ways. Hopefully, teachers and school staff can provide emotional support. Some things they can watch out for:

- **Anxiety or Worry.** Due to the uncertainty of cancer and its treatment, and a future that is not clear.
- **Anger or Resentment.** Towards the situation, siblings or parents due to changes in attention or care for needs.
- **Sadness or Depression.** From sudden and continued ways their life has changed and produced new concerns.
- **Helplessness.** From a lack of control over the situation and the decisions and possible results of treatment and the future.
- **Loneliness or Isolation.** When the child feels no one else is experiencing the same things they are and have no one to talk about them.

Working with the school, you may find ways to give your child space to process their feelings, more time to finish assignments and other ways to build up their mental health.

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 resource navigation, 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.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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