



The
National
Children's
Cancer
Society

25 years of serving kids and their families

SPIRITUALITY IN FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER

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Spiritual Responses to Cancer

Cancer, and life after cancer, may lead to a spiritual struggle. You may question your relationship with God, others, and the world. When a crisis occurs, many people immediately turn to their high power for strength. Others struggle and push God away.

Feelings of loneliness or isolation are also common. You may feel as if you've been abandoned by your God or separated from your former beliefs. Unless you confront this sense of isolation, it can be ongoing—and damaging. Anger directed at the spiritual being you worship is also a very common response. Anger is normal, especially under the stress and fear of a disease such as cancer.

Your Faith Community

For many people, faith provides a sense of community. This community can be a source of strength and support during and after cancer. Within your community, you can receive care that may provide you with healing, guidance and support.

Who Will Provide Spiritual Support?

Spiritual matters call for spiritual caregivers who can provide support throughout your cancer experience and beyond. This caregiver can be a clergyperson from your faith community, a hospital chaplain, a good friend, a family member or other spiritual guide. Whoever you turn to, they should:

- Listen well
- Accept your own spiritual journey
- Be open to understanding your spirituality and faith
- Allow for questions without always providing answers
- If needed, act as a liaison with your faith community
- Be open to expressed hopes and concerns
- Be comfortable discussing spirituality, faith and religious issues

A Spiritual Journey

You have your own, unique sense of spirituality—it's what gives your life meaning. Spirituality is a journey—a state of experience and discovery. It does not have a fixed ending. The spiritual part of who we are is where we live and die, where we make our decisions, and where we find life's meaning. This is especially true in the midst of those experiences that seem meaningless, difficult, or unfair.

Spirituality and religion are not interchangeable. Although for some people, they may be interwoven and thereby inseparable as they complement each other. All human beings have an innate spirituality, but not all have a defined religion. Spirituality is at the core of what we believe and trust. Religion is often, but not always, the framework that makes spirituality work for us personally.

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Here are some additional tips on taking care of your spiritual well-being:

- 1) **Be open to the breadth and depth of yourself.** You have reserves within and surrounding you that can help you through many difficulties.
- 2) **Engage the strength of your spirit.** That is what has maintained you thus far. Trust that it remains and will be supported and strengthened if you remember that you are not alone.
- 3) **Be drawn to a God as a presence of strength and hope in your faith or spirituality.** Again, you are not alone in spirit or in relationships. Family, friends, healthcare professionals, and the God of your understanding are with you.
- 4) **Speak for yourself.**

There is no set formula for spirituality and finding your spiritual self. Rather, each spiritual journey is unique. Improving your relationship with yourself, others, and God will help you to grow spiritually.

Content contributed by Reverend Jay Kanerva, M.Div.

Just Between Us | Survival Tips from other Survivors

"Prayer does give a comforting, powerful feeling."

- Rachel, mother of Roman (Rhabdomyosarcoma)

"Every family has different ways of dealing with cancer. I for one; lean on God. I have changed since my son was diagnosed. I am more patient and my faith is stronger. We wouldn't have gotten through this without God and all the wonderful people He sends to us."

- Tina, mother of Kenton (Liver Cancer)

"The power of prayer is not only to God, but also the positive energy you create. Asking others to pray for Sam gives us strength knowing it is sending this positive energy to him. Also, it helps to know we have the support of our community." - Linda, mother of Sam (Neuroblastoma)

"I was raised Christian in a very spiritual home. But I definitely had my boxing match with God over my daughter having cancer. I stopped praying, going to church, even reading my Bible. Eventually, I dropped the gloves and fell to my knees. I went back to my roots of knowing that He has a master plan for my daughter. The negativity of the anger only keeps you in the dark place longer."

- Shannon, mother of Olivia (Retinoblastoma)

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RESOURCES

Help for the climb

For additional resources, visit beyondthecure.org or talk to a member of your child's medical team.

Medical

National Cancer Institute

800-4-CANCER cancer.gov
Provides state-of-the-art information about the treatment of individual types of cancer, clinical trials and late effects.

CureSearch

800-458-6223 curesearch.org
Funds research and provides information to those affected by childhood cancer.

Chemo Care

chemocare.com
Provides information about chemotherapy and side effects.

Insurance/Legal

HealthCare.gov

healthcare.gov
A government sponsored web site on healthcare information.

Patient Advocate Foundation

800-532-5274 patientadvocate.org
Solve insurance and healthcare access problems.

Social Security Administration

800-772-1213 ssa.gov
Provides answers to questions regarding social security benefits.

Support, Advocacy and Financial Assistance

The National Children's Cancer Society

800-5-FAMILY theNCCS.org
Emotional support, advocacy, education, and financial assistance to parents of children with cancer and an online community for parents and survivors.

American Cancer Society

800-ACS-2345 cancer.org
Information on parental issues such as coping with diagnosis, understanding the health care system, financial and insurance information, and transitioning your child back into school.

Association of Cancer Online Resources (ACOR)

acor.org
Electronic support groups to patients, caregivers, and survivors.

Cancercare 800-813-HOPE cancercare.org Individual and group counseling both on-line and via their toll-free counseling line.

Supersibs

888-417-4704 supersibs.org
Support for brothers and sisters of children with cancer.

First Hand Foundation

816-201-1569 applications.cerner.com/firsthand
Financial assistance for treatment, equipment, displacement and vehicle modifications for children with health problems.

United Healthcare Children's Foundation

952-992-4459 uhccf.org
Financial help for medical services such as speech, physical or occupational therapy, prescriptions, and medical equipment such as wheelchairs, orthotics and hearing aids.

Healthy Living

American Institute of Cancer Research

800-843-8114 aicr.org
Offers specific nutrition information for the cancer survivor.

SmokeFree

877-448-7848 smokefree.gov
Help for those who want to quit smoking

Sun Safety Alliance

703-481-1414 sunsafetyalliance.org
Provides information on sun safety.

Learning Disabilities

National Center for Learning Disabilities

888-575-7373 nclld.org
Solutions and opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities.

Survivorship

Beyond the Cure Survivorship Program

Sponsored by The National Children's Cancer Society
800-5-FAMILY beyondthecure.org
Information on all aspects of cancer survivorship, a late effects assessment tool and college scholarships.

Livestrong

866-673-7205 livestrong.org
Awareness, advocacy and support for the cancer community.