

# When a Parent Has Cancer



## For patients with cancer and their families

Read this guide to learn:

- How to talk to your child about your cancer diagnosis
- How you can expect children at different ages to react
- Resources that can be helpful to your family



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## Helping your child cope with your cancer diagnosis

It can be hard to talk to your child about your illness. Children are different and will react to cancer in their own way. Learning about these topics can help you and your family cope during this difficult time:

- how to talk to your child about cancer
- how your child may react
- other helpful resources

You know your child better than anyone else. It's up to you to decide when, how and what to tell your child. If you need more information or have any concerns about how your child is coping, your health care team is ready to help.



### Talking to your child about cancer

#### Should I tell my child about my illness?

This is a very personal decision that each family has to make. Here are a few things to think about:

- Even very young children know when something is wrong. These are all signs to children that things are not normal:
  - changes to their regular daily schedule
  - more relatives and friends coming to visit
  - seeing people upset
  - whispered phone calls
- Children have very good imaginations. If they notice things are not normal, they can think of lots of scary reasons. These thoughts may worry them more than the truth.

- If your child finds out from someone else, you may damage the trust they have in you.
- Children can feel very alone if they aren't told. They might feel they're not important enough to be included in something that affects the whole family.
- Being honest and open with your child may help your family become closer.
- Adults often don't realize how well children can deal with the truth. Even hearing very sad news is better than the worry they feel when they don't know what's happening.

We can't stop them from feeling sad. But we share our feelings and give them information about what's happening.

### **Who should tell my child?**

- Even though it's a very hard thing to do, it's best for you to tell your child if you feel able to.
- If you don't feel able to tell your child, your partner or a close relative such as a grandparent, can do it. It's important that you know what they say to your child. It may be helpful for you to be there for the talk.

### **When should I tell my child?**

- It's usually best for your child to know about your illness as early as possible after your diagnosis.
- You don't have to tell them everything at the same time. You can give a bit of information at a time.
- Be consistent in the way you explain things. Always check to see if your child understood what you said.
- Tell them information before things happen, but not too soon. For example, tell them when you have a scan or treatment coming up.

- After you finish treatment, tell them about your health and any changes. Make sure they know you will share all information with them.
- Talk to your child when they ask questions or seem worried about your health. But, keep your answers short and stay on topic.

### **Is it okay for me to be upset in front of my child?**

It's OK to get upset or cry. Seeing you cry lets your child know that it's OK for them to cry and express their feelings too. Crying together is a way of sharing your feelings and supporting each other.

**Talk to your child about feelings and how important it is to express them. Express your own feelings instead of hiding them.**

### **What should I tell them?**

- You may want to practice what you will say. Think about and plan answers for the questions your child may ask. Use words that your child will understand.
- Ask them what they think cancer is. If they're not sure, explain it as well as you can.
- It's very helpful to use the word **cancer**. Nicknames like, "the big C" or saying things like, "I have a bad seed growing inside" can be confusing to your child.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know" if you don't know the answer to their question. Some questions don't have answers. Other answers only become clear as time passes. But, try not to say, "I don't know" all the time because your child might start to feel scared and unsure.
- Tell them that they didn't cause your cancer, and nothing they do will make it worse or make it go away. Explain that you have doctors who have a plan to help you get better.
- Tell them your cancer can't spread to other people. They or their healthy parent can't catch it. It's a different kind of illness than a cold or chicken pox.

- Let them know what will happen next. For example:
  - what will happen to you
  - how their daily schedules will change
  - who will take care of them if you are in the hospital

Talk about only the upcoming days or weeks. Talk about long-term issues only if your child has a specific concern.
- Ask your child if they are worried about anything in particular. Listen closely to their answer. What they say can become important in future talks with your child.
- Make sure your child knows that it's OK to talk and ask questions, even if you both feel sad and upset. Set aside plenty of time to talk. Choose times when you won't be interrupted.



### **Some examples of what to say to your child**

I have an illness. It's called cancer. The doctor is giving me medicine to help me get well. Sometimes I will feel ill or tired, and sometimes I will feel fine. Dad/Mom will help me to take care of you until I feel better.

Being ill makes me feel sad. You are a help. But it's all right for you to feel sad (or angry or worried). Our feelings change but Mommy/Daddy and I will always love you.

A lump was growing in my body that wasn't supposed to be there. It's called cancer. The doctors took it out in the operation I had. Now I will have treatment so that it doesn't come back.

If you have any questions about cancer, you can ask me. Sometimes you hear scary things about cancer, but there are lots of different kinds of cancer. I will tell you what we know about my cancer.

The cancer is trying to grow again. That makes me angry and sad too. I have to take very strong medicine (or have another operation or radiotherapy) to try to get rid of it. Doctors know a lot about taking care of people when this happens. They think that this treatment will help me.

## **What if they ask if I will die?**

Many children have heard of cancer and know that people can die from it. If they ask you if you will die:

- Tell them the truth about what you know about your cancer.
- If it's very treatable, tell them people very rarely die from your kind of cancer.
- If you're not sure about your health after your treatment, tell them sometimes people can die from cancer. But, it's different for everyone and you hope to get better. Tell them your doctors are doing the best job they can to make you better.
- Promise them you will let them know about any other information or changes.

Let them know they may see changes in how you look (for example, you may lose weight or hair) as you go through treatment. It may seem to them that you are getting worse, but it's part of you getting better. If you like, use children's storybooks to help explain the side effects of your treatment.

If you have questions or concerns about how to best support your children, talk to your health care team.

## **How can I protect them from pain?**

- You can't take their pain away, but being honest, supportive and there when they need you can help your children cope. Children learn from experiences and every experience is an opportunity to learn. It helps them grow and understand.
- Pretending that nothing is wrong may cause your child to think their pain and fear isn't real. Or, they may feel you don't think they're strong enough to cope.
- A big part of your job as a parent has been to protect your children from bad things. Unfortunately, pain is sometimes part of life. Now is the time to help your children build their inner strength and courage. The best way to help them cope is to let them know they are loved and cared for.

## **How do I know if they're having problems coping?**

It's normal for your child's feelings and behaviour to change for a few weeks after they hear about your cancer. During this time, comfort them and accept them. Let them know it's OK to experience many different feelings.

If the changes last longer than the first few weeks, they may be having problems coping. Some signs include:

- A normally quiet child starts to misbehave and argue all the time.
- A child who is normally selfish starts taking care of everyone in the family.
- A friendly child becomes moody and quiet.
- Your child starts acting younger than they are. This is normal when children are stressed, but if it lasts longer than a few weeks, they may be having trouble coping.
- Your child has trouble sleeping for a month or more.
- Your child is having more trouble than usual with schoolwork. Let them know they are still responsible for working hard at school.
- Your child no longer wants to do normal activities like sports or playing with friends. Let them know they can and should still try to enjoy their favourite activities.

Talk with your child's caregivers (for example: daycare staff, teacher, babysitter or a play group supervisor). They may notice things that you don't notice at home.



If the problems continue even after talking with your child, you may want to find extra help or advice.

## **Where can I get help?**

- Talk to your family doctor, clergy, a school counsellor or a hospital social worker for advice and/or a referral.
- You can find relevant information at your clinic, the Princess Margaret Patient and Family Library, your local library, and the internet. The Magic Castle also has resources for the whole family.
- Some hospitals have Child Life Specialists. They work with children who are dealing with serious medical conditions. Ask your doctor if there is a Child Life Specialist at your hospital.
- Talk to other cancer patients and ask them what worked for their families.
- Ask a close friend or family member for help, especially if you are feeling ill, overwhelmed or exhausted. Ask them to contact some of the resources listed in this guide or find out about resources in your community.
- Share the Kids Help Phone number with your child to provide them a confidential space to talk to professional counsellors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1 800 668 6868.
- Find out if you may be covered by private family insurance plans such as an Employee Assistance Program. Ask your child or teen if they would like to use the counselling services.

## Common ways children react to a parent having cancer

### Infants and toddlers (up to 2 years old)



#### What's important to know about this age group?

- Children in this age group are at the early stages of development. Their comfort is based on the levels of attachments they have with their primary caregivers.
- They can't always understand what you explain to them, but they can feel comfort or discomfort.
- They don't understand ideas like 'yesterday' or 'tomorrow.' They only understand what's happening now.
- They know when something is gone, but they can't understand the idea that it can come back. That's why separating things or people from them is so upsetting.
- Their sense of belonging is built based on a loving relationship with parents and primary caregivers. When they sense that something has changed, they show a range of emotions and need support and attention as they depend on you to keep them safe and feel loved.
- Even though they can't say so, they know when something is wrong with their parents, and they feel the loss when a loved one isn't around.
- It can take some time for them to feel comfortable if a parent looks different or is in an unfamiliar place, like the hospital.

#### What is most scary or upsetting?

- Being separated from their parent or parents (or main caregiver)
- Not feeling comforted or safe
- Sudden changes to their regular daily schedules
- Someone else's needs being put ahead of their own

## **What can you do to help your child cope?**

- Keep giving them lots of comfort (hugs, kisses, cuddles). If you are in the hospital, try to have your child come for short visits often, especially when they are ready for a bottle or quiet story. Remember to have someone bring some favourite toys.
- Try to keep regular routines (as much as possible).
- Try not to use too many different caregivers.
- If you have to take them somewhere new, bring familiar toys or other objects.
- If they have to come with you to appointments, bring food, toys and/or a comforting blanket or stuffed animal.
- Give them a -shirt or scarf that has your scent on it. This can help provide them comfort when you are not around.

## **Preschool children (ages 3 to 5)**

### **What's important to know about this age group?**

- Children in this age group are focused on their parents and themselves.
- They can only understand very simple words when you try to explain something.
- They are starting to understand things like yesterday and tomorrow, but they can't understand how long to wait until a certain date or event.
- They are starting to understand very simple ideas about how the body works, but ideas like illness are difficult.
- Even though they can't always say so, they know when something is wrong with their parents. They feel loss when a loved one isn't around.
- They can pay attention to what you are saying a little more, but after a short time, they want to go back and play.
- They use play as a way to make sense of the world and express their feelings.



## **What is most scary or upsetting?**

- Believing they caused the cancer or they have the power to change it
- How their own lives will change
- Thinking they can catch cancer, like a cold or chicken pox
- The physical changes they see in their parent (like losing hair or a body part)
- What other children will do or say about how different their parent looks
- New and different places like the hospital

## **What can you do to help your child cope?**

- Be clear and talk simply to your child. Children this age don't understand long words or many medical terms. It may help to draw a picture of what's happening. Their questions can be unpredictable, so be prepared.
- Be available to answer any questions and to talk any time.
- Try to keep regular daily schedules (as much as possible). Tell them about any changes in their schedule for the day or in the near future.
- Give your child lots of hugs, cuddles, or kisses. They feel comfort when you are close.
- If you are in the hospital and when you are able to spend more time with them, try to have your child come for short visits. This helps them feel included and lessens their fears about being in a hospital. Talking to your doctor or nurse can also help them understand why you are in hospital.
- Provide them with toys like dolls, puppets, doctor's kits, or a toy ambulance.
- If your child has to come with you to appointments, bring snacks, toys and drawing supplies.

- Reassure children that you are still the parent. Letting them know there are still rules is even more important during stressful times.
- Avoid saying things like, “Be very quiet so mommy can get better.” Young children may think it means it’s their fault when their parent gets sick.
- Read books that relate to your situation or similar stories about animals, living things, hospitals, doctors and nurses.
- Pretend play can help them learn and understand what’s happening. It’s important to support this, so provide a corner with toys and items that children can use during pretend play.

## **School age children (ages 6 to 10)**

### **What’s important to know about this age group?**

- Children in this age group still depend on their parents and need attention.
- They want to fit in with their friends.
- They are starting to use reason and common sense in their thinking.
- They are concerned about rules and fairness.
- They are interested in how different parts of the body work.
- They use play and creative arts to make sense of the world and express their feelings.
- They are more aware of their feelings and why they have them.
- They learn quickly and use what they learn to find more information.



## **What is most scary or upsetting?**

- Thinking their parent will die
- Thinking that their healthy parent will get sick too
- Thinking they did something to cause the cancer or they have the power to change it
- How their own lives will change and who will take care of them
- Not knowing what will happen next
- Mistaken ideas about cancer because of things they heard from friends or saw on TV
- What their friends will say or think about their parent's cancer

## **What can you do to help your child cope?**

- Try to keep regular routines (as much as possible).
- Be calm and provide them with lots of hugs and kisses. Children this age can feel lonely and worried. Being near and reassuring them can help.
- Let your child feel angry. It's a natural part of adjusting to your illness.
- Reassure children that you are still the parent. Letting them know there are still rules is even more important during stressful times. Now is not the time to bend the rules.
- Let your child know what will happen soon. Children this age can't think weeks or months ahead.
- Don't take it personally if your child seems more interested in your IV or your surgery scar than how you feel. Children this age are very interested in how the body works.
- Explain your illness, treatment and any equipment you need. Make sure you give them the right information in case they have mistaken ideas.
- Provide lots of time for your children to talk or ask questions, but don't be surprised if they don't want to talk when you do.

- If the parent is in the hospital, try to plan things that the parent and child can do together like watching a video, reading a book, or playing a board game.
- Tell your child again and again that they didn't cause your illness and can't do anything to change it.
- Be patient and understanding.



## Preteens (ages 11 to 13)

### What's important to know about this age group?

- Children in this age group start to build important relationships outside of their family.
- Their friends are very important to them and peer pressure starts to affect them.
- They need facts to help them understand information.
- They are beginning to think abstractly. This means they can use facts to create their own ideas or meanings of things.
- They want more freedom but still struggle to be responsible.
- They may use play or creative arts to make sense of the world and express their feelings.
- They are self-centred. Their ideas and thoughts are often about how things will affect them.
- Their frustration may cover-up their real feelings.



## **What is most scary or upsetting to them?**

- Thinking their parent will die
- Thinking that their healthy parent will get sick too
- How their own lives will change
- How their parent's cancer will affect their social life
- Not knowing what will happen next
- Mistaken ideas about cancer because of things they heard from friends or saw on TV

## **What can you do to help your child cope?**

- Let your child know they should continue their regular activities.
- Talk to staff at your child's school regularly to make sure everything is OK.
- Let your child feel angry. It's a natural part of adjusting to your illness.
- Reassure your child that you are still the parent. Letting them know there are still rules that need to be followed is important. Keep their regular routines in place. Routine plays a very important part in their life.
- Let them know what will happen during the next few days or weeks, even if they don't seem interested. They should learn the facts from you, not from other sources.
- Tell your child that the most important way to help is to keep working hard at school.
- Encourage your child to keep their relationships with friends and other important adults in their life.
- Keep up with family traditions but also talk about how the cancer may affect your family at holidays or events that are coming up.

- Provide lots of time for your children to talk or ask questions, but don't be surprised if they don't want to talk when you do.
- If you are in the hospital, try to plan things that you and your child can do together like watching a video, reading a book, or playing a board game.
- Tell your child again and again that they didn't cause your illness and can't do anything to change it.
- Regularly ask questions to check that your child has the right information about your illness. If they don't, make sure you provide it.
- Use different resources to help you find the right words when talking about your cancer.
- Be patient and understanding. They need time to cope.

## Teenagers (ages 14 to 18)



### What's important to know about this age group?

- They want to be independent, but they still need their parents.
- For teenagers, their friends are at least as important as their family.
- They can understand complicated information about illness.
- They struggle with abstract ideas like the meaning of life and death.
- They care about what their friends think. What their friends think can influence what they do.
- Their increased hormones are causing them to have mood swings.
- They can talk about their feelings in more detail.
- They are self-conscious. They may feel as if the whole world is looking at them and judging them.
- Their behaviour is a bit like a roller coaster. Sometimes they may seem mature, and other times they behave as if they are much younger.

## **What is most scary or upsetting?**

- Thinking their parent will die
- Not knowing what will happen in the future
- How their own lives will change
- Their friends will reject them
- Whether they are ready to be adults
- When their life feels like it is out of control
- Feeling alone and misunderstood
- Mistaken ideas about cancer because of things they heard from friends or saw on television

## **What can you do to help your child cope?**

- Give your teen lots of information about your illness. Encourage them to ask questions and always tell them about any changes to your health.
- Let your child feel angry. It's a natural part of adjusting to your illness.
- Reassure your teen that you are still the parent. Be consistent with rules and when responding to problem behaviours.
- Be specific about what they can do to help, but be realistic about how much time you expect them to be at home.
- Try not to take it personally if your teen seems more interested in their friends and social life. Friends are their support system.
- Don't expect your teen to become an adult overnight. Allow them to be teenagers.
- Encourage your child to use a journal or sketchbook to privately express their feelings, especially if they have a hard time talking about it. Art classes and writing clubs can be very helpful at this time.

- Encourage your child to talk to another trusted adult. Sometimes it's easier for them to talk to an aunt, uncle or favourite teacher than a parent.
- Teens may want to know how the cancer will affect them. Will it get in the way of their social life? Will they have to do more chores? This is normal. Be honest with them.
- Ask your teen if they want to come with you to your appointments. This can help them understand what you're going through.

Healthy relationships support children's emotional well being. Consistent and responsive interactions help children learn in a positive way about family, community and the world around them. Using your knowledge about your child's own needs and using resources and services can help parents and children throughout this journey.

## **Resources and support services for children and their families**

### **The Magic Castle (Child Care) at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre**

620 University Ave. Room M913

Website: Search "Magic Castle" on [www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret](http://www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret)

Phone: 416 946 4501 extension 5157

Email: [Alketa.Kumbaro@uhn.ca](mailto:Alketa.Kumbaro@uhn.ca)

Ages: Infants to 12 years old

Hours: Monday to Friday, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

The program is provided by an Registered Early Childhood Educator or Family Support Worker. Support services for the families of Princess Margaret Cancer Centre are free of charge. Children of patients receiving treatments at the Princess Margaret can attend the playroom while waiting for their family members. The Magic Castle provides sensitive care and support to children in a fun, bright and safe environment.

### **Gilda's Club Toronto**

Website: [www.gildasclubtoronto.org](http://www.gildasclubtoronto.org)

Email: [info@gildasclubtoronto.org](mailto:info@gildasclubtoronto.org)

Gilda's Toronto (an affiliate of the Cancer Support Community) offers free cancer support for anyone affected by cancer and their families. Check website to register for online groups.

### **Nankind**

Website: <https://nankind.com>

Phone: 416 730 0025 extension 2

Email: [info@nankind.com](mailto:info@nankind.com)

Facebook: /NankindCanada

X: @nankindca

Instagram: @nankindca

Youtube: /@nankind

Free childcare for parents with cancer. Volunteers help children understand their parent's cancer and build resilience. Community of volunteers have specialized training to support families during their cancer journey. Also check Nankind Clubhouse and Kind Connections for support.

### **Wellspring**

Website: [www.wellspring.ca](http://www.wellspring.ca)

Offers education, support groups and programs for children, teens and parents. Check the cancer support online services for more information.

Wellspring Cancer Support Online: <https://go.wellspring.ca/online>

Interpreters are available for Cantonese, Mandarin and other languages.

### **Family Services Toronto**

Counselling and Mental Health

355 Church St.

Website: <https://familyservicetoronto.org>

Phone: 416 595 9618

Visit website to explore programs and counselling offered across the city.

**Catholic Family Services of Toronto**

Website: <https://www.cfstoronto.com>

1155 Yonge St. Suite 200

Phone: 416 921 1163

Counselling programs and services to help families and individuals.  
Counselling fees charged based on income level.

**Native Child and Family Services of Toronto**

30 College St.

Website: <https://nativechild.org/holistic-services>

Phone: 416 969 8510

**Jewish Family and Child Service of Metro Toronto**

4600 Bathurst St., 1st Floor

Website: <https://www.jfandcs.com>

Phone: 416 638 7800 extension 6234

Fees depend on income. Languages include English, French, Hebrew, Hungarian, Russian and Yiddish.

**Psychosocial Oncology Clinic**

(Department of Supportive Care at Princess Margaret)

620 University Ave., 5th floor

Monday to Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00pm

Website: [https://www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret/Clinics/Psychosocial\\_Oncology](https://www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret/Clinics/Psychosocial_Oncology)

Phone: 416 946 4525

Emotional, psychological and social services offered by social workers, music and art therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists to help patients help their children cope with the cancer. Ask for interpreter services if needed.

## **Indigenous Cancer Support Programs**

### **UHN Support Services**

Visit [www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret](http://www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret) and select “Support Resources” to find information and support for patients and community members who identify as First Nations, Inuit or Métis. Connect with a Regional Indigenous Patient Navigator.

### **Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres**

219 Front St. E. Toronto

Phone: 416 956 7575

Cancer Care Ontario Indigenous Navigators:

North region 807 684 7200 extension 4324

North East 705 522 6237 extension 2626

Erie St. Clair 519 254 5577 extension 58615

South West 519 685 8500 extension 54043

Simcoe Muskoka 249 535 3472

Central East 905 576 8711 extension 32554

South East 613 549 6666

Champlain 613 737 7700 extension 70522

Toronto Central 647 309 1794

Hamilton/Niagara/Haldimand/Brant 905 387 9711 extension 63312

### **Information Services**

#### **RETHINK Breast Cancer**

Website: [rethinkbreastcancer.com](http://rethinkbreastcancer.com)

Phone: 1 866 RETHINK (738-4465)

Facebook: /RethinkBreastCancer

X: @rethinktweet

Instagram: @rethinkbreastcancer

YouTube: /@rethinkbreastcancer1

Focuses on historically underserved groups such as those diagnosed with breast cancer at a younger age.

### **Canadian Breast Cancer Network**

Website: [www.cbcn.ca](http://www.cbcn.ca)

Email: [cbcn@cbcn.ca](mailto:cbcn@cbcn.ca)

See “Never Too Young” handbook for young women with breast cancer.

### **Canadian Cancer Society**

Website: <http://www.cancer.ca>

Information about issues that children of parents with cancer can relate to. Pamphlets available to patients and families at your closest unit office.

### **Cancer Information Service**

Cancer Assistance Program: 905 383 9797

Juravinsky Cancer Centre: 905 387 9495

Homefront Cancer Service: 905 643 0404

Cancer Information Service: 905 574 5784

Cost: No fees, Languages: English and French

Offers information over the phone about all types of cancer and general community resources. Written information can also be mailed free of charge.

### **Princess Margaret Patient and Family Library**

610 University Ave., Main Floor

Phone: 416 946 4501 extension 5383

Email: [patienteducation@uhn.ca](mailto:patienteducation@uhn.ca)

Find free, reliable, up-to-date health information in a variety of languages. Open for in-person services Monday to Friday, from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. The Library space is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. During this time, you have access to all UHN health brochures.

## **Child Care Services**

Family, friends and neighbours are often willing to provide childcare support. It can be a way for them to help and support as you cope with having cancer. It's important that you and your child feel comfortable with the caregiving skills of the person you choose.

Some other options include:

### **VHA Home Health Care**

Website: <http://www.vha.ca>

Phone: 416 489 2500 or 1 888 314 6622

Address: 30 Soudan Ave., Suite 600, Toronto

The services offered include homemaking, personal care and temporary home childcare.

### **City of Toronto Child Care Centres**

Website: [www.toronto.ca/children](http://www.toronto.ca/children)

Phone: 416 392 5437

Toronto's licensed childcare system has over 1000 licensed centres and 24 home child care agencies providing early learning and care for the children up to 12 years of age. Call or use the website for information about child care centres in Toronto, fees or getting help with fees (day care subsidy).

For information about child care centres in other areas, contact:

Halton Region: 1 888 703 5437

Peel Region: 905 890 9432

Durham Region: 905 666 6238

### **Early On Child and Family Centres**

Also search City of Toronto website for 242 locations of free programs for parents and caregivers and their children ages 0 to 6 years of age. Parents or caregivers can drop in and stay with their children during the program. Call the program closest to you.

## **Questions to ask the manager or director when choosing a child care centre:**

- May I see license for the daycare? Is it up to date? (License should be posted at the entrance)
- Does this day care follow the rules for local and provincial health, fire, zoning and space requirements?
- What is the weekly cost? Do you have a contract with the city to take children receiving a fee subsidy?
- What are the hours the centre is open?
- Do you charge us if my child is absent because of holidays or if they are sick?
- Can you get to the daycare by public transit?
- What is the training and experience of the staff?
- Can we visit and meet with the director and staff?
- What plans do you have in place when children show signs of poor behaviour?
- Can you tell me about your regular daily schedule?
- What happens if my child becomes sick during the day?
- Can I see an example of a week's menu (if meals or snacks are provided). What if my child can't eat certain foods or has allergies?
- How can the staff help my child during this difficult time?
- How does your program support children's development? What are some specific activities that do this?

## **Licensed private home child care**

You can find licensed childcare in private homes. Here are some questions you should ask the director (or main child care provider) when you are choosing a private home child care service:

- How many children are in the home and what are their ages?
- Are there other people in the home, like teenagers or relatives? If so, can I meet them? (see if your child is comfortable with them)
- Are there any pets?
- Which areas of the home are used for childcare?
- Where do you take the children for outdoor play?
- What happens if you are sick or take a vacation?

## **Emergency Day Care**

Contact the following centres if you need emergency out-of-home childcare services or search online for emergency in-home childcare services in your area.

Both centres provide services with fees on a sliding scale.

### **Parent Resources EarlyON Child and Family Centre**

River Oak Parent-child Centre Inc.

Address: 1117 Gerrard St. E. (Leslie and Gerrard)

Phone: 416 463 5399

### **Scadding EarlyON Child and Family Centre**

Address: 707 Dundas St. W., Toronto

Phone: 416 392 0335 extension 235

Website: [www.scaddingcourt.org](http://www.scaddingcourt.org)

Provides relief, emergency and occasional childcare. Giving notice is preferred but emergency spaces may be available. For newborns up to children of 5 years old. Open Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm.

## **Other contacts**

### **City of Toronto**

#### **Toronto Children's Services**

Phone: 416 392 5437

Website: [www.toronto.ca/children](http://www.toronto.ca/children)

A good source for any information about licensed childcare and early learning opportunities.

#### **Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation**

Phone: 416 338 4386

Website: [www.toronto.ca/parks](http://www.toronto.ca/parks)

Find information about recreation programs including after-school recreation and care (ARC).

#### **Toronto Public Health/Toronto Health Connection**

Phone: 416 338 7600

Website: [www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health)

Find information about programs and services that promote healthy child development.

## **The Government of Ontario**

### **The Children's Information Portal**

Website: [www.childrensinfo.ca](http://www.childrensinfo.ca)

### **Ontario Government Information & Referral Service**

Phone: 1 800 267 8097

Resources with information about the Government of Ontario's programs and services for children.

## **Books and pamphlets**

This is only a sample of available books and pamphlets. Some are available at the Princess Margaret Patient and Family Library, the Magic Castle at Princess Margaret, your local Canadian Cancer Society office, or from your social worker. Please call or visit your local library or bookstore to get a complete list.

### **Toddlers and preschool children**

**Clay and Katie Visit the Hospital** written and illustrated by Anna Narday, 2006. A short guide through a healthcare facility where children can learn about admitting, exam rooms, waiting rooms, patient rooms, recovery and the discharge process.

**Momma Grog Gets Sick** by Gretchen Huntley and illustrated by Bernadette Truesdell, 2012. This book can help children understand the changes that may happen in their lives when a loved one is diagnosed with cancer. Illustrations help young children make connections to the relevant situation that their parent or family member is going through.

**Calm Down Time** by Elizabeth Verdick and illustrated by Marieka Heinlen, 2010. A book about emotions that young children have in different situations. A guide for parents or caregivers to recognize these feelings and tips on how to support behaviour challenges, difficult feelings, tantrums, melt downs and frustration.

**Curious George Goes to Hospital** by Margret & H.A.Rey, 1966. A well-known series for young children. Curious George talks about his own experience in a hospital bed and operating room, and how he got better under the care of nurses and doctors. A great way to help children familiarize themselves with emergencies, illnesses and treatments.

## **Preschool and school aged children**

**My Dad is a Cancer Fighting HERO** written and illustrated by Chelsey Gomez in 2021, a two-time cancer survivor. A gentle rhyming book to help children cope with dad's cancer diagnosis.

**What Every Child Needs to Know about Cancer** written by Brad and Dr. Marc, 2014. A simple way to explain cancer to young children from how it happens, treatments used, and how nature and exercise help.

**Mr. C the Globetrotter** written by Eva Grayzel, 2013. Mr. C is a cancer cell who visits countries around the globe. During this journey readers are empowered with ways to help themselves and others.

**Butterfly Kisses and Wishes on Wings** by Ellen McVicker, 2010. A helpful book for children when someone they love has cancer. Suitable for ages 3 to 7.

**A Dragon in Your Heart** by Sophie LeBlanc, 1999. A book written by a mother with breast cancer for her 5-year-old daughter. Provides details about cancer and how chemotherapy works.

**The Goodbye Cancer Garden** by Jenna Matthies, 2011. After the breaking news that Mom has cancer, every page shows grateful smiles and loving companionship. An upbeat, hopeful, and beautifully illustrated story. Suitable for ages 5 to 8.

**Someone I Love Has Cancer** written and illustrated by Sara Olsher, 2021. A book designed to remove the unknowns of cancer and its treatments. Empowers children with knowledge in concrete situations.

**Jeannie Ann's Grandma has Breast Cancer** written by Diane Davies and illustrated by CA Nobens, 2020. The vocabulary, sentence structure and illustrations are understandable and allow the adult reader to start conversations that guide young children through the steps of understanding breast cancer and its treatment.

**In Mommy's Garden** by Neval J Ammary, 2004.

A book that helps explain cancer to young children. Available in the Princess Margaret Patient and Family Library.

**Kids Tell Kids What It's Like.** (Pamphlet in the Magic Castle). When a family member has cancer, kids share their stories about what is like to have a family member with cancer.

**Mom Has Cancer** by Jennifer Mallinos, 2008. A book that focuses on what needs to be said to make a tough situation manageable. Bright watercolours and cheerful cartoon illustrations keep the tone upbeat. Suitable for ages 4 to 7.

**Mom and the Polka-dot BooBoo** by Eileen Sutherland, 2007. A story to help families talk about breast cancer. Written by a mother of 2 and illustrated by her young daughter. Gently prepares children for the weeks and months following their mother's diagnosis.

**Mrs. B Has Cancer** by Glynis Belec, 2013. A story about a boy and his friends whose teacher has cancer. Suitable for ages 8 to 12.

**Our Dad is Getting Better.** American Cancer Society, 2007. A book for children who have a loved one with cancer. Suitable for ages 4 to 8.

**Our Mom Has Cancer** by Abigail and Adrienne Ackerman, 2001. Written and illustrated by 11-year-old and 9-year-old sisters, this book tells of their experiences and feelings when their mother had breast cancer. A book with funny moments that help families keep a positive attitude.

**Stickers on Her Bald Head** written and illustrated by Chelsey Gomez, 2021. A story about the author's daughter Luna who keeps mom laughing even on the dark days.

**When Someone You Love Has Cancer** by Alaric Lewis, 2005. This book helps kids cope with cancer in their lives. Includes 14 full-page colour illustrations and 40 helpful tips written especially for children.

## Teenagers

**Afraid to Ask.** Toronto, Ontario: Kids Can Press, 1984. Written for teens and gives answers to questions about cancer. Available in the Princess Margaret Patient and Family Library.

**Brushing Mom's Hair** by Andrea Cheng, 2009. A story about how a young girl deals with her mother's breast cancer. Written as a series of poems, each poem describing events about her mother.

**Medikidz Explain Cancer.** American Cancer Society, 2010. Medikidz comic books take the reader on a superhero adventure though the human body to learn about different types of cancer.

**My Parent Has Cancer and It Really Sucks** by Maya and Martin Silver, 2013. A book that helps guide teens through the experience of having a parent with cancer. Offers "survival tips" from other teens with firsthand experience. Suitable for ages 12 to 16.

**When Your Parent Has Cancer: A Guide For Teens.** (pamphlet) United States: National Institute of Health  
This guidebook can help prepare teens for some of the things they might face when living with a parent or relative who has cancer. Included in this list for information to help teens cope. Any information about American medical practice may not be the same as in Canada.

**The Year My Mother Was Bald** by Ann Speitz, 2003. Clare's journal about the year her mother has treatment for cancer. A book with a lot of information about cancer, cancer diagnosis and treatment. Good for ages 8 to 13.

## Parents

**When a Parent is Sick** (3rd ed), 2023 by Joan Hamilton. Helping parents, family members and friends explain serious illness to children. A guide that helps respond to children's fear, questions and doubts. Many examples can be used to communicate with children of different ages including teenagers.

**Can I Still Kiss You?** by Neil Russell, 2001. This book provides help with answering your children's questions about cancer.

**Cancer in The Family: Helping Children With a Parent's Illness** by Sue Heiney, 2001. A book with steps to help children understand what happens when a parent has been diagnosed with cancer, how to talk to children about it, and how to answer difficult question about cancer.

**Helping Your Children Cope with Your Cancer** by Peter Van Dernoot, 2002. A guide for parents and families.

**Raising an Emotionally Healthy Child When a Parent is Sick** by Paula Rauch, M.D. and Anna Muriel, M.D, 2005. This book helps parents understand their child's development, emotions and reactions at a difficult time. Supports parents as they encourage and help their child to cope.

**When a Parent Has Cancer: A Guide to Caring for Your Children** by Wendy Harpham, M.D, 2004. A mother, doctor, and cancer survivor, Dr. Wendy Harpham offers clear, direct and sympathetic advice for parents trying to raise children while they struggle with cancer. Also included is **Becky and the Worry Cup**, an illustrated children's book that tells the story of a 7-year-old girl's experience with her mother's cancer.

## Websites

These websites are included for information on children's coping only.

### **Bereaved Families of Ontario**

<http://bereavedfamilies.net>

### **Canadian Cancer Society**

Search "Talking To Children About Cancer" on

<https://cancer.ca>

### **211 Toronto**

[www.211toronto.ca](http://www.211toronto.ca)

211 Toronto can connect you to community, social, health and government services.

### **Gilda's Club**

[www.gildasclubtoronto.org](http://www.gildasclubtoronto.org)

Check the members forum, an online support room for families while they deal with cancer.

### **The National Cancer Institute**

[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

The online version of the brochure "When Someone in Your Family has Cancer" allows children to find the answers to their questions quickly. They can also read comforting words of other children in similar situations.

## Videos

### 80 Cancer Care A Legacy of Help and Hope

See featured video and video library on

<https://www.cancercare.org>

Also read “Helping Children Understand Cancer: Talking to Your Kids About Your Diagnosis”

“**Hear How I Feel**” video from the Department of Psychosocial Resources, Northeastern Ontario Regional Cancer Centre, Sudbury. Focuses on the concerns of teens who are faced with their parent’s cancer. Available at the Patient and Family Library, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre.

“**Kids Talking to Kids about Cancer: The Discovery**” by Rethink Breast Cancer, a series of 5 videos that provide information for children on what is cancer, treatment, recovery and when the cancer comes back.

Search title on <https://www.youtube.com>

Note: The opinions in these books, pamphlets, videos and websites are the opinions of the authors. They may not be the opinions of your doctor or health care team.

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