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Helping Your Child Manage School During Cancer Treatment

Though it may not seem important in light of everything else going on, continuing to be a part of the school community should be a priority. For many children, school is a safe place for learning, fun, and friendship that's far from the world of cancer and treatments. School is the main part of almost every child's daily life, and going back to school is a sign of normalcy. Most pediatric treatment centers offer resources and support to help make sure your child continues with their education with instruction at home, in the hospital, or attending school part-time when they feel well enough. Here are some reasons why it helps children with cancer to continue with school activities during treatment:

- Continuing to participate in school during treatment can help your child adjust by keeping them connected with their "normal life", including friends and school communities.
- Continuing with school work helps them to continue to learn and grow and stay on track academically.
- Staying connected during treatment can help children feel less overwhelmed with returning to school when treatment completes.

Ways to keep up with school during treatment

Children's hospitals may have education coordinators and teachers to help the child keep up with school during long hospitalizations or clinic visits. Hospital education coordinators and teachers might also coordinate with your child's school to arrange other types of instruction. If your hospital does not have a teacher on the team, talk with a social worker, nurse, or child life specialist about getting support to work with your

child's school. The school options that may work best for your child depend on many factors, including the [type of cancer](#)¹ and [types of treatment](#)² needed. There are a few different ways your child can keep up with school during treatment, so it is best to talk with your team about the best school options for your child.

- **Homebound instruction** may be provided by the public school without an additional cost. The school district might arrange for a teacher to work with your child at home if they have to be out of school for longer periods of time, but are not in the hospital. Some children with cancer might go to school during some parts of treatment and then receive homebound instruction or hospital instruction during other parts of their treatment.
- **Attending a hospital or clinic-based school.** When a child will have to be in the hospital for a long time, they might be able to have teachers from their school district or from the hospital school come and teach. In-hospital schooling can also work well for children who do not feel well enough to have more than one hour of instruction a day. Even one hour of school a day can still give the children the feeling of connection to what children without cancer do every day.
- **Attending school during treatment.** Some children can go to school during treatment, depending on their treatment schedule, how they feel, and infection risk. Ask the cancer care team when during treatment your child can go to school. Some children enjoy seeing friends when they feel well and can go for small blocks of time during the school day. There may be times when they cannot go because of how they are feeling, treatment schedules, or other factors.
- **Additional support services called 504 plans or Individualized Education Plans (IEP).** These may be part of how the school, your cancer care team, and your family work together to help your child participate in school during their treatment and after. The teacher that works for the hospital or the social worker on the cancer care team can help you understand how these services work for children with cancer.

Returning to school during treatment

During cancer treatment it can be hard to send your child to school without worrying about how they will feel while they are there and the risk of [infection](#)³. If you and your cancer care team decide that it is medically safe for your child to go to school, the benefits of going to school and connecting with peers often outweigh the risks. Because going to school during treatment takes teamwork, most pediatric treatment centers offer special support in the school to make it easier to go back. Many children will not be able

to return to school full-time during treatment but might be able to spend some time at school off and on when they are feeling well and when the cancer care team feels it is medically appropriate for them to be at school. If you and your cancer care team decide that your child is ready to return, here are some things you can do that might be helpful if your child will return to school at some point during treatment:

- Having a member of the cancer care team go to the school to teach the teachers and other students in the class about your child's diagnosis and care.
- Helping arrange meetings with the school to create a 504 plan or an IEP to make sure your child has what they need to learn well.
- Talking with the cancer care team about ways to shift medication schedules so your child does not have to take medications at school.
- Working with the cancer care team (and the school nurse if there is one) to create a plan for [managing side effects](#)⁴ like fatigue, problems getting around, nausea, or pain at school.
- Asking the cancer care team to arrange a meeting with the school, complete forms, or send a letter to the school explaining what to do if your child might need immediate treatment. For example, the school should know what to do if your child has a fever or someone in the class gets chicken pox.
- Continue communicating with the school and teacher when your child is not able to attend.

Please see [Returning to School After Cancer Treatment](#),⁵ for more information on going to school after intensive treatment ends.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/all-cancer-types.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types.html
3. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/low-blood-counts/infections.html
4. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects.html
5. [/content/cancer/en/treatment/children-and-cancer/when-your-child-has-cancer/returning-to-school.html](http://content.cancer/en/treatment/children-and-cancer/when-your-child-has-cancer/returning-to-school.html)
6. childrenoncologygroup.org/index.php/home/48-coping-with-cancer/school-support
7. childrenoncologygroup.org/index.php/home/48-coping-with-cancer/school-support

References

Childrens Oncology Group. School Support. Accessed at <https://childrensoncologygroup.org/index.php/home/48-coping-with-cancer/school-support> (childrensoncologygroup.org/index.php/home/48-coping-with-cancer/school-support)⁶ on September 18th 2017

Thompson A, Christiansen H, Elam M, et al. Academic continuity and school reentry support as a standard of care in pediatric oncology. *Pediatr Blood Cancer*. 2015; 62: S805-S817.

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Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as journalists, editors, and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

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