

FACING CANCER
together



A Support Guidebook For

PRETEENS

When Your Parent Has Cancer



Help when cancer strikes

*an***gel**
foundation




This Book Is For You!

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

This resource is to help you explore and learn more about what it means to have a parent or grandparent with cancer. You are probably experiencing a wide range of thoughts and feelings like anger, sadness, fear, and worry. These are all very real and normal feelings. ***You are not alone.***

This book will explore:

- Cancer basics
- Thoughts and feelings
- Coping and support ideas



**Feel
free to use
this book as you
wish. Doodle, write
notes, or share with your
friends. Sometimes friends
are the best medicine to
help you work through
what is happening
when a parent or
grandparent
is sick.**

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

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. 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. 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.**



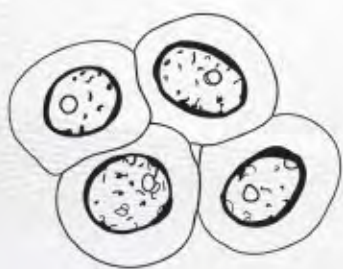
YOU
are not alone.

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**. When a clump of abnormal cells group together, they form **tumors** that can then take over and destroy surrounding healthy cells. This can cause the body to become very sick.

Common types of tumors:

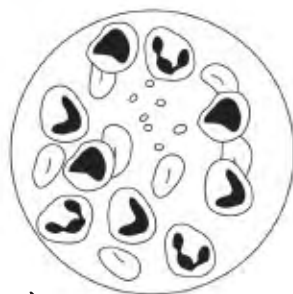
- ✓ **Benign:** Tumors that are not cancerous and can be easily removed from the body.
- ✓ **Malignant:** Tumors that consist of abnormal cells that are out of control and have divided too many times. This type of tumor is cancerous. When a cell has broken free of the primary tumor, the cancer has spread and is called **metastasis**.



healthy cells

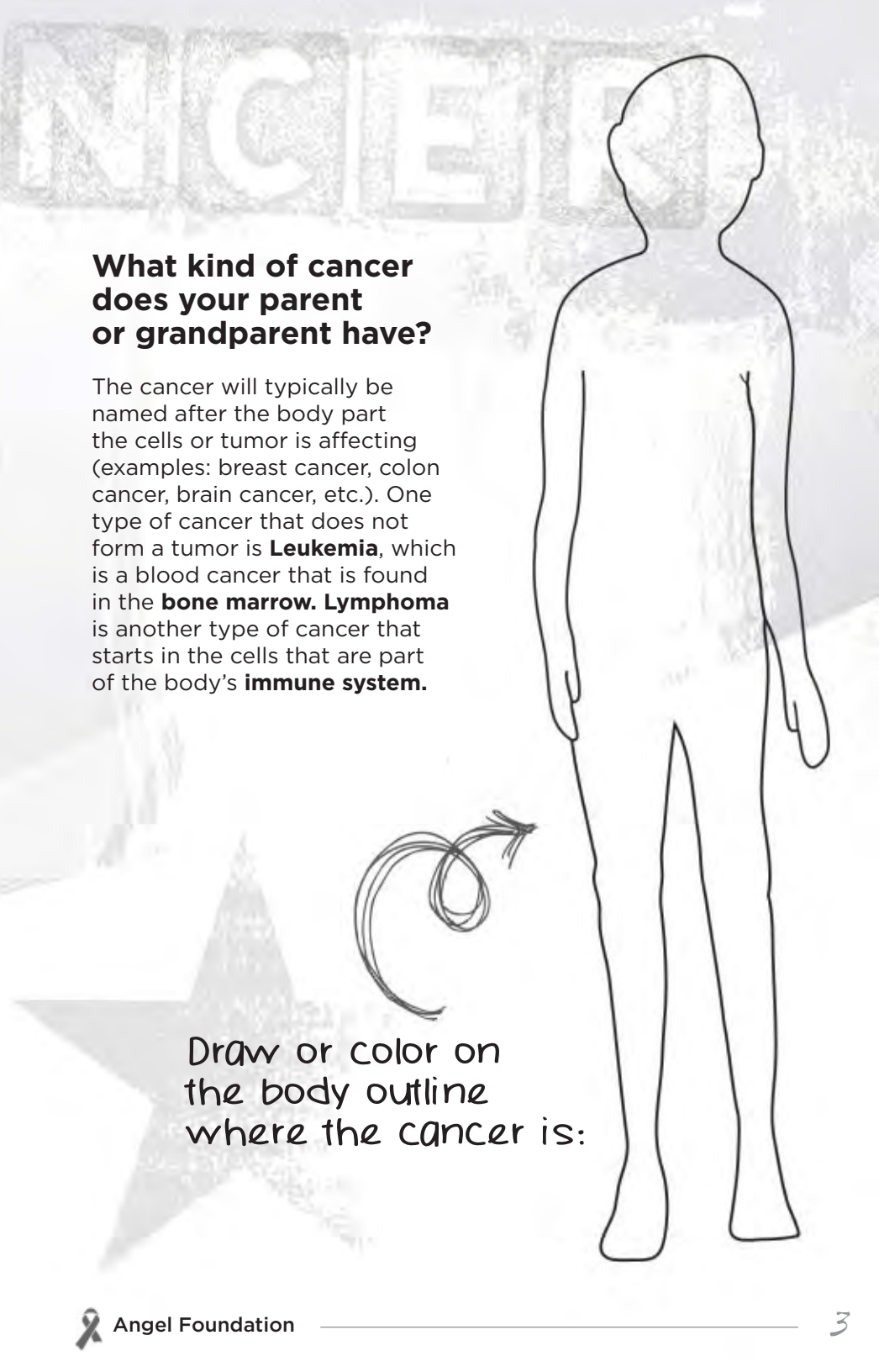


cancer cells



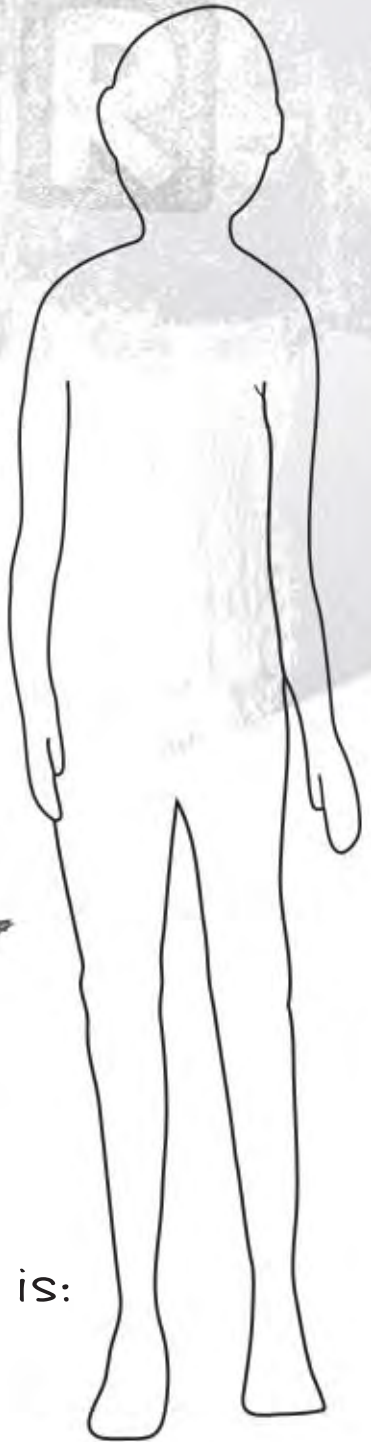
leukemia

Illustrations by Rachel Rolseth



What kind of cancer does your parent or grandparent have?

The cancer will typically be named after the body part the cells or tumor is affecting (examples: breast cancer, colon cancer, brain cancer, etc.). One type of cancer that does not form a tumor is **Leukemia**, which is a blood cancer that is found in the **bone marrow**. **Lymphoma** is another type of cancer that starts in the cells that are part of the body's **immune system**.



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



What kind of medicine or treatment will my parent or grandparent have?

Typically, everyone's treatment is different. It can include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, or all of the above.

- ✓ **Surgery** – This is the removal of a tumor. A surgeon will operate to remove the tumor and surrounding cells from inside the body. Your parent or grandparent will not be awake for this procedure.
- ✓ **Chemotherapy** – This is strong medicine that targets abnormal cells. This medicine can be given in a pill, injection, or through a port (see **Port-a-Cath**). Chemo is given on a set schedule to help your parent or grandparent rest and heal after they receive it each time.
- ✓ **Radiation** – This is radiotherapy that uses high-energy rays that shrink and/or destroy cancer cells. It may be given outside the body through a machine or radioactive material placed inside the body near the cancer cells.
- ✓ **Port-a-Cath (Port)** – This is a special tube (port) placed inside the body in the chest to receive medicine. Having a port placed means your parent or grandparent will be poked with needles a LOT less during treatment.
Ask to see your parent or grandparent's port.
- ✓ **Bone Marrow Transplant (BMT)** – This is a procedure where cells are harvested from either a donor or the patient's own bone marrow. These BMT cells are used to help replace diseased cells with non-cancerous cells.

Use this space to write down your parent or caregiver's type of cancer and treatment plan:





Treatment Side-Effects:

There is no getting around it: side-effects from treatment stink! Your parent or grandparent may have all of the side-effects listed below, or just a few. It is helpful to become familiar with them and prepare you for what is ahead.

Common treatment side-effects:

- ✓ Hair loss
- ✓ Weight changes
- ✓ Nausea
- ✓ Feeling tired
- ✓ Mood changes

Your parent or grandparent has an important group of medical professionals to help them, and they each play an important role. You can ask questions to learn how they are helping!

My Parent or Grandparent's Care Team:

- ✓ Doctors
- ✓ Nurse Coordinators
- ✓ Nurses
- ✓ Social Workers
- ✓ Chaplains
- ✓ Nutritionists
- ✓ Physical/Occupational Therapists



Use this space to write down questions:

Visiting the Clinic or Hospital

You may be curious about visiting the hospital or clinic and seeing how treatment works. Visiting will also give you a chance to take your list of questions to ask a care provider. Remember, your mind is very powerful. If you see what chemo or radiation actually looks like, it may help you cope better with the unknown. This will also give you an opportunity to spend one-on-one time with your parent or grandparent and ask them specific questions. You may be worried beforehand, but those feelings are all very normal and okay to have!

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

- ✓ Coloring books and coloring pencils
- ✓ Blankets and pillows
- ✓ Books or magazines
- ✓ Favorite music
- ✓ A journal that you can write back and forth in together
- ✓ Crossword, Sudoku, or other mind games
- ✓ Watch a movie together
- ✓ Snacks and water
- ✓ Warm socks and knitted hats (clinics and hospitals can be cold)
- ✓ Lip balm
- ✓ Unscented lotions – hand massages are very relaxing and it can also make you feel helpful
- ✓ Provide a cold wash cloth

Recovering from Cancer

You may begin to hear words like **prognosis** and **remission** as time goes on. A **prognosis** is the estimate of how well someone's body is responding to treatment. The purpose of treatment is always **remission**, which means there are no signs of cancer in the body. Unfortunately, this can often be a long and winding road. It can wear the entire family down and feel like a roller-coaster of emotions. During that time, there might be a **relapse** or **recurrence**, which means the cancer has returned.

Relapse or **recurrence** often may mean more treatment is needed. Talk with your parent or grandparent about the new treatment plan. Remember to be open and honest with your feelings. You may feel like you need to ask your parent or grandparent **if they will die**. This is a very normal question to ask when someone is sick. You might hear responses like this:



"It's not happening to me right now, but if something changes, I will make sure you and the whole family understands what is going on."

"It all depends on how I respond to my treatment. Let's give that a chance to work. It worked before, so hopefully it will work again."



"It's okay to worry about this, but let's try and live each day to its fullest. As a family, we can help each other put aside our worries."



What is Going to Change?

Life tends to change dramatically when cancer is a part of your family's story. From this moment forward, life will never be exactly the same as before. No family is the same; every family will respond to cancer very differently.

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.

Your parent or grandparent may ask for some additional help around the house. They may ask you to do extra chores or babysit your siblings more often. These routine changes can be hard, because you may feel **annoyed** for wanting to spend time with your friends. However, you may find that having your parents trust you with additional responsibility will help bring you (and the family) even closer together.

You may see physical changes to your parent or grandparent. Cancer treatment is rough no matter what type it is. Chemotherapy can damage healthy hair cells, which can mean hair loss. Your parent or grandparent's **self-esteem** may be affected and this can sometimes be hard to watch. Changes in how they look, feel, or act may be **embarrassing** for **both of you**. Perhaps you can offer to go shopping for hats or scarves with them, or talk about how they are feeling about these changes.

How do you think you
and your family will handle
the next few steps?

Here is space to write down what has **changed** in *your* life:

What About Your Parent or Caregiver?

Your parent or caregiver will have their own ups and downs, too.

They might be feeling:

- ✓ Lonely
- ✓ Angry

- ✓ Upset
- ✓ Sad

- ✓ Afraid
- ✓ Frustrated

These feelings may be very similar to what you are feeling. It is common for the parent or grandparent to try and protect their children. The same might go for the child wanting to hide their feelings and protect the adult. The most important thing is to try and have those uncomfortable (but honest) conversations **together**.





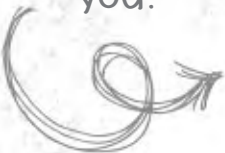
It's Not Fair! What About Me?



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? Taking care of your emotional and physical needs will be a very important part of **your job** during this time.

Use this
space
to write
about
what's
bugging
you:





Relax and Unwind

Find ways to let off steam
and refocus yourself.

Be creative

- ✓ Write in a journal
- ✓ Doodle
- ✓ Make your own art
 - Use clay or Play-Doh when feeling upset or angry

Get physical

- ✓ Toss a ball around
- ✓ Go for a walk

Relax

- ✓ Learn breathing techniques
 - Practice breathing exercises to help relax your body
- ✓ Get enough sleep
- ✓ Listen to music

Use this space to write ideas that will help you relax:

[illegible]

Who Can Support You?

It is important to know whom you can go to for help (or ask questions of) when your parent or grandparent is too sick to help you. There are probably many people around that are more than willing to lend a helping hand.

Who can you ask for help?

- ✓ Grandparents, aunts and uncles
- ✓ School teachers, nurses, or counselors
- ✓ Spiritual leaders
- ✓ Family friends
- ✓ Personal friends and peers



SUPPORT

Get Help When You Are Feeling Down

You might still be feeling **helpless** and **hopeless** during your parent or grandparent's treatment. If these feelings are interfering with your school work, friends, or family life, you may need additional support. Don't worry: these feelings are very normal and there are many local support groups or counselors to help you through the tough times.

Resources that can help:

- ✓ Angel Foundation programs
- ✓ Social Worker
- ✓ School teacher or counselor
- ✓ Spiritual leader
- ✓ Oncology Therapist




Use this space to list any worries or concerns that are interfering with your life.



Growing Stronger as a Family

Remember, you can revisit this guidebook again when you think about all the information you've been given. It is a lot to digest 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.



“Families are like fudge—
mostly sweet
with a few nuts.”

—Unknown

Additional Local and National Resources:

Angel Foundation

www.mnangel.org

Gilda's Club Twin Cities

www.gildasclubtwincities.org

KidsHealth

www.kidshealth.org

Kids Connected

www.kidsconnected.org

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org



Books:

Butterfly Kisses and Wishes On Wings by Ellen McVicker

A resource about how to talk to a child about a parent's cancer diagnosis.

Because... Someone I Love Has Cancer by American Cancer Society

A creative art activity book for children to discover inner strengths and enhance self-esteem during a challenging time.





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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www.mnangel.org