# Childhood Cancer Family Support Guide

***1 in every 260 children gets cancer, and that leaves 259 of us to help***

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# What is Childhood Cancer?

"Childhood Cancer" is actually many diseases that happen almost anywhere in the body. Each diagnosis has a different prognosis and treatment plan. Every child's cancer journey is unique.

Cancer treatments may include chemotherapy, surgery, radiation, newer therapies, or a combination of these things. Treatment can last a few months or several years. It can take place inside the hospital or at home. The short term side effects can include nausea, pain, hair loss, and fatigue. The long term side effects can include physical impairments, cognitive impairments, and chronic pain. Childhood cancer changes a child's life forever.

Children get different cancers than adults do. Many of these cancers need to be researched more, which is why about half of children with cancer enroll in clinical trials. It is very important to support the family's treatment choices, which are made with extreme care by the entire treatment team. It is also important to support childhood cancer research, since most cancer research does not directly help children with cancer.

**Learn More:**

**ChildrensOncologyGroup.org**

**ACCO.org**

**AlexsLemonade.org**

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# What Can I Do To Help After a Childhood Cancer Diagnosis?

Childhood cancer is a very chaotic situation. When you ask families, "How can I help?" they may not be able to tell you right away. If possible, simply asking when you can bring a gift or help with a task is more practical.

Examples of gifts that are likely to be helpful include

- Food delivery gift cards
- Cleaning supplies
- Groceries
- Pajamas, blankets, decorations, and other comfort objects for the hospital
- Toys for the diagnosed child and siblings

If you know the family well, offering to take on a weekly chore is a great way to support them throughout treatment. Treatment may last months or years, and it is exhausting for the whole family.

Examples of tasks that are likely to be helpful include

- Shopping for groceries
- Picking up siblings from school and/or taking them to activities
- Cleaning inside or outside the home
- Calling and giving someone in the family space to vent

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# Tips for Supporting...

## A Child With Cancer

- Cancer takes everything normal away. It can be very helpful for children to talk about their hobbies and interests. Nobody wants to only be treated like a "cancer kid."
- Prepare other children (friends, classmates, etc.) for changes in appearance that will likely come. Awareness helps to reduce bullying.

## Siblings of a Child with Cancer

- Remind siblings that their needs are important too. You should not assume that siblings are fine because they "look" fine. Let them know it is ok to need extra support.
- Follow the sibling's lead with what to talk about. They may need help with big emotions, or they may just need a distraction.

## Parents of a Child with Cancer

- Parents need to know that they are doing their best and they are still "good" parents. Parents often feel incredibly guilty that they did not "catch" the cancer sooner, even though it's never their fault.
- Let parents be sad or angry. They know how unfair their child's suffering is. They already have to put on a brave face around their child – let them take a break around you.

Every person and family is different. You will likely have some uncomfortable conversations as you support someone you love throughout this journey. Know that your time and efforts are appreciated!

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# What Not to Do

People sometimes say unhelpful* things about childhood cancer. Even if you don't say these things, be aware that your loved one is probably hearing them from others.

What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger.

Have you tried X hospital or X treatment?

There's no way I'd be able to survive this.

Maybe if you didn't do X, your child would not have gotten cancer.

I don't understand, your child doesn't even look sick.

If you believe hard enough, everything will be just fine.

Treatment is over, is everything back to normal yet?

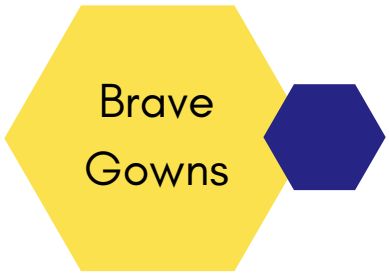
Everything happens for a reason.

Don’t let yourself get down, stay positive!

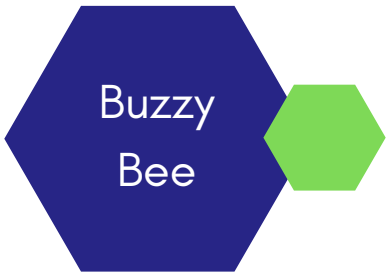
*Every family is different. When in doubt, ask what to say or what not to say.

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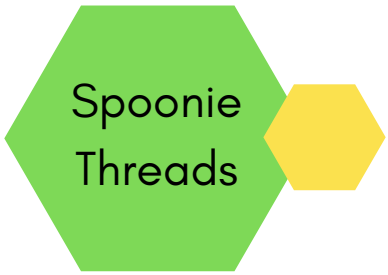
# Gift Ideas for Children with Cancer




Brave Gowns are more comfortable than regular hospital gowns, and children can choose from many characters and costumes. They have a range of sizes for all ages, and they donate gowns to children's hospitals in need (bravegowns.com).




"Buzzy" is a vibrating, cooling tool that helps to reduce the pain of needle injections. Anything that can distract from the pain of a poke is a big help to a child going through cancer treatment (buzzyhelps.com).




Spoonie Threads sells adaptive clothing to meet a variety of medical and mobility needs. Clothing options are available for central lines, feeding tubes, and other common medical supplies that make regular clothing inaccessible (spooniethreads.com).

