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# Finding Help and Support When Your Child Has Cancer

No one is prepared for a child to be diagnosed with cancer. Because a child's cancer diagnosis impacts all aspects of family life, the majority of families benefit from receiving additional education and support to help them adjust and cope. Most pediatric cancer centers have a broad range of services and programs to support coping for children and family members through the entire cancer experience.

The health professionals on the team who are experts in coping provide a service called **psychosocial support**. All psychosocial services are optional, but are considered to be a standard of care for pediatric cancer. Standard of care means that something is thought to be helpful enough that those services or treatments are recommended to everyone.

## Psychosocial help from the cancer team

Psychologists, social workers, child life specialists, doctors, and some kinds of nurses may all be involved in providing psychosocial support. Some of the common types of services available from psychosocial professionals on the team are:

**Advocacy (including financial advocacy):** Patient advocates can help children and families understand and manage the complex health care system and identify and make use of programs, financial help, policies, and laws.

**Education (about how to cope):** Children and families learn about the normal social and emotional effects of a cancer diagnosis and treatment, healthy ways to cope, stress management, and other helpful ways to get through this time.

**Supportive counseling:** Provides listening, empathy, and a way for children, parents,

siblings, and other family members to express the feelings that result from the stress of cancer.

**Targeted psychotherapy:** Teaches children and family members how to manage feelings of anxiety, sadness, fear and other emotions related to the cancer diagnosis and treatment.

**Behavioral interventions:** Targeted treatments often focused on addressing symptoms associated with cancer treatment (for example feelings of nausea, difficulty taking pills, fear of needles).

**Referral to outside resources or community consultations:** Helps families get meals, lodging, transportation, and financial or emergency assistance, often in coordination with community-based resources. Some centers may also provide referrals to community-based professionals for illness-related mental health services, if those services are not offered at the pediatric cancer center.

**Medication:** In addition to supportive counseling, psychotherapy, or behavioral interventions, some children benefit from the use of medication to treat problems such as anxiety or depression, or to lessen the behavioral side effects of medications.

You may also want to see [Who Treats Children with Cancer](#)<sup>1</sup> , which is a guide to all the kinds of professionals working on cancer care teams.

For more information about services to help with going back to school see [Helping Your Child Manage School During Treatment](#)<sup>2</sup> and [Returning to School After Treatment Ends](#).<sup>3</sup>

For more information about how to help families cope after a child is diagnosed with cancer, see [If Your Child Has Been Diagnosed With Cancer](#)<sup>4</sup> .

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