



# Support Resources for Families Dealing with Cancer

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## Cancer Pathways Family Cancer Support Program

### Camp Sparkle

Camp Sparkle is a free summer day camp offered to children ages 6-12 in the greater Seattle area who have been touched by cancer. Children at Camp Sparkle are impacted by cancer in a variety of ways including having a loved one with cancer, having lost a loved one to cancer or having cancer themselves. Our mission is to improve the lives of families dealing with cancer. We hold four camps throughout the summer and have approximately 30 children at each camp. A summer at Camp Sparkle is a summer filled with laughter, friendship and fun!



### Support Groups

#### Families Living with Cancer Group

2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month, 7:00-8:00pm, currently meeting on Zoom.

This support group offers a space for parents with children under age 18 to share and discuss the challenges they face when cancer is in the family. We discuss topics such as communicating with kids, family functioning, relationships, behavior changes in kids, grief and loss, maintaining hope, family resources, and more. This is a confidential group facilitated by a licensed clinician.



#### Family Grief Group

1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month, 7:00-8:00pm, currently meeting on Zoom.

This support group offers a space for parents with children under age 18 to share and discuss the challenges they face when their family has lost someone to cancer. We discuss topics such as grief reactions in kids, activities and resources for families, anger, fear, adjusting to a death, meaning-making, and more. This is a confidential group facilitated by a licensed clinician.

#### Children's Expressive Arts Group

*\*not currently meeting, will resume when it is safe to gather*

This support group provides a safe space for children to identify and express their emotions, thoughts, and questions related to cancer. This group is available to children who have a family member with cancer or who have recently lost a family member to cancer. Children participate in an art or drama therapy project lead by a licensed clinician. Appropriate for children ages 5-12.

### Teen Writing Contest

The goal of our writing contest is to provide teens with a place to tell their stories, whether it's their own diagnosis or that of a loved one. We want to hear about their own experience and allow them to use their own voice. Teens will have an opportunity to submit an essay about their cancer experience and win a cash prize. Essays should be well-written, honest, and a story that is easy to follow from start to finish. Essays are submitted on our website.

## Social Worker Consultations

Our Social Worker, Maddie Ritter, is available to provide clinical social work support to patients, caregivers and families. Have questions about how to tell your kids about a new diagnosis? Or ways to support your family through cancer? She is available by phone or in-person for help with specific issues, ideas for improved family communication, supportive listening, advice on hard conversations, recommendations for additional support services and more. Please call 207-709-1400 to schedule a consultation.

## Child and Family Therapist

### Michelle Massey, LICSW, OSW-C

Location: Edmonds and Redmond  
 Contact info: 206-245-7754 or  
[michelle@masseycounseling.com](mailto:michelle@masseycounseling.com),  
 Specialty: Oncology, children, families,  
 grief/loss, anxiety  
[More information on website](#)

### Tanya Ranchigoda, LICSW

Location: Seattle (Lake City)  
 Contact info: (206) 306-4052 or  
[tranchigoda@yahoo.com](mailto:tranchigoda@yahoo.com)  
 Specialty: Chronic Illnesses, end of life,  
 teens, children, families, crisis  
 management, anxiety and depression  
[More information on website](#)

### Richard Berger, LMFT

Location: Seattle (Greenlake)  
 Contact info: 206-915-3107 or  
[richard@rbtherapy.com](mailto:richard@rbtherapy.com)  
 Specialty: Family therapy, child therapy,  
 parenting support, couples counseling,  
 grief and loss  
[More information on website](#)

### Geri Schnitzer-Newson, MSW, ACSW

Location: Issaquah  
 Contact info: (425) 224-5731 or  
 Specialty: Greif, health-related issues,  
 oncology, and anxiety  
[More information on website](#)

### Kathleen Goodman, LMHC

Location: Seattle (Madison Valley)  
 Contact info: 360-602-1027 or  
[Kathleen@kathleengoodmancounseling.com](mailto:Kathleen@kathleengoodmancounseling.com)  
 Specialty: Children and adolescence,  
 oncology related issues, anxiety, stress  
 management, life transitions, healthy  
 relationships  
[More information on website](#)

### Katie Maynard, MSW, LICSW

Location: Seattle (Fremont)  
 Contact: (425) 835-3698  
 Specialty: Children, adults, oncology,  
 play therapy  
[More information on website](#)

### Ellen Bovarnick, LICSW

Location: Redmond and Bellevue  
 Contact info: (206) 800-7423  
 Specialty: Oncology, individuals, couples,  
 families, grief, relationship issues,  
 women's issues

### Jen McCormick, LICSW

Location: Seattle (U District)  
 Contact info: 206-855-3835  
 Specialty: Greif in children and adults  
[More information on website](#)

### Wellspring Counseling

Location: South Seattle and Redmond  
 Contact info: 206-524-9055

Specialty: Family, couple and individual counseling

[More information on website](#)

### Youth Eastside Services

Location: Eastside

Contact info: 425-747-4937

Specialty: child and family counseling, ethnic and cultural minorities, wide-range of mental health disorders

[More information on website](#)

### Larch Counseling

Location: Duvall

Contact info: 425-200-0130

Specialty: children, teens and family counseling

[More information on website](#)

### Envision Counseling

Location: Seattle and Bothell

Contact: (425) 835-3698

Specialty: Children, play therapy, adolescence, adults and couples

[More information on website](#)

## Additional Support Groups

**EvergreenHealth Cancer Center CLIMB Program:** Children's Lives Include Moments of Bravery (CLIMB) is a special program providing emotional support for children who have a parent or primary caregiver with cancer. For more information call 425-899-2265 or email [DG-GrpClimbProgram@evergreenhealth.com](mailto:GrpClimbProgram@evergreenhealth.com)

**Swedish Cancer Institute CLIMB Program:** Children's Lives Include Moments of Bravery (CLIMB) is a special program providing emotional support for children who have a parent or primary caregiver with cancer. For more information or to register, call 206-386-3228.

**Mary Bridge Children's Hospital Discoveries Program:** Family program for children between the ages of 4-18 years who are experiencing the serious diagnosis of a family member. Meets in Tacoma, WA. For more information call 253-103-1966 or [visit their website](#).

## Online Support

**Cancer Support Community.** [www.cancersupportcommunity.org](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org)

- [The Living Room](#): Discussion Boards and Live messaging with trained oncology counselors for emotional support.
- [Group Loop](#): Group Loop is a safe (and fun!) online community where teens affected by cancer can meet and connect with each other to build social and emotional support, and to regain a sense of control over their lives.
- E-Book: [What Do I Tell The Kids?](#)
- Cancer Support Helpline: 1-888-793-9355.

**The Imaginary Friend Society:** Kid-friendly short films that cover a wide range of cancer topics. [More information on their website](#).

**Inspire.com** Online support community with discussion boards and chat rooms. This resource comes recommended from one of our members! <https://www.inspire.com/>

## Financial Support

**Komen Patient Assistance Fund:** Provide financial assistance to low-income patients with breast cancer. More [information here](#) or Call (206) 832-1282

**Cancer Lifeline Patient Assistance Fund:** Financial assistance to low-income patients with cancer other than breast. More [information here](#) or Call (206) 832-1282

**Leukemia and Lymphoma Society:** Financial assistance for blood cancer patients in active treatment. More [information here](#) or call 866-446-7377.

- Co-Pay Assistance Program
- COVID Patient Financial Aid Program
- Patient Aid Program
- Patient Travel Assistance Program
- Urgent Need Program

**American Cancer Society Hope Lodge Program:** This program can offer a free place to stay when a patient is getting treatment far from home. More [information here](#) or 800-227-2345.

**American Cancer Society Road to Recovery Program:** Transportation to and from cancer treatment. More [information here](#) or 800-227-2345.

## Bereavement Support

**The Healing Center:** The Healing Center is a grief-support community for adults, children and families. They offer a unique, long-term, multi-faceted approach to grief support, combining group support with informal events and social networks. [More information here.](#)

**BRIDGES Program at Mary Bridge Children's Hospital:** This program is for children who have experienced the death of a parent or sibling. This program meets in Tacoma and Puyallup, WA. [More information here.](#)

**Camp Erin:** Children and teens ages 6-17 attend a transformational weekend camp that combines traditional, fun camp activities with grief education and emotional support, free of charge for all families. Located in King, Snohomish and Pierce County. [More information here.](#)

**The Dougy Center:** They provide support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families grieving a death can share their experiences. [More information here.](#)

**Grief Out Loud Podcast:** Available on online and podcast apps. [More information here.](#)

**Compassionate Friends:** <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/>

**Grief Digest Magazine:** <https://centering.org/magazine-articles/>

## Books

### Books for Children/Teens who have A Parent with Cancer

*The Goodbye Cancer Garden* by Janna Matthies. Breast Cancer specific.

*Mom Has Cancer! (Let's Talk About It Series)* by Jennifer Moore-Mallinos

*Promises* by Elizabeth Winthrop

*Our Family Has Cancer, Too* by Christine Clifford. Interactive book.

*The Feelings Book* by Todd Parr

*Feelings to Share from A to Z* by Todd Snow

*Ida B* by Katherine Hannigan. Recommended for ages 9 and older

*Butterfly Kisses and Wishes on Wings* by Ellen McVicker

*When Someone You Love Has Cancer: A Guide to Help Kids Cope* by Alaric Lewis

*You are the Best Medicine* by Julie Aigner Clark

*There's No Such Thing as a Dragon* by Jack Kent. Recommended for ages 7-9

*Sky Memories* by Pat Brisson Recommended for ages 9-12

*When Your Parent Has Cancer: A Guide for Teens.* NCI e-book

<https://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/When-Your-Parent-Has-Cancer.pdf>

### Books for Children/Teens about death and grief

*The Pond* by Nicola Davies

*Death is Stupid* by Anastasia Higginbotham

*Wherever You Are: My Love Will Find You* by Nancy Tillman

*Lifetimes* by Bryan Mellonie

*When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to understanding Death* by Marc Brown

*The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst

*The Next Place* by Warren Hanson

*You are Not Alone: Teens Talk about Life after the Loss of a Parent* by Lynn Hughes.  
Recommended for teens and pre-teens.

*How Do We Tell the Children?* By Dan Schaeffer and Christine Lyons. For parents who want to know more about talking to children and teens about grief and loss.

## **Books for Parents**

*What Do I Tell The Kids?* E-book:

[https://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/sites/default/files/uploads/living-with-cancer/topics/guide/fsac\\_what\\_do\\_i\\_tell\\_the\\_kids.pdf?v=1](https://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/sites/default/files/uploads/living-with-cancer/topics/guide/fsac_what_do_i_tell_the_kids.pdf?v=1)

*The Whole-Brain Child* by Daniel Siegal, M.D. and Tine Payne Bryson, Ph.D

*When a Parent Has Cancer: A Guide to Caring for Your Children* by Wendy Harpham M.D.

*Cancer In the Family: Helping Children Cope with a Parent's Illness* by American Cancer Society

*When Someone You Love Has Cancer* by Cecil Murphey

*Can I Still Kiss You? Answering Your Children's Questions about Cancer* by Neil Russell

*Helping You Children Cope with Your Cancer: A guide for Parents and Families* by Peter VanDerNoot

*How to Help Children Through a Parent's Serious Illness* by Kathleen McCue

*Talking about Death: A Dialogue between Parent and Child* by Earl Grollman

## **General Tips and Ideas**

### ***When there is a new diagnosis***

- **Breath.** This will be a long journey and there is no "right" way to process or cope.

- Involve your kids as early as possible. We know that kids do better when they are given honest and accurate information about the diagnosis. Be loving, accepting, truthful and consistent.
- Kids as young as 5 and 6 years old can start to understand illness. Kids at ALL ages notice changes within the family and will need support in processing those changes.
- Prepare what you want to say to your child. Perhaps write down the topics you want to cover. Make sure you are using language your child can understand.
- Time the conversation well. Don't start the conversation when your child is already feeling tired or upset. Try having conversations in the car or when they are being tucked into bed at night.
- Give small amounts of information rather than everything at once, this gives them time to process and ask questions. It is okay if they don't have questions right away, continue to remind them it is okay to ask.
- Be open to questions and be honest with your answers. It is okay to be honest and also maintain hope.
- It's okay to tell your kids how you are feeling. In fact, it is encouraged!
- Other people to involve and notify:
  - School and school counselor: Most schools have licensed counselor who can provide additional emotional support to children. Teachers can also monitor for changes in behaviors or emotional wellbeing.
  - Church Community: If you are part of a church community, they can often be a great support network. Enlisting their help with meal trains or financial assistance can be very helpful.
  - Cancer clinic social worker: Most oncology clinics have a licensed social worker who is available to patients for emotional support and resource referrals.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help from others. Specific requests work best. For example, "I need you to mow my lawn this weekend."
- Do your research. National organizations like American Cancer Society and Cancer Support Community can be great resources for information on specific cancers and what national organizations exist.

### ***Coping with the diagnosis***

- Prioritize family time and things that bring you joy.
- Maintain schedules and house rules the best you can.
- Join a peer support group. Meeting other families who are dealing with cancer can help normalize that experience for you and your children. Groups provide emotional support and connection.
- Plan to have regular family check-ins. Having regular conversations about cancer and the treatments can help reduce fear and anxiety.

- Recognize that seeking professional counseling doesn't mean you are weak, inadequate or crazy.

### ***When there is a death***

- Feelings of guilt, fear, anger and depression will be intense and painful. This is normal. It is okay to let yourself and your kids express these emotions as they come. It is important not to hold your emotions inside or ignore them.
- Recovery takes time and there is no right or wrong way to grieve.
- Everyone in the family will grieve in their own way. It is important to honor and respect these different ways of processing.
- Support groups, reaching out to trusted loved ones, individual counseling, and journaling can help you and your family work through the emotions of grief. Recovery can be achieved only by experiencing and working through these emotions.
- As much as possible, find things to do that bring you and your family joy.
- Create a legacy box or story with your kids. This could be a memory box filled with items that remind you of the loved one who died or a scrap book with special pictures. Make something tangible that you or your kids can reach for when you need comfort.
- Recognize that seeking professional counseling doesn't mean you are weak, inadequate or crazy.
- See Bereavement Support section of this document for ideas on organizations and programs to help you process.

### **References**

*"Taking Care of Yourself"* Northwest Infant Survival & SIDS Alliance  
*"Making Memories Last: The Art of Legacy Work"* Wendy Griffith, MD Anderson Cancer Center  
*"Parents and Grieving"* Seattle Children's Journey Program, Patient and Family Education  
*"Children's Grief"* Seattle Children's Journey Program, Patient and Family Education  
*"About Dying"* Hester Hill Schnipper, Cancer Today Magazine