

How to Cope When Your Child Is Diagnosed with Cancer

Nothing can prepare you for the feeling of learning that your child has cancer. All of these unfamiliar stresses and feelings can be so much to bear. However, there are ways to cope and deal with the emotions that both you and your child may be facing.

We share some tips for parents from parents who've been through it on how to cope with some of the stress and unfamiliar situations post-diagnosis:

Lean On Those Around You

Your support system is larger than you'd think, and they want to help you during your child's health journey.

Don't be shy to ask for what you need. Financial assistance, helping with meals or carpool, taking care of the pet or housework can all be areas of life that need extra hands during this time.

However, keeping track of all the people who want to help will likely be overwhelming. Designate a trusted friend or family member to coordinate what people can do, so you can keep your focus on your child.

Tip: A free CaringBridge online health journal allows you to update everyone at once, so all your loved ones know what's happening in your child's health journey. Loved ones can comment their support on your journal entries, and our on-site Planner lets you easily coordinate care needs.

To learn more or start a site today visit:
www.caringbridge.org/pediatric

“Support from everyone, family and friends, and even a stranger really makes a difference when your world is falling apart.” -Tina W.

Seek Out Specialists

In addition to your loved ones, your hospital's social workers and child life specialists are experienced resources who can offer amazing support in this time.

They can teach you distraction techniques for getting your child through procedures and other aspects of treatment. They also work with your child's siblings, help your family cope, and direct you on how much information to share with your child given his or her age.



Journal

You're likely feeling overwhelmed or scared in this unfamiliar time. Keeping a journal can help you process these thoughts and feelings and keep you grounded.

Simply writing things down can have a positive effect - potentially resulting in less anxiety surrounding treatment or appointments, and helping you cope with what you and your child are experiencing.

Research, But Know When to Take a Break

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Speak to Parents with Similar Experiences

There is strength in community. Even if you feel as though you're alone in this experience, there are people out there willing to talk you through this difficult time. Whether they're parents of a child that has or had cancer, or even had cancer themselves, they can share their strength and guide you through what to expect in the cancer journey process.

“Make friends with other parents on the ward and spend time with them while the children are asleep, rather than sitting alone with your thoughts.” -Lena W.



Get to Know Your Medical Team

Depending on the aggressiveness of the cancer and the type, your child may be in the hospital frequently following their diagnosis. Your medical team is there to support you through it all.

Your child's doctors can refer you to classes or support groups for parents that have a child experiencing cancer, and will do their best to answer any questions you might have. If you are able to take your child home, ask them how best to care for them there.

Getting to know your care team will help you feel more comfortable and confident when asking questions about your child's treatment or condition.

Take Care of Yourself As Best You Can

It might not seem like the right time, but taking care of yourself remains one of the most important things you can do. It's harder to take care of your child and be present with their care when your health is not prioritized. Start simple, with activities like:

- **Exercise** - Pick a method you enjoy, whether it be yoga, biking or a long walk
- **Eat well** - Consume what makes your body and mind feel good
- **Rest up** - Try to get those 7-8 hours of ZZZs
- **Read a book** - Engage in an activity that helps your mind escape
- **Deep breaths** - Self-care can be as simple as taking a cleansing breath

See a Counselor

The emotional toll of your child having cancer impacts your whole family, and you may experience deep emotions like grief and trauma.

Grief counseling can help your family work through big decisions about treatment and find healthy ways to cope with the pain of your child's diagnosis. Prioritizing your family's mental health can give you all resilience, and protect your marriage and other relationships through this time.

Keep a Health Binder

Making a health binder can help you keep information organized and assist in your discussion with doctors.

Being an active participant in your child's treatment can help you hold your doctors accountable, and present yourself as a well-informed, honest and committed parent. This can encourage doctors, nurses, clinicians and others to be respectful of your judgment.

Your binder can also help you get familiar with how your child reacts to certain medications, what works the best, and what doesn't work. Plus, having all of the information together in one spot may speed up appointments, which can create a better quality of life for you and your child.



Make a Hospital Stay More Comfortable

If your child will be hospitalized for some longer stretches, bring familiar items from home like fluffy pillows, cozy blankets and stuffed animals to make the stay more comfortable for your family. Some hospitals may let you hang things on the wall like drawings or cards. Little things like this can help.

Accept the New Normal

Instead of focusing on getting back to the life you had, try to shift your focus on your "new normal." Take time to mourn the loss, but then look to the present. A new person has emerged from this struggle, and it can help to find ways to bring that new person fulfillment. One way of doing this is by looking for little moments of joy and hope in yours and your child's life.

“The bottom line is that set-backs will inevitably happen, but the response cannot be despair but instead recognize that there are challenges, but you have a lot of support and help available to you. Also, relish those good results and just remember to try and just ENJOY your time with your child and to do that you have to be able to let your mind relax for a while.” -Jon H.

CaringBridge is a global, nonprofit social network dedicated to helping family and friends communicate with and support loved ones during a health journey. We offer free, personal, protected websites for people to easily share updates and receive strength and encouragement from their community. This article was pulled from our families' insights in collaboration with experts.

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