

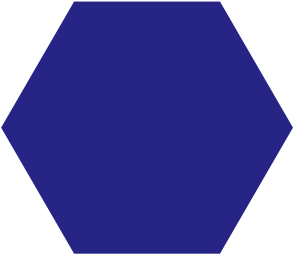


A Guide to Supporting
A Family You Love
Through Childhood Cancer



What is Childhood Cancer?

"Childhood Cancer" is actually dozens of diseases that can occur almost anywhere in the body. Each diagnosis has a different prognosis and treatment plan. Even if you know someone else who has had cancer, each person's experience is very 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 a clinical trial at some point during their treatment. It is very important to support the family's decision in treatment, which is made with extreme care by the entire treatment team. It is also important to support childhood cancer research, since the majority of cancer research does not directly benefit children with cancer.

Learn More:
ChildrensOncologyGroup.org
ACCO.org
AlexsLemonade.org

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

When someone is in a situation as chaotic as childhood cancer, when you ask, "How can I help?" they truly may not be able to think of what they need at that exact moment in time. If possible, simply asking when to deliver supplies or complete a task you can help with is more practical.

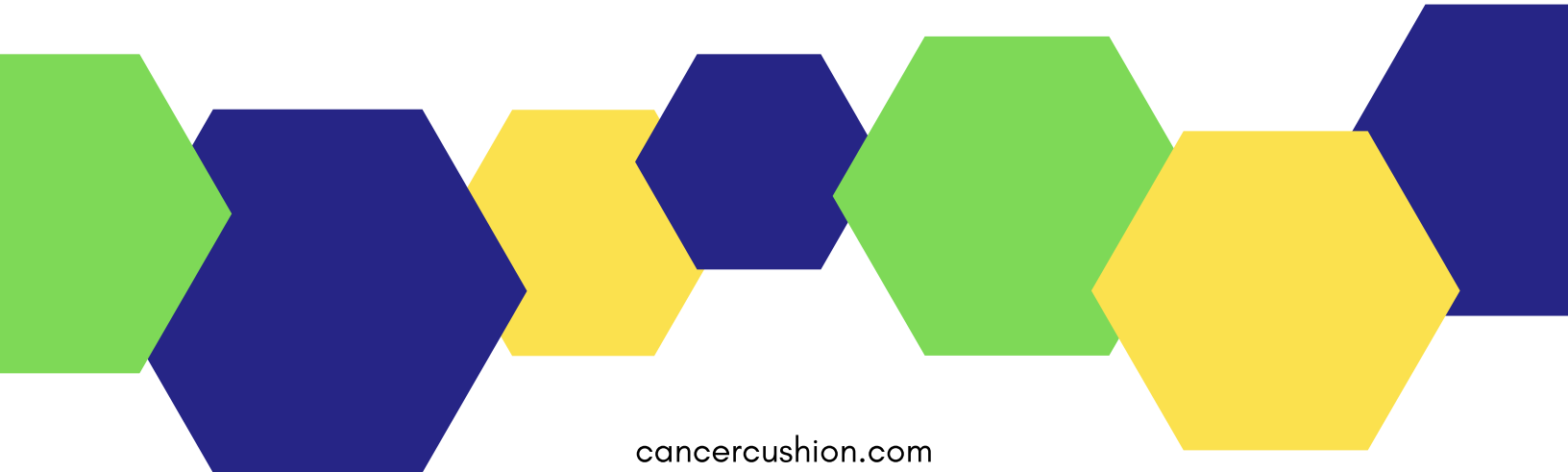
Examples of gifts that are likely to be helpful include

- 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, which will tax their resources for the foreseeable future.

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



Tips for Supporting...

A Child With Cancer

- Cancer takes everything normal away. Having a chance to talk about interests and activities from before the cancer diagnosis can be very helpful. Nobody wants to only be treated like a "cancer kid."
- Prepare other children (friends, classmates, etc.) for the changes in physical appearance that will likely come during cancer treatment. Over 30% of children with cancer experience bullying in school, but that number drops when peers understand what these children are going through.

Siblings of a Child with Cancer

- Remind siblings that their needs are important too. They may not volunteer their struggles because they do not want to burden their parents, so you should not assume that siblings are fine because they "look" fine. One on one attention from other caring adults cannot replace time with parents, but it can offer a safe place of support.
- Having a sibling with cancer is very frightening and isolating. Follow a sibling's lead – sometimes they may want to talk about their feelings, and sometimes they may prefer a pleasant distraction.

Parents of a Child with Cancer

- Remind parents that they are doing their best and that they are still "good" parents. Although symptoms of childhood cancer mimic common illnesses, parents often feel incredibly guilty that they did not "catch" the cancer sooner.
- Let parents be sad, angry, or any other number of negative emotions. They are fully aware of how unfair it is that their child must suffer in ways that most people will never see. 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!

What Not to Do

People say surprisingly unhelpful things to families when they're going through childhood cancer. When faced with such a serious crisis, many people simply do not know how to communicate in ways that are both honest and compassionate. Even if you don't say these things, be aware that your loved one is probably hearing them from others.

Inappropriate* things that families hear all too often include...

What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger.

Have you tried X hospital or X treatment?

I don't know how you do it! There's no way I'd be able to survive this.

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

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

Are you looking forward to when treatment ends and everything is back to normal?

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

*Every family is different. When in doubt, ask what feels supportive and what feels dismissive rather than guessing.