

Ideas and Resources

*“Medicine for the soul.”
~ Inscription over the door of the Library at Thebes*

Selected stories, guidebooks and other resources created by parents, patients, counselors, teachers and writers – those who understand.

When facing a cancer diagnosis, a simple story often communicates better than a textbook, pamphlet or medical article. This section highlights a collection of resources that have been selected to help you and your family better understand and cope with a cancer diagnosis and the range of emotions that go with it. Like any resource list, it will never be complete. Explore what you find here, but do search beyond these pages.

Most of the books and resources in this section can be found in libraries, bookstores or are available from online retailers, such as amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com.

An Introduction to the Resources

Children’s Books

These books are often as helpful and informative for parents as they are for children. They are easy to read and provide a springboard for talking and thinking for all of you. Children’s books often speak a truth in a simple, insightful or clever way. And they are not a strain on your child’s or your short attention span.

Some of the children’s books recommended are about cancer and some address the types of feelings your children may experience. Some are classics and some are new stories. While most are written for children younger than 12 years old, many can be enjoyed by teenagers and adults.



Teen Books

The number of books written about cancer specifically for teenagers is small. Yet, some will still enjoy reading the children's books. Teenagers also tend to be attracted to more active resources, like watching movies, surfing the Internet, and getting into music. Explore all of these resources with your child.

Guidebooks

These books are packed with detailed clinical and practical information, and tend to be written more for adults. They present different and overlapping points of view about talking with children about cancer. Many can be reviewed in sections or by topic, and can be easily picked up and put down.

Storytelling

You and your children may enjoy writing or telling your own story. You may dream up a story using your children as the central characters. Telling stories can help you heal. Many of the authors listed here write from their own experiences, having lived the story they write about. The resulting books are actually a part of their family's healing process.

"If there's a book you really want to read but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."

~ Toni Morrison

Tips for Reading Stories to Young Children

- Look over the story first before reading it to your child. Be sure it feels right for you and your child.
- Find a comfortable and cozy place where you and your child can read and talk about the story.
- Allow, and even encourage, your child to imagine himself or herself in the story.
- Use your natural voice as you read.
- Try not to speak down to your child while reading. Let the meaning and feelings of the story enter you as well. Allow yourself to take the journey with your child.
- Share the images and ideas that you each envision.
- Try not to make a moral judgment or conclusion from the story.
- Relax and chat about how you both liked or disliked the book when you are finished.
- Children of all ages (and adults) like to have someone read to them! One is never too old to hear a story read aloud.
- If a book is too deep for a child or his or her interest stops, pause, talk about it a little to understand the discomfort and try another time or another book.



“A book is the only place in which you can examine a fragile thought without breaking it, or explore an explosive idea without fear it will go off in your face.”
~ Edward P. Morgan



Children's Books About Cancer

Preschool – Early Elementary

[“Someone I Really Love Has Cancer” by Dana Cohn and L.E. Murray](#)

Cartoon/illustrated color book about a boy named Charlie and his friends who help him understand his feelings about his Mom’s cancer.

[“My Own Human Body” by Giovanni Caviezel](#)

This charming board book explains the human body in a series of words and pictures that will make sense to preschool boys and girls. As children turn the pages, they observe the human body’s interior and learn about the functions of muscles, lungs, the skeleton, and the stomach and intestines. This book is a wonderful tool to help young children see and understand how the human body looks inside, and is easy to use in pointing out where the cancer is.

[“Butterfly Kisses and Wishes on Wings: When Someone You Love Has Cancer” by Ellen McVicker and Nanci Hersh](#)

The story, told through the eyes of a child, offers a simple and clear understanding of cancer, cancer treatments, treatment side effects, and the many feelings that families face with a loved one’s cancer. Most important, however, is the lesson that teaches children to realize the power they have to be an active and integral part of a loved one’s cancer journey.

[“Can I Catch Cancer?” by Cristine Thomas](#)

This book explains cancer in terms and illustrations children can easily understand. Gently and playfully guides the child through the process of a cell growing into a tumor. Includes interactive pages so the child reading this book can understand and visualize by coloring and drawing the cute and clever characters in the book.

[“Life Isn’t Always a Day at the Beach: A Book for All Children Whose Lives Are Affected by Cancer” by Pam Ganz and Tobi Scofield](#)

A cartoon illustrated workbook for kids to color, to help learn and understand their feelings about a parent’s cancer.

“The Rainbow Feelings of Cancer: A Book for Children Who Have a Loved One with Cancer” by Carie Martin and Chia Martin

This book is written gently and with simple language that young children can understand.

“Tickles Tabitha’s Cancer-Tankerous Mommy” by Amelia Frahm

This book helps children deal with the mood changes that a parent with cancer might go through. It portrays family life in a humorous way.

“When Someone Has a Very Serious Illness: Children Can Learn to Cope with Loss and Change” by Marge Heegaard

Cartoon-illustrated workbook for kids to color themselves to help understand feelings when their parent is ill.

Elementary Ages

“Promises” by Elizabeth Winthrop and Betsy Lewin

Story of a young athletic mom who has cancer, told from the perspective of her child.

“Upside-Down Cake” by Carol Carrick, illustrated by Paddy Bouma

A nine-year-old boy tries to come to terms with his grief and anger when his father develops cancer, gradually becomes weaker and weaker, and then dies.

Elementary - Early Teens

“Becky and the Worry Cup: A Children’s Book About a Parent’s Cancer” by Wendy Schlessel Harpham, MD, and Jonas Kulikauskas

Wendy Harpham, MD, wrote this book and another guidebook to describe her personal experience helping her children deal with her diagnosis of cancer. “Becky and the Worry Cup” talks about chronically tired parents, parents who have to go away for awhile for treatment, low blood counts, etc. It suggests ways children can overcome some of the helpless feelings they experience when a parent is sick.

Late Elementary - Early Teens

“Can I Still Kiss You? Answering Your Children’s Questions About Cancer” by Neil Russell

Diagnosed at age 47, when his children were 11 and 13, this is the emotional account of the cancer’s life-changing impact on the author and his family. It is both an informative narrative and interactive journal; it will help parents speak to their children about the cancer that has come into their lives.

“The Year My Mother Was Bald” by Ann Speltz and Kate Sternberg

This book helps readers identify with a child experiencing her mother being diagnosed and treated for breast cancer, and the various steps and consequences that go hand-in-hand with an extensive modern treatment course.

Teens

“When Your Parent Has Cancer: A Guide for Teens” by National Cancer Institute

This pamphlet offers step-by-step information for teenagers to help understand and cope with a parent’s cancer and the challenges it may bring. The pamphlet is available free of charge from cancer.gov or by calling 1-800-4-CANCER.

“What About Me? How Teenagers Feel when Someone in the Family is Ill” by Cancer Family Care

Solid and sensitive information for teenage children of cancer patients. It includes testimonials from teens who have found themselves in this situation.

All Ages

“H is for Hair Fairy: An Alphabet of Encouragement and Insight for Kids and Kids at Heart with Cancer” by Kim Martin and Wend Boomhower

An uplifting and encouraging book that helps cancer patients feel less scared and confused, and recommended for anyone, young or old, who is dealing with cancer or knows someone who has been affected by it.

“Kemo Shark” by H. Elizabeth King, PhD, Mitchell McGough, and Diane Williford Steele

Kemo Shark is the hero of a sixteen-page color “comic book” designed to help children understand the psychological and physiological changes in a parent with cancer who undergoes chemotherapy.

“My Mom Has Cancer” by Sheri Lichtenstein

A book written by a 10 year-old with children’s drawings.

“Once Upon a Hopeful Night” by Risa Sacks Vaffe, Troy Cramer, and Risa S Yaffe

This book accomplishes the hard and often painful task of revealing to your kids that you have cancer in a sensitive and simple way. It is a caring book to read to your children or anyone else in a crisis. Good for all ages.

“Our Family Has Cancer Too” by Christine Clifford

This book has pages of cartoons that show the humorous and serious side of cancer in the family.

“The Paper Chain” by Eliza Blanchard, and Kathy Parkinson

A beautiful, cartoon-illustrated book that tells the story of how one family coped while their mother was in the hospital during her cancer treatment.

“Snowman on the Pitcher’s Mound” by Jamie Reno

This is a book written for both parents and children about loss from a young boy’s perspective. It provides a guide for teachable moments that parents can use to help them relate to their children when faced with serious illness or loss.

“What is Cancer Anyway? Explaining Cancer to Children of All Ages” by Karen L. Carney

This book includes an extended family (parents, kids, grandparents) and talks about cancer simply and directly; addressing a few emotional concerns such as “can I kiss Grandpa?” and “will I get sick, too?”

Children's Books About Uncertainties

Elementary Ages

"Angel Kisses" by Katie Dorn, Ginny Kelley and Amanda Garcia

This is a lyrical story that helps make religious sense of cancer.

"Drawing Together to Learn About Feeling" by Marge Heegard

This expressive workbook covers the strong feelings that children experience in life but sometimes have trouble identifying. Through drawing, children can express and release deep emotional feelings in safe and appropriate ways.

All Ages

"Bridge to Terebithia" by Katherine Paterson and Donna Diamond

This is a story of friendship, imagination, love and loss written about two fifth-graders.

"Fall of Freddie the Leaf" by Leo Buscaglia

The focus of this story is about love, and how love enables us to face some of life's most difficult challenges. It is a book about change, death, and transition.

"Sad Isn't Bad: A Good Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss" by Michaelene Mundy and R.W. Alley

A story of the normal process and feelings associated with loss, and how natural they are.

"Tear Soup" by Pat Schweibert, Chuck DeKlyen

This book is wise and insightful, both for a grieving person as well as someone who loves a grieving person. Loss of any type is addressed in this book. It is perfect for children as the illustrations are stunning and it is written simply, but adults will experience the book more deeply as they will see its wisdom and understand its nuances.

Adult Books About Uncertainties

Teens – Adults

“Finding Hope when Dreams Have Shattered” by Ted Bowman

Learn to dream again after loss. This is a beautiful and practical guidebook for rekindling hope again after any kind of loss.

“Kitchen Table Wisdom” by Rachel Naomi Remen

Excellent book of stories told to the author by cancer patients. Inspiring and easy to read.

“Loss of Dreams” by Ted Bowman

This book is about dealing with non-death losses including dreams. A practical and poetically resourced book that provides perspective on a topic not often anticipated or talked about.

“When Bad Things Happen to Good People”
by Rabbi Harold Kushner

This book is about the “why” question and ways to respond to “bad things.” It offers a perspective on God, life and suffering.

All Ages

“The Next Place All Ages” by Warren Hanson

This illustrated book poses thoughts about what might happen in the next life for children, parents and adults alike. It’s a simple but profound way of explaining death to a child without making it seem frightening or overtly religious.

“Healing a Child’s Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends & Caregivers” by Alan D. Wofelt

This book provides a great list of things to do for families and individuals of all ages as they travel the process of loss.

Adults

“Helping Children Grieve When Someone They Love Dies”
by Theresa Huntley

Divided into sections by ages from elementary through teens, this book provides parents and other adults with timeless information to help children face the loss of a loved one.

Children's Books About Feelings

All Ages

“Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day”
by Judith Viorst

This book helps children (and adults) express their feelings of frustration when things go wrong. This author has a number of titles that are helpful in dealing with emotions. All ages find this book to be fun and sensitive.

“My Many Colored Days” by Dr. Seuss

The best benefit of this book is not necessarily for kids to understand themselves, but to help kids understand grown-ups' moods – why Mommy is tired after a long day at work or why Daddy is frustrated when he burns dinner. I can tell my daughters that I am in a 'gray' mood, and all becomes crystal clear!

“Where the Wild Things Are” by Maurice Sendak

This book is about joining in with the wild things to help lessen the fear about them.

Elementary Ages

“The Grouchy Ladybug” by Eric Carle

This book allows parents to talk with their kids about right and wrong behavior, about cooperation and conflict, and about standing up against bullies. It is a very unique book that starts conversations between parents and kids.

“I Was So Mad” by Mercer Mayer

This book is for very young children about frustration and anger.

“The Very Lonely Firefly” by Eric Carle

This book follows a lonely firefly on his search for other fireflies that leads him to other sources of light such as light, candle, and flashlight. A good book for conversations on what we feel like when we are feeling lonely.

Elementary – Early Teens

“There’s a Nightmare in My Closet” by Mercer Mayer

From the perspective of a young boy, this book tells the story of how a child confronts his fears and learns that they might not be as scary as he once thought.

... and a Few Books About Elephants

All Ages

“Babar” by Jean de Brunhoff

Stories about a young elephant called Babar who leaves the jungle, visits a big city and returns to bring the benefits of civilization to his fellow elephants. He returns to become the king of the kingdom.

“Dumbo” by R. H. Disney

This is a lovely story about a physical symbol or good luck charm (feather) that is released when courage comes from within.

“The Magician’s Elephant” by Kate DiCamillo

The Magician’s Elephant is a haunting fable about trusting the unexpected and making the extraordinary come true. The tale is somber, but the overall message of the story is hope. The characters are quirky and magic lingers on every page.

“My Friend is Sad” by Mo Wilems

From the Elephant and Piggy series, this book about friendship discusses the emotion of sadness through the use of humor.

“The Saggy Baggy Elephant” by Kathryn Jackson
and Byron Jackson

The story of a baby elephant who is lost in the jungle and is made fun of by other animals for the way he looks. Then he’s found by a great herd of gray elephants who tell him he’s a perfectly wonderful little elephant.

Guidebooks for Parents and Families

“Cancer in the Family” by Sue P. Heiney, Joan F. Hermann, Katherine V. Bruss, Joy L. Fincannon

This book details the necessary steps to help children understand what happens when a parent has been diagnosed with cancer. It also includes a special illustrated workbook designed just for children and adolescents to help them record their thoughts and feelings so they can learn how to better navigate this emotional time.

“Coping When a Parent Has Cancer” by Linda L Strauss

This book thoroughly describes cancer and its current treatments, including pointing to improving long-term survival rates and cures. Then it talks about the many challenges a cancer diagnosis can present to families, including financial concerns, altered household responsibilities, the need for care of both patient and children, living with uncertainty, and more. The book is filled with valuable practical information on a wide range of topics, including how to find a teen support group and why to join, what a hospice is, how to behave with a dying person and at a funeral, and anticipating the stages of grief.

“Facing Cancer: A Complete Guide for People with Cancer, Their Families and Caregivers” Edited by Theodore Stern and Mikkael Sekeres

This book is uniquely supportive of the emotional, social and familial aspects of living with cancer. Written by leading doctors in their respective fields of psychiatry and oncology, it is the only reference that combines top-tier medical information and compassionate counsel on cancer. The book is ideal for anyone whose life is affected by a cancer diagnosis.

“Finding Your Way: Families and the Cancer Experience: A Guidebook” by Gail A. Noller, MA

This comprehensive guidebook deals with the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis on an individual and all those that surround that person. Ask about the companion video series. The book is more appropriate for adults, but the companion video, with some parental screening, can be helpful to children.

“Healing Stories: Picture Books for the Big and Small Changes in a Child’s Life” by Jacqueline Golding, PhD

With over 500 hand-picked titles, “Healing Stories” recommends carefully selected books essential for any adult looking to help children cope with their growing pains through reading.

Featuring the long-established children’s classics and the most recent library sensations, these hand-picked stories address kids’ struggles – from everyday to life-changing events – while offering adults the information they need to make the right choices for their kids.

Also includes useful tips to make reading fun and helpful for both adults and children. This is a great guide to finding additional lists of books that help children cope and grow.

“How to Help Children Through a Parent’s Serious Illness” by Kathleen McCue, MA, CCLS, and Ron Bonn

This book offers supportive, practical advice from a leading child-life specialist, including what to tell a child about an illness, how to recognize early-warning signs in a child’s drawings, sleep patterns, schoolwork and eating habits, and when and where to get professional help. Complete with illustrations and Calvin & Hobbes cartoons.

“The Human Side of Cancer” by Jimmie Holland, MD

This is a well-respected text that talks about the real life aspects of cancer, emotions, relationships and healing. It is written by a psychiatrist with years of experience talking to cancer patients and their families.

Dr. Holland shares what she has learned from all of them about facing their life-threatening illness and what truly helps along the cancer journey. This book is the next best thing to sitting in Dr. Holland’s office and talking with her about the uncertainty and anxiety elicited by this disease. And it is a book that inspires hope -- through stories of the simple courage of ordinary people confronting cancer.

“The Human Body Book and DVD” by Steve Parker

This is a highly recommended anatomy book which can be useful for you and your children as you learn about where your cancer is and how the human body functions.

“Their Cancer: Your Journey A Traveler’s Guide for Caregivers Including Families and Friends” by Ann Orchard

This book offers direct advice and reflections for caregivers, family members and friends who are dealing with a loved one’s cancer.

“Vanishing Cookies: Doing OK When a Parent Has Cancer” by Michelle Goodman, MD

This book is written by a psychologist with the special needs of 7 to 12 year-olds and their families in mind. It emphasizes the value of open communication and normalizes feelings. This item is available in the free “Kid’s Kit” from the American Cancer Society.

“When a Parent Has Cancer / Becky and the Worry Cup” by Wendy Schlessel Harpham, MD

This is typically a two-book package, written by a physician who is also a parent and cancer survivor. It offers clear, direct and sympathetic advice about the issues that arise during the long months of treatment. Important points for parents are in bold for easy reading, and it includes a chapter on teens. “Becky and the Worry Cup” is a wonderful companion piece for children.

“When a Parent is Sick: Helping Parents Explain Serious Illness to Children” by Joan Hamilton

This book reviews a child’s understanding and response to serious illness at different stages of development. It provides suggestions of how adults may help the child cope with their feelings and the daily disruptions the illness has created. Joan Hamilton is a clinical nurse specialist in cancer care in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She has worked with cancer patients and their families for more than 20 years.

“When a Parent is Very Sick” by Edna LeShan

This book talks about typical feelings and a child may have when a parent is seriously ill or injured, as well as how it affects the entire family. The book suggests healthy ways for children to deal with these situations.

DVDs and Videos

Daughter to Mother: Teenage Girls Whose Mothers are Living with Recurrent Breast Cancer Share Their Experiences

In this 15-minute documentary, four teenage girls whose mothers are living with recurrent breast cancer express their thoughts and feelings. This DVD was developed to encourage teens and their mothers to share difficult emotions. The DVD is available from the producer, Cancervive, at cancervive.org.

Kids Tell Kids What It's Like When a Family Member Has Cancer

Cancer affects everyone in the family. In this award-winning 115-minute documentary, children talk about their hopes, fears and the adult burden placed upon them when cancer strikes a parent. The film is faithful to the kids' point-of-view and validates the children's emotions. The DVD is available from the producer, Cancervive, at cancervive.org.

Parenting Through Cancer

The Minnesota Angel Foundation's Parenting Through Cancer DVD addresses one of the most difficult concerns a parent has when diagnosed with cancer—how to talk to their children about it. Whether newly diagnosed or in recurrence, this DVD provides the basis for opening up healthy lines of communication, addressing family needs and providing tools for the family to become strengthened by the experience. Easy-to-navigate chapters address the needs of different age groups, and wonderful interviews with a panel of experts, parents and children, provide practical advice for facing the challenges of cancer together as a family. The DVD is available from the Angel Foundation at 612-627-9000 or at mnangel.org.

Talking About Your Cancer: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children Cope

This 18-minute film was produced by Philadelphia's Fox Chase Cancer Center to help guide parents in conversations with their children. It can be ordered from Fox Chase Cancer Center at 1-888-369-2427 or fcc.edu.

We Can Cope: When A Parent Has Cancer

This is a set of three videos, including a manual for parents. The parent video features seven parents talking about how their families coped. The teen video features a group of teenagers talking about their parents' cancer and how they coped. The child video features three young children expressing their feelings. The program can be ordered from Inflexxion Inc. at 1-800-848-3895 or wecancope.com.

Websites

cancer.org

The official site of the American Cancer Society provides a wealth of cancer-related information, including diagnostic and treatment information for all types of cancer, statistics, a treatment decision guide, current research activities, and much more. Its Community section provides information on local resources, support groups, presentations and activities near your home. Discussion boards allow people with various types of cancer to exchange thoughts with cancer survivors. The site's My Planner lets patients maintain a personal calendar for appointments and reminders, make a to-do list, save links to articles, and contact other registered users of the site. The ACS has also created the Circle of Sharing, a unique, free program that helps cancer patients and their caregivers get personalized information about the disease, and share that information securely with family and friends..

cancer.gov

This is the site of the National Cancer Institute, part of the U.S. National Institutes of Health. It offers volumes of reliable and up-to-the-minute cancer information and support options, including articles on a wide range of cancer topics, types of cancer, treatments, statistics, and clinical trials and research.

cancer.org

This large national nonprofit site offers a broad range of 100% free programs and resources for anyone affected by cancer: people with cancer, caregivers, children, loved ones, and those who have lost someone to cancer. CancerCare programs, provided by professional oncology social workers, include counseling, support groups, Connect Education Workshops, publications, financial assistance and practical help. CancerCare also sponsors a companion website: lungcancer.org.

cancerhopenetwork.org

This independent nonprofit site matches cancer patients and their families one-on-one with trained volunteer cancer survivors who have recovered from similar experiences. The volunteers' personal cancer experiences give them a unique perspective and understanding of the questions and fears that only individuals who have gone through it can have. The matching process helps provide support and hope, to help patients and family members look beyond the diagnosis, cope with treatment, and start living life to its fullest once again.

caringbridge.org

This is a free, personalized website for easier communication with family and friends during a health crisis. You or a loved one can update your story and friends can write notes to you on the site. It conserves energy and saves phone calls.

kidskonnected.org

The mission of the nonprofit Kids Konnected is to provide friendship, understanding, education and support for kids and teens who have a parent with cancer or have lost a parent with cancer. Developed on the premise that when a parent gets cancer the entire family is affected and the needs of the children must be addressed, Kids Konnected offers support and services for kids (ages 4 to 12), teens, parents and professionals; including a 24 hour kids' hotline, monthly support group meetings for parents and children, summer camps, a moderated chat room, and a host of educational services and materials.

livestrong.org

The LIVESTRONG Foundation's mission is to unite people to fight cancer; believing that unity is strength, knowledge is power and attitude is everything. Its website provides support and services ranging from educational programs and articles to the latest in clinical trials findings to one-on-one support through its Survivor Care program.

*"Acceptance of what has happened is the first step
to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune."*

~ William James

