



A Resource Guide for School Professionals



Introduction

There are currently more than 12 million people living with cancer in the United States and Canada, and 1.5 million individuals are newly diagnosed with cancer every year. Nearly 25% of adults with cancer have children under the age of 18 living in the household. Every day across North America, children, teens and their families are confronting cancer's impact.

For children who have a parent or sibling with the disease, and for adults who have a child or teen diagnosed with cancer, the diagnosis and treatment of cancer is one of the most difficult life experiences. Children face a set of pressures and emotions that can isolate them from their peers and take a long-term toll on their development and emotional well being.

When facing cancer, families can benefit substantially from outside support. In addition to the support received from organizations like Gilda's Club, school professionals such as nurses, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, administrators, coaches and teachers can be helpful sources of information and emotional support. In order to do this, they need the tools necessary to help children in their schools handle difficulties involved with the impact of cancer.

This booklet is designed to provide straight-forward, accessible information on how to support children and teens impacted by cancer. It addresses a child's cognitive understanding of cancer based on his or her age, common behaviors or reactions that school professionals may observe, how to talk to children about cancer, and helpful ways a school can respond when a child is diagnosed with cancer. An extensive list of resources is available to further support the school.

Gilda's Club Westchester

Gilda's Club Westchester is a FREE cancer support community for people impacted by cancer, their families and friends.

Our mission is to ensure that all people impacted by cancer are empowered by knowledge, strengthened by action, and sustained by community. We create welcoming communities of free support for everyone living with cancer – men, women, teens and children – along with their families and friends.

Children, Teens and Families at Gilda's Club Westchester

Gilda's Club Westchester offers a combination of support groups, social events and activity based workshops for children and teens who are living with cancer, have a family member or friend living with cancer, or have someone in their life who has died from cancer.

For more information on Gilda's Club Westchester or to view a calendar of events, please visit our website: www.gildasclubwestchester.org

Gilda's Class (Cancer • Learning • Social/Emotional • Support)

Given the psychological stress that children face when affected by cancer, Gilda's Club Westchester developed a school-based program in fall 2007 to address the needs of school personnel, students and their families about the impact of cancer. Geared towards schools throughout Westchester, Rockland and lower Fairfield counties, the Gilda's Class enables GCW's trained professionals to work closely with school districts to tailor a program specifically designed to address the needs of each particular school.

Gilda's Class provides interactive presentations, workshops, and an online curriculum for classroom teachers that helps support children and teens who are impacted by cancer. The program is designed to reduce anxiety, dispel myths about cancer and address fears. It also provides school professionals with comprehensive and factual information on cancer enabling teachers and school personnel the tools to respond to a child who is diagnosed with cancer or facing familial illness.

Developmental Aspects

It is important to remember that all children are NOT alike. This provides general information on the developmental aspects of a child's understanding of cancer and death, as well as the common behaviors to expect.

Infancy – Toddlerhood (0 – 2 Years)

Understanding of Cancer and Death	Common Reactions/Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> No cognitive understanding of cancer or death<input type="checkbox"/> Sense changes in their environment and routine<input type="checkbox"/> Aware of changes in behavior and emotions of people around them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Increased irritability<input type="checkbox"/> Tantrums<input type="checkbox"/> Changes in eating habits<input type="checkbox"/> Separation anxiety<input type="checkbox"/> Changes in sleeping patterns

Preschool (3 – 5 Years)

Understanding of Cancer and Death	Common Reactions/Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> May interpret things very literally Euphemisms can be confusing (e.g., “he went to sleep” or “she passed away”)<input type="checkbox"/> “Magical thinking” – may think they did something to cause the illness or death<input type="checkbox"/> May think death is temporary and the person will return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Regression (bed wetting, thumb sucking, increased clinginess)<input type="checkbox"/> Intermittent, but intense emotional response<input type="checkbox"/> Repeated questions about the illness or death

School Age (6 – 8 Years)

Understanding of Cancer and Death	Common Reactions/Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Can usually understand the difference between a simple and serious illness, but may be confused about which cancer is (i.e. if cancer is contagious)<input type="checkbox"/> Worries about immediate future rather than long term impact<input type="checkbox"/> “Magical thinking” – may think they did something to cause the illness or death<input type="checkbox"/> Beginning to understand the permanence of death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Regression<input type="checkbox"/> May exhibit heightened state of anxiety<input type="checkbox"/> May ask questions about the physical aspects of the illness or death<input type="checkbox"/> May express anger if usual routine is disrupted<input type="checkbox"/> May have feelings of guilt or anger

Middle School Age (9 – 12 Years)

Understanding of Cancer and Death	Common Reactions/Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual understanding of the meaning and impact of illness and the reality of death and its consequences<input type="checkbox"/> Understands that death is inevitable and that everyone dies<input type="checkbox"/> The meaning of illness and death is primarily centered on how it affects the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> May try to hide feelings<input type="checkbox"/> May focus on how the illness or death has disrupted their life<input type="checkbox"/> May fear others will become sick, including themselves<input type="checkbox"/> Commonly express fear and sadness as anger<input type="checkbox"/> May blame themselves for the illness or death

Adolescence (13 – 18 Years)

Understanding of Cancer and Death	Common Reactions/Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Capable of thinking abstractly about illness, death and the meaning of life<input type="checkbox"/> Understands many of the scientific details of illness and death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> May struggle to be independent, yet remain close to parent<input type="checkbox"/> May not outwardly express feelings<input type="checkbox"/> May direct anger towards family members

Common Behaviors to Look for in the Classroom

- Forgetfulness
- Sleepiness
- Poor concentration
- Irritability
- Hyperactivity
- Inappropriate reactions
- Regressive behaviors
- Response triggers
- Acting out
- Controlling behavior
- Physical symptoms (stomach aches, headaches)

Influential Intellectual/Psychological/Social Factors

While there are common responses to illness and death, every child is different. It is important to keep these influential factors in mind.

- The child's family's style of coping
- The child's family's style of communication
- The child's relationship with the person who is sick or has died
- Pre-existing family issues (i.e. divorce)
- Past experiences with illness or death
- Cultural or religious beliefs
- Home environment
- Cognitive understanding
- Capacity to verbalize feelings
- Methods of coping with emotional pain
- The child's temperament

Talking about Tough Stuff: Tips for Professionals when Talking to Kids about Cancer and Death

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.”

— Fred Rogers

Whether you are speaking to a child individually, in a classroom, or a school community, there are some basic things to keep in mind.

Timing – time the conversation appropriately (not when the child is hungry, stressed, or about to transition to a new activity).

Use simple, straightforward language – use the words “cancer” and “death” to eliminate any confusion and misinformation. Do not use euphemisms that children may not understand (i.e. “passed away”).

Less is more – only provide as much information as is necessary and then allow for questions.

Allow for a range of emotions – model and validate feelings. Provide opportunities such as play time and art that can serve as emotional outlets.

Support – remind students who their supports are in the school and who they can talk to about the illness or death

Supporting the Student Impacted by Cancer

What You Can Do

School is often one of the safest and most predictable places a child knows. When a child has a family member living with cancer, life can be uncertain and isolating. School provides order, distraction and normalization to a child impacted by cancer.

As a school professional, one of the most important things you can do is maintain the child's usual routine and enforce limits. While it may be tempting to stretch the rules for students who are experiencing chaos at home, setting boundaries at school communicates safety and predictability to a child.

Certainly, there may be times when flexibility is necessary. Because a child impacted by cancer may experience things like exhaustion, poor concentration and irritability, there may be times when special consideration needs to be taken when asking that child to perform certain tasks.

Because school symbolizes the norm and provides distraction, the child may not wish to discuss the illness while in school. However, it can be helpful to help the child identify at least one school professional who the child can speak with or just take a break with if necessary. This person may be the school social worker or psychologist; however, it may also be the school nurse, coach, assistant principal or teacher. Look to the child to see who they tend to lean on and with whom they may already have a naturally close relationship.

What their Peers Can Do

Children and teens do not instinctively know how to be a support to a classmate who has an ill or dying family member. A child dealing with cancer in the family often feels isolated, and school can help the child feel like he or she is part of a community.

Teachers can offer peers an opportunity to send the child a card or a handmade gift. If the child is out of school because of a family member's hospitalization or funeral, ask a classmate to keep notes for the student so that he or she does not feel behind when they return to school.

Teaching classmates to be empathic can be helpful as well. Ask the students, *"How would you like to be treated if you were going through this experience?"* This may prepare the students and give them techniques on how to be supportive.

When a Student is Diagnosed with Cancer

In 2021, approximately 15,600 children between the ages of 0 – 19 were diagnosed with cancer. The majority of children diagnosed with cancer are successfully treated and become long term survivors.

The three most common cancer diagnoses seen in children and adolescents are leukemia, lymphoma and cancers of the brain and central nervous system. Children undergo the same treatments as adults when facing cancer: chemotherapy, radiation and surgery being the most common.

The Impact of Cancer and Treatments

Children diagnosed with cancer may face many years of illness, treatments and post treatment side effects. All of these can greatly impact their experience in school.

Possible Short Term Side Effects

Physical Side Effects	Social and Emotional Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Hair loss<input type="checkbox"/> Mouth sores<input type="checkbox"/> Bloating<input type="checkbox"/> Speech impairment<input type="checkbox"/> Low blood count (weakened immune system, anemia, fatigue, bruises)<input type="checkbox"/> Nausea<input type="checkbox"/> Red or irritated skin<input type="checkbox"/> Disfigurement or amputation (surgery)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety<input type="checkbox"/> Depression<input type="checkbox"/> Anger<input type="checkbox"/> Concerns about absences and falling behind in school<input type="checkbox"/> Isolation<input type="checkbox"/> Low self-esteem due to physical changes

Possible Late Effects – may appear months or years after treatment

Physical	Cognitive	Social and Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Vision or hearing loss<input type="checkbox"/> Thyroid problems<input type="checkbox"/> Organ malfunction<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary cancers<input type="checkbox"/> Infertility<input type="checkbox"/> Growth problems	<p>Late Effects may impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Math abilities<input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving<input type="checkbox"/> Attention span<input type="checkbox"/> Concentration<input type="checkbox"/> Handwriting<input type="checkbox"/> Processing information<input type="checkbox"/> Memory<input type="checkbox"/> Planning/organizational skills<input type="checkbox"/> Reading<input type="checkbox"/> Spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Underdeveloped social skills<input type="checkbox"/> Post-traumatic stress disorder<input type="checkbox"/> Depression related to physical changes<input type="checkbox"/> Fear of relapse<input type="checkbox"/> Isolation

Returning to the Classroom: How to Set the Student up for Success

ASSESS the situation, COMMUNICATE with those involved, SUPPORT the student

When a student is returning to school after being absent for a length of time due to treatment, assess their medical needs, academic strengths and needs, as well as psychological strengths and needs.

Find an effective way to communicate with the family. Appoint a school liaison who will routinely be in contact with the family via telephone or email.

Support the student physically, cognitively and emotionally. Here are some things to consider as the student plans to return:

- Location of the student’s desk
- Convenience of student’s locker
- Physical education requirements
- Make exceptions to the “no hat” rule
- Distance between classes
- Weight and number of textbooks

- Provide outlines/study guides
- Emphasize quality vs. quantity of student's work
- Modify assignments or allow for extra time with assignments
- Use multisensory methods
- Allow for oral vs. hand written tests
- Consider alternative assessments
- Arrange a time before or after school when the student can meet with their teacher

Identify with the child a school professional who will be his/her primary support. This person may assist with physical or cognitive tasks as well as provide emotional support.

Helping Classmates Understand

Before a student returns to school, it is important to provide his or her classmates an opportunity to learn about the illness and its side effects. The purpose of this conversation is to reduce anxiety, dispel common myths about cancer, and reduce "gossip" among peers. Students may also develop further empathy for their classmate once they have a better understanding of their experience.

Prior to talking to a class about a classmate's experience with cancer, the school must gain permission from the family. The child involved may even wish to have some input on what and how information is communicated. Be respectful of the family's wishes and be patient if they are resistant to giving consent.

A meeting with classmates should include age-appropriate information about cancer, the treatment that the student went through, and any side effects that may be observable in the classroom. This is an opportunity to address any misconceptions about cancer, such as "cancer is contagious."

Lastly, help the classmates gain empathy for the student returning. Ask them for examples on how they would want to be treated after being out of school for a long time. Ask them ways they can be supportive to the student who is returning.

Conclusion

Strengths of Your School

When a school community is directly impacted by cancer, it can be an overwhelming experience. It is important to remember that your school has incredible strengths that allow it to not only function during the worst of circumstances, but also bring safety, joy and support to the students facing the most difficult obstacles.

Caring for Yourself

As professionals, in order to successfully be a responsive support in a child's life, self-care is essential. The cancer diagnosis of a student or a student's family member may bring up a range of feelings that can be difficult to tolerate based on your own past experiences with cancer or your relationship with the student. It is normal and natural to be impacted by your students. Recognize your feelings and find effective ways to express them. Talk to your colleagues, share with a friend or spouse, or try to find activities that provide emotional outlets. If necessary, seek professional support through a cancer support organization like Gilda's Club Westchester.

Community Resources

Gilda's Club Westchester

A FREE cancer support community offering emotional and social support to men, woman, children and teens impacted by cancer in any way. GCW's comprehensive Children, Teens and Families Program offers education, social activities and support groups to children and teens who have cancer, have a family member living with cancer, or have someone in their life who has died from cancer.

Contact Information:

80 Maple Avenue

White Plains, NY 10601

Telephone: 914.644.8844

Website: www.gildasclubwestchester.org

Cancer Support Community

A global non-profit network of 175 locations, including CSC and Gilda's Club centers, hospital and clinic partnerships, and satellite locations that deliver more than \$50 million in free support and navigation services to patients and families. In addition, they also administer a toll-free helpline and produce award-winning educational and digital resources. CSC conducts cutting-edge research on the emotional, psychological, and financial journey of cancer patients and advocates at all levels of government for policies to help individuals whose lives have been disrupted by cancer. To search for a local affiliate, visit their website.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 888.793.9355

Website: www.cancersupportcommunity.org

Information and Support

American Cancer Society

Provides information about cancer, treatment options, support groups, and general health. Cancer information specialists are available 24 hours a day through the hotline. Contact Information:

Toll Free Telephone: 800.ACS.2345

Website: www.cancer.org

Candlelighters NYC

Organization that assists through all stages: discovery, diagnosis, education, treatment and remission. We provide an emotional support system full of love and comfort while they are so far away from home. We add quality of life to children with cancer by providing them with a fun, positive atmosphere to help them feel normal in a situation that is so far from that.

Contact Information:

Website: www.candlelightersnyc.org

Children’s Brain Tumor Foundation (CBTF)

A non-profit organization that offers children’s support, counseling, information/ education, and advocacy services to families and survivors through a free *Resource Guide for Parents of Children with Brain and Spinal Cord Tumors*. Programs include educational conferences, Parent-to-Parent Network, and the Family Outreach Project.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 212.448.9494

Website: www.cbtf.org

Friends of Karen

Friends of Karen serves children from birth to 21 years of age who live in the New York metropolitan area and have been diagnosed with cancer or any life-threatening illness. Friends of Karen’s mission is to provide emotional, financial, and advocacy support for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families, in order to help keep them stable, functioning, and able to cope.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 914.277.4547

Website: www.friendsofkaren.org

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

The following services are provided for individuals living with a blood cancer: financial assistance, educational programs and brochures, an informational website, family support groups, and a peer-to-peer support program. Programs and materials for children, families, schools and healthcare professionals to help manage the return to school are also provided.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 1.800.955.4572

Website: www.lls.org

Make-A-Wish Foundation of the Hudson Valley

Grants wishes to children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope, strength and joy. To qualify for a wish, the child must be older than 2½ years old and younger than 18 (at the time of referral) and must not have received a wish from another wish-granting organization. A child can be referred to the Make-A-Wish Foundation by a parent or guardian, a medical professional, or by the child.

Contact Information:

Phone: 914.478.9474

Website: www.wish.org/hudson

Making Headway Foundation

Supportive care for families of children with brain or spinal cord tumors. Monthly support groups for children with cancer, their parents, and siblings. Groups are located in New York City and New Jersey. No fee.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 914.238.8384

Website: www.makingheadway.org

SuperSibs

A non-profit organization that provides support for siblings between the ages of 4 and 18 of children with cancer. No fee.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 866.333.1213

Website: www.alexislemonade.org/childhood-cancer/for-families/supersib

Bereavement**Calvary Hospital Bereavement Department**

Through Calvary Hospital, the Bereavement Department offers 25 groups across three sites for adults, children, and teens. A week- long summer camp for bereaved children is also available.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 718.518.2000

Website: www.calvaryhospital.org/patients-families/bereavement-department-welcome/

The Caring Circle of Hospice Care in Westchester and Putnam

Provides age specific bereavement groups for children and teens. Caregivers' groups meet at the same time as children's groups. No fee.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 914.666.4228

The Den

A non-profit organization that provides a safe, caring place for children, teens and families to explore their feelings about the loss of a family member or friend and begin the journey toward healing. Children and their families participate in groups led by professionals and trained volunteer facilitators.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 203.869.4848

Website: www.familycenters.org

The Dougy Center

A non-profit organization that offers grief support services to children and their families. Through their National Center for Grieving Children and Families, they provide support and training locally, nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations wishing to assist children in grief.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 503.775.5683

Website: www.dougy.org

The Tree House of the Bereavement Center of Westchester

Offers bereavement support to children, teens, and adults. The Tree House and School Outreach program specifically serve families and children within the tri-state area.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 914.787.6158

Website: www.thebereavementcenter.org

Westchester Jewish Community Services

Offers adult bereavement groups and individual bereavement counseling for children, teens, and adults. Social workers are also available to work with families at end of life. Sliding scale fee.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 914.761.0600

Website: www.wjcs.com

Camps

Camp Kesem

Camp Kesem is a nationwide community, driven by over 5,700 passionate college student leaders, that supports children through and beyond their parent's cancer. Kesem operates 137 free summer camps in 44 states for children ages 6 to 18 who have been impacted by a parent's cancer. No fee.

Contact Information:

Phone: 253-736-3821

Website: <https://www.kesem.org/>

Camp Simcha

Kosher camp for children with cancer and related illnesses. Offers separate 3-week sessions for girls and boys ages 6 to 16. Round trip transportation is provided. Located in Glen Spey, New York. No fee.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 212.699.6661

Website: www.campsimcha.org

Happiness is Camping

An overnight camp in New Jersey for children with cancer and their siblings ages 6 to 16. Children can go for one of six 5-7-day sessions. Transportation is provided to and from the New York City office. No fee.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 718.295.3100

Website: www.happinessiscamping.org

Hole in the Wall Gang Camp

An overnight camp for children ages 7 to 15 years who have cancer or another serious childhood illness that makes it medically difficult for them to attend other camps. Children go for one of nine week-long sessions. There are camps in Florida, Connecticut, New York, Ireland, and France. No fee.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 203.772.0522

Website: www.holeinthewallgang.org

Ronald McDonald Camp

Residential camp for children ages 7 to 17 with cancer, on or off therapy, and siblings. Junior counseling program for teens ages 18 to 19. No fee for children with cancer; \$100 fee for sibling. There is a limit of one sibling per family. The program is for one week in mid-August.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 215.387.8406

Website: www.rmhcphilly.org/camp/

Sunrise Day Camp

A day camp for children ages 3 1/2 – 16 with cancer and their siblings. It is a camp designed to meet the emotional, social, recreational and physical needs of these children while allowing them to enjoy the comforts and safety of their own homes at night. This camp is free of charge for all children undergoing treatment.

Contact Information:

Telephone: 914.343.5405

Website: www.sunrisedaycamp.org.

Miscellaneous Resources – Websites, Videos, Pamphlets and Video Games

Websites

www.griefnet.org

Internet community that provides over thirty e-mail support groups. Has moderated chat rooms for kids in grief and parents. Contains lists of books, library information, memorials, newsletters, and suicide prevention.

www.grouploop.org

Online support groups and bulletin board for teens with cancer and teens close to cancer.

www.kidshealth.org

Information for kids, parents, and teenagers on general health and illness related topics.

www.stupidcancer.org

Non-profit organization that provides advocacy, research, and support to adolescents and young adults living with cancer.

www.teencanceramerica.org

Information for teens with cancer including medical facts, social/school issues, nutrition and exercise, and relaxation. Includes discussion boards and on-line support groups.

Annotated Bibliography

Books for Professionals

Grollman, E. A. (1993). *Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love*. Beacon.

~A guide that offers advice and addresses issues that teens may have after the death of a loved one such as normal reactions to the shock of death, how to work through grief, and how grief can alter relationships.

Grollman, E. A. (1996). *Bereaved Children & Teens: A Support Guide for Parents and Professionals*. Beacon.

~A guide written by 14 professionals on how to help children and teens through the emotional, religious, physical, and social aspects of experiencing the death of a loved one. Topics include what to say to small children, and how to explain different religious beliefs in words children can understand.

Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers. (1998). The Dougy Center.

~A helpful resource for teachers in elementary, middle, and high school that offers tips and information on how to respond to a death.

Keene, N. (2003). *Educating the Child with Cancer: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*. Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation.

~A book that addresses learning issues for children with cancer from infancy to adulthood including education in the hospital and at home, school re-entry, and cognitive, psychological and physical effects of treatment. Also includes a list of resources. Free copies are available for families and teachers with a child with cancer. Call 1-800-366-2223 or go to www.candlelighters.org.

McCue, K. (2011). *How to Help Children Through a Parent's Serious Illness*.

~A book that provides supportive, practical advice on how parent's and professionals can support a child.

Books for Children about Cancer

Ages 3-8

Blake, C., Blanchard, E., & Parkinson, K. (1998). *The Paper Chain*. Health Press.

~An illustrated book that tells the story of how one family coped while their mother was in the hospital during her cancer treatment.

Dodd, M. *Oliver's Story: For Sibs of Kids with Cancer*. Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation.

~Written through the eyes of a six-year-old, this book addresses many questions siblings may have when their brother or sister is diagnosed with cancer. It also provides suggestions for how they can be helpful in the process.

Homer, M. (1999). *Chemo Crusader and the Cancer Fighting Crew*. PEPCO.
~An illustrated book for kids with cancer. It explains cancer and how medicines are used to fight it using simple language easy for very young children to understand.

King, H. E. (1995). *Kemo Shark*. Kidscope, Inc.
~A cartoon illustrated book written by a child psychologist. It features “Kemo” the shark who explains how chemotherapy works to fight cancer.

Kohlenberg, S. (1994). *Sammy’s Mommy Has Cancer*. Gareth Stevens Publishing
~An illustrated book for very young children. Follows the story of a toddler whose mom gets diagnosed with cancer. Explains in very simple sentences what cancer is and the treatment that his mom will go through.

Numeroff, L., & Harpham, W. (1999). *The Hope Tree: Kids Talk about Breast Cancer*. Simon & Schuster.
~Children of women with breast cancer share their feelings and experiences to help families talk about the difficult issues of breast cancer in healthy ways. Comforting animal characters are used to help make the information more accessible to children.

Ages 9-12

Ackermann, A. & Ackermann, A. (2000). *Our Mom has Cancer*. American Cancer Society.
~An illustrated book written by two sisters about their own experiences when their mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Gives the perspective of a 9-year-old and an 11-year-old during the process of things such as chemotherapy, hair loss, etc.

Clifford, C. (1998). *Our Family Has Cancer, Too!* University of Minnesota Press.
~A book for families to read together, this book addresses questions that children may have after a parent is diagnosed with cancer. Contains suggestions for how to discuss certain issues as well as a glossary of cancer related terms.

Ganz, P. & Scofield, T. (1996). *Life Isn’t Always a Day at the Beach*. Ganz High Five Publishing.
~A cartoon illustrated workbook for kids to color themselves to help them learn and understand their feelings about their parent’s cancer.

Hague, M. & Krisher, T. (1992). *Kathy’s Hats: A Story of Hope*. Albert Whitman and Company.
~An illustrated book about a 9-year-old girl with cancer. It addresses the feelings of awkwardness and ugliness that occur throughout treatment.

Keene, N. (2002). *Chemo, Crazyness & Comfort: My Book About Childhood Cancer*. Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation.

~A book that provides clear explanations and practical advice for children with cancer along with warm and funny illustrations to help kids make sense of cancer and treatment. To obtain a copy go to www.candlelighters.org.

Richmond, C. (1997). *Chemo Girl: Saving the World One Treatment at a Time*. Jones and Bartlett Publishing.

~Written and illustrated by a 12-year-old cancer patient, depicts Chemo Girl's adventures in saving a little girl from cancer.

Speltz, A. (2003). *The Year My Mother Was Bald*. Magination Press.

~Clare's journal and scrapbook the year her mother is diagnosed with cancer and goes through treatment. Clare tells her story and shares her feelings. Young readers will learn to understand the science of cancer and its treatments and will take comfort in knowing that their feelings are normal and that they are not alone.

Ages 13+

Dorfman, E.V. (1998). *The C-Word: Teenagers and their Families Living with Cancer*. Elena Dorfman.

~Five teens and their families and friends are interviewed on what it has been like for them living with cancer. Many issues such as fears about relationships and chemotherapy are talked about in straightforward fashion.

Fine, J. (1986). *Afraid to Ask: A Book About Cancer*. Lothrop.

~An excellent and highly readable reference volume that includes information about more than 20 specific types of cancer, offered in a question and answer format. Addresses emotional concerns as well as scientific facts. Ages 12 and up.

Gravelle, K., & Bertram, J. (2000). *Teenagers Face to Face with Cancer*. Backprint.com.

~Kids from grade 7 and up describe their treatment and how cancer has affected their lives. The authors provide facts about common teen cancers.

Strauss, L.L. (1988). *Coping When a Parent Has Cancer*. The Rosen Publishing Group.

~Offers suggestions for dealing with the problems teenagers face when a parent has cancer.

Books for Children about Death and Dying

Ages 3-8

Brown, L. K. & Brown, M. (1996). *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death*. Little, Brown.

~Addresses in simple language the fears and questions children have about death such as "What does dead mean?" and "Why does someone die?"

Brown, M. (1995). *The Dead Bird*. HarperTrophy.

~A group of children find a dead bird, bury it, and visit and put flowers on the grave everyday.

Cohn, J. & Owens, G. (1987). *I Had a Friend Named Peter: Talking to Children About the Death of a Friend*. William Morrow.

~An illustrated book about a girl whose friend gets hit by a car and dies. Her parents talk to her about things such as what death means, the funeral and burial.

Mills, J. (1993). *Gentle Willow: A Story for Children About Dying*. Magination Press.
~In this story, illustrated by Michael Chesworth, Amanda the squirrel calls upon the Tree Wizards of the forest to help Gentle Willow, who is suffering from a mysterious ailment. Amanda experiences emotions common to us all when facing death—loss, confusion, anger, and finally, hope.

Mundy, M. (1998). *Sad Is Not Bad: A Good Grief Guidebook for Children Dealing with Loss*. Abbey Press.

~This guide, which has fourteen sections of two to three paragraphs each, discusses the various aspects of grief, and the ways that people cope with the death of a loved one. It tells children what they need to know after a loss: that the world is still safe, that life is good, and that hurting hearts do mend. Vocabulary is geared to ages 4-8, but the book is useful for all ages.

Viorst, J. (1971). *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*. Atheneum.

~A boy's cat dies and he and his family think about ten things they liked about him. Describes in simple language the emotions that the boy goes through after the death of his cat. Also address questions about the finality of death and what happens after death.

Ages 9-12

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl. (1952). Doubleday.

~A diary kept by a teenager living in hiding in Nazi Germany. It chronicles her experiences for two years ending in her death at a concentration camp.

Brisson, P. (1999). *Sky Memories*. Delacorte.

~An 11-year-old girl recalls and is comforted by the memories she shared with her mother who has died of cancer.

Burnett, F. H. (1987). *A Little Princess*. HarperTrophy.

~A book about what happens to a young girl after her father dies. To help get through hard times at boarding school, the young girl fantasizes that she is a princess.

White, E. B. (1976). *Charlotte's Web*. Harper & Row.

~A pig named Wilbur develops a very special friendship with a spider named Charlotte. Through this very special friendship, the cycle of life and the natural process of death are explored.

Rofes, E. E. (1985). *The Kid's Book About Death and Dying: By and For Kids*. Little Brown & Co.

~Fourteen kids offer facts and advice to help other kids better understand death. Addresses topics such as different funeral customs, death of pets, autopsies, and euthanasia.

Ages 13+

Alcott, L. (1969). *Little Women*. World Publications.

~A story about four sisters growing up in New England in the 1800's. It follows their journey into womanhood through celebrations, family crises, and the death of a loved one.

Fitzgerald, H. (2000). *The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends*. Fireside, a division of Simon & Schuster.

~The author focuses on the special needs of adolescents, offering clear and concrete help for dealing with a range of difficult emotions and situations, including family changes, issues with friends, and problems at school.

Green, C. (1976). *Beat the Turtle Drum*. Viking.

~A story of how a young girl comes to terms with her sister's death.

Gunther, J. (1949). *Death Be Not Proud*. Harper & Row.

~A true story, told through a father's perspective, about the experience of one seventeen-year-old boy diagnosed with a brain tumor. The story, which ends in the boy's death, focuses on his courage, wit, and uplifting spirit

Rawls, W. (1984). *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Random House Children's Books.

~A story about a boy and two dogs who become his best friends. They have many adventures together, one of which ends in the death of both dogs. The boy, in his grief, is comforted when he hears the old Native American legend of the red fern that grows over the dogs' graves.

Romain, T. (1999). *What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?* Free Spirit. ~A book that explains in straightforward language what death means, and answers questions that kids may have about death.

For All Ages

Buscaglia, L. (1982). *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf*. Slack.

~A simple story about a leaf that changes with the passing of the seasons and learns that death is a part of life.

Books for Parents

Babcock, E.N. (1997). *When Life Becomes Precious: A Guide for Loved Ones and Friends of Cancer Patients*. Bantam Books.

~See in particular, Chapter 9, "How to Support Your Children When Someone They Love Has Cancer: Sharing the News and Helping Them Understand

Emswiler, M.A. & Emswiler, J.P. (2000). *Guiding Your Child Through Grief*. Bantam Books.

~Many of the practical suggestions in this book have equal relevance for families dealing with the challenges and changes due to parental illness.

Grollman, E.A. (1991). *Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child*. Beacon.

~A book designed to help parents talk with children about the death of a loved one. Features a read-along story that parents and children can read together as well as a list of resources and related organizations.

Emotional Aspects of Childhood Leukemia: A Handbook for Parents. The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

~Contains advice on how to handle the new demands that parents will face, how to talk to children about the diagnosis, and issues relating to the end of treatment. Also includes a list of helpful resources. To obtain a free copy call 1-800-955-4572 or go to www.leukemia-lymphoma.org.

Harpham, W. S. (1997). *When a Parent Has Cancer: A Guide to Caring for Your Children*. Harper Collins.

~Advice on how to approach common problems that may arise when a parent has cancer. Mostly addresses how to care for children under the age of ten but also contains a chapter on teens. Includes a companion book for kids, *Becky and the Worry Cup*.

Heiney, S. P., Hermann, J. F., Bruss, K. V., & Fincannon, J. L. (2001). *Cancer in the Family: Helping Children Cope with a Parent's Illness*. American Cancer Society.

~This book outlines valuable steps necessary to help children understand what happens when a parent has been diagnosed with cancer.

McCue, K. M.A., C.C.L.S. & Bonn, R. (1994). *How to Help Children Through a Parent's Serious Illness: Supportive, Practical Advice from a Leading Child Life Specialist*. St. Martin's Press.

~Excellent resource for both dual-parent and single-parent families.

Russell, N. (2001). *Can I Still Kiss You? Answering Children's Questions About Cancer*. Health Communications.

~A question and answer book written by a cancer patient who wrote down the questions he was asked by his children during his cancer experience.

Thirty-five Ways to Help a Grieving Child. (1999). The Dougy Center.

~A guide for caregivers that offers suggestions for how to help grieving children and teens express their feelings. It also provides information on reactions and behaviors to expect from grieving children at different ages.

The mission of Gilda's Club Westchester is to ensure that all people impacted by cancer are empowered by knowledge, strengthened by action and sustained by community.

Our innovative program is an essential complement to medical care, providing networking and support groups, workshops, education and social activities.



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