KEEP CALM AND TALK TO SOMEONE THAT LOVES YOU

Angel Foundation provides additional support programs in the Twin Cities for parents, caregivers, young adults, teens, preteens and children.

All events and programs are free.
What do you know about cancer? Cancer is a scary word, isn’t it? What does having cancer even mean? Does cancer mean your mom or dad will die? Here are some basics to understand right away – before you finish reading this guidebook. Pay attention to the bold words as you read.

You Did Not Cause Your Parent or Grandparent’s Illness
There is nothing you said or did that caused this illness. Doctors still do not fully know what causes cancer, but they are doing their best to learn more about it every day. The most important thing to know is that you are not to blame.

You Are Not Alone
There are other kids experiencing the same feelings that you are right now. Many feel alone and scared, like you do. If you aren’t yet ready to talk to your mom, dad, or grandparent, you might want to find a school nurse or an aunt or uncle to talk to. Sometimes talking to an adult can help you feel better. You are not alone.

Feel free to doodle, write notes, or share THIS BOOK with your family.
What is Cancer?

Your body is made up of **cells**. These cells are super tiny and you need a microscope to see them. Cancer happens when cells that are not normal grow very fast and **do not know when to stop**. These cells continue to make more and more cells until they form a bump (**tumor**) or make the blood sick.

It’s Important to know:
- You can’t catch cancer like a cold.
- It’s OK to hug or kiss your mom or dad.
- You did nothing wrong to cause the cancer.
- You are loved.

**WHAT KIND OF CANCER**

** DOES YOUR PARENT OR GRANDPARENT HAVE?**

Ask your parent or grandparent what kind of cancer they have (example: Breast, Colon, Lymphoma, etc.). Ask them to name the body part the cancer is affecting.

Illustrations by Rachel Rolseth
What Kind of Medicine Will My Parent or Grandparent Have?

You might hear words like:

**Surgery** is also called an operation. Having surgery means doctors will perform an operation and fix something inside the body to help the person feel better. Oftentimes, cancer “bumps” (tumors) are removed by surgery.

**Chemotherapy** (“chemo”) is a big word for treatment which uses medicine to help people who have cancer. This special medicine helps get rid of the cancer cells that are making the person sick. The medicine is given through a special tube (see Port-a-Cath) or in the form of a pill. Sometimes, the strong “chemo” medicine affects hair cells, which may cause your parent or grandparent to lose their hair.

**Radiation** is a form of energy that kills cancer cells and keeps them from growing and multiplying.

Other important things to know:

- Chemo often decreases the amount of **fighter cells** (white cells) which can weaken the immune system. The **immune system** helps you fight colds and other common illnesses.
- Your parent or grandparent may not be able to go into **public spaces** when they are in treatment, because they are more likely to pick up germs.
- **Wash your hands** with soap and water to keep from spreading germs.
- **Avoid bringing home sick friends or schoolmates.**
- **Tell your parents or grandparents if you are feeling sick,** because they may need to stay away while you get better.

Here is a space to write down your questions:

______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
VISITING THE CLINIC OR HOSPITAL

You may be curious about visiting the hospital or clinic and seeing with your own eyes how the medicine works. Remember, your mind is very powerful. If you see what chemo or radiation looks like, it may help you understand exactly what is happening to your parent or grandparent. You may be worried beforehand, but those feelings are all very normal. The clinic or hospital might seem frightening, but everything you’ll see has a special job to help give medicine and take care of people.

You might see:

- **IV poles** are the tall poles with the hanging bags of medicine your parent or grandparent will receive. They have a machine that knows just how much medicine to give. They beep a lot. Ask a nurse where the “silence” button is.
- **Port-a-Cath** is the special tube (port) placed inside the body to receive medicine. Having a port means your parent or grandparent will be poked with needles a LOT less during treatment.
- **Tape** holds the special port needles in place. This tape is only temporary, because the port needle comes out when your parent or grandparent goes home.
- **Chemotherapy** (“chemo”) is special medicine that comes in a bag and will hang on an IV pole. The nurses are trained to handle this medicine and know exactly how to give it.

Your Parent or Grandparent Might Be Feeling:

- Lonely
- Angry
- Upset
- Sad
- Afraid

Ideas to comfort you and your parent or grandparent during treatment:

- Coloring books
- Blankets and pillows
- Books or magazines
- Favorite music
- Crossword puzzles
- Watch a movie
- Snacks
- Warm socks and hats
- Lip balm

What Is Going To Change?

Life will be different for a little while. Some things will change and some will stay the same. Your mom or dad may ask you to do chores or help around the house a little bit more than you are used to. You will still go to school, do homework, and play with friends.

Your parent or grandparent might need to rest more and may not be able to help you with everything that they used to. That can sometimes feel frustrating or make you feel angry.

The special chemotherapy medicines affect the hair cells and this may cause your parent or grandparent’s hair to fall out. You can help them pick out a hat or scarf to help them feel better.

Use this space to write down what has changed in your life:

____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
It’s Not Fair! What About Me?

It’s not fair that your parent or grandparent is sick. You might be wondering Why me?

Sometimes in life it’s hard to control things around you. Unfortunately we can’t predict when someone is going to get sick.

Find ways to RELEASE YOUR WORRIES

How are these changes affecting you?

It’s okay to have worries when a parent or grandparent is sick. It’s important to find ways to help manage and express your feelings.

Find ways to release your worries:

Here are some ideas:

Be creative
- Color
- Make something for your parent or grandparent

Get physical
- Go for a walk
- Toss a ball around
- Exercise

Relax
- Get enough sleep
- Listen to music
- Read a book or watch a movie

Daydream
- Think of the perfect day
- Where was your last vacation?
What Worries You?

What do you think of when you hear these words: concern, connect, conquer, and courage. What does each word mean?

CONCERN: __________________________________________
CONNECT: __________________________________________
CONQUER: __________________________________________
COURAGE: __________________________________________

List worries that you and other kids have, such as pets, storms, bus rides, and friendship troubles.

____________________________ __________________________________________
____________________________ __________________________________________
____________________________ __________________________________________
____________________________ __________________________________________

Who Can Help You?

It is important to know whom you can go to for help (or ask questions of) when your parent or grandparents are too sick to help you. There are probably many people around you that can help.

- Grandparents, aunts or uncles
- School nurses or counselors
- Teachers
- Spiritual leaders
- Family friends

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better.
It’s not.

- Dr. Suess
Remember, you can revisit this guidebook again when you think about all the information you’ve been given. It is a lot to think about at one time and it’s okay to put a book like this aside for a while. Come back to the parts you may need at various times in the future. It’s important to use what you’ve learned to move forward together as a family and discover your strengths together.

**DRAW A FAMILY PORTRAIT**
Art Activity: 2

Happiness is... Sadness is...

On a separate piece of paper, paint or draw a mountain and valley. The mountain can represent a time when you were happy; the valley represents a time when you were sad.

DRAW A MOUNTAIN AND VALLEY.
ADD PICTURES THAT SHOW OR DESCRIBE THOSE SPECIFIC EVENTS.

Note to Adults

Being faced with a cancer diagnosis can be very overwhelming, especially when you think of your children or grandchildren. You may instinctively want to protect them from what your cancer diagnosis means and how it will impact the family. However, children of all ages are very perceptive to changes in routine and how you interact with them. The most important thing to remember is that children are very resilient and can understand more than you may think they do. It’s best for the truth to come from you, rather than hearing it from someone else.

When talking to your children or grandchildren, give simple and honest explanations. You will be surprised how a short, simple explanation can provide comfort and relief.

Simple explanations:

“Mommy has breast cancer. The doctor will give me a very strong medicine that could make me feel really sick. It might make me lose my hair, too, but you can help me pick out a pretty hat if it does.”

“Even if mom or dad are unable to be with you, you will always be taken care of.”

Art Activity: 3

Build a Worry Warrior.

CREATE AN IMAGINARY CREATURE TO HELP Gobble UP YOUR WorRIES!

You can use a recycled cereal box and add a mouth. Feed your Worry Warrior by writing down something that bothers you and put it into your Worry Warrior.
Books:

**Let My Colors Out** by Courtney Filigenzi
For preschoolers and younger elementary aged children. Colors are incorporated into the story to express a young boy’s emotions as his mother goes through treatment for cancer.

**The Hope Tree: Kids Talk about Breast Cancer**
by Laura J. Numeroff and Wendy S. Harpham
For elementary aged children. Kids (age 5-12 years old) share their feelings, questions, and experiences about having a parent who has cancer. This story can be used to address all types of cancer.

**Mom Has Cancer!** by Jennifer Moore-Mallinos
For younger elementary aged children. A story about a little boy’s mother who is diagnosed with cancer and the questions and conversations that come with the diagnosis.

**The Rainbow Feelings of Cancer: A Book for Children Who Have a Loved One with Cancer**
by Carrie Martin and Chia Martin
For elementary aged children. Through illustrations and text, children share feelings, thoughts, and questions about their parent who has cancer.

**Additional Resources:**
Additional local and national resources

- Angel Foundation
  www.mnangel.org

- Gilda’s Club Twin Cities
  www.gildasclubtwincities.org

- Kids Konnected
  www.kidskonnected.org

- American Cancer Society
  www.cancer.org

- KidsHealth
  www.kidshealth.org