

FACING CANCER
together



A SUPPORT GUIDEBOOK FOR
Children

When Your Parent Has Cancer

Help when cancer strikes

anxel
foundation



This Book Is For You

If your parent or grandparent has been diagnosed with cancer, this special book is for you.

This book is for you to learn more about what it means to have a parent or grandparent with cancer. You are probably feeling anger, sadness, fear, and worry. These are all very real and normal feelings. *You are not alone.*

This book will talk about:

- Cancer basics
- Your feelings
- Ways to let go of your worries

Find a digital PDF copy
of the guidebook on our website:
www.mnangel.org

Facing Cancer Together

What Do You Know About Cancer?

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.



healthy cells



cancer cells



leukemia

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.

Draw or color
on the body outline
where the
cancer is:





Illustration 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 | ✓ Sad |
| ✓ Angry | ✓ Afraid |
| ✓ Upset | |

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

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

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:





Illustration by Rachel Rolseth

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.

What About Your Feelings?

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.

Illustration by Rachel Rolseth



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





Illustration by Rachel Rolseth

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."



Additional Resources:

Additional local and national resources

Angel Foundation

www.mnangel.org

Kids Konnected

www.kidskonnected.org

Gilda's Club Twin Cities

www.gildasclubtwincities.org

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

KidsHealth

www.kidshealth.org

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.



KEEP CALM AND TALK TO SOMEONE WHO 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.



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