

Some ideas to help brothers and sisters cope

- Be honest about the cancer diagnosis and treatment. Kids are very savvy and will come to their own conclusions if they think they are not being told the truth.
- If possible, introduce siblings to the treatment team, who can help give medical information and reinforce that the siblings are special too.
- Give information that is age appropriate. Don't be overly concerned about giving too much information. Children, like grown-ups, stop listening when they've heard enough. Children may worry about cancer being contagious and may need reassurance that they cannot catch it. Explain that there is nothing anyone did to cause the cancer.
- Let siblings know when a hospitalization or long clinic day is anticipated.
- Be open and willing to answer questions as treatment continues.
- Let siblings know where they will be staying (if not at home) and who will be staying with them. Explain any other arrangements that have been made to provide for their care in view of the changed family routine.
- Whenever possible, give siblings the opportunity to express where they would like to go after school and whom they would like to care for them when parents are not available.
- Ask family, friends or neighbors to help get siblings to their usual activities, such as soccer practice or piano lessons.
- Arrange for "alone time" with the well sibling that the child can count on.



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- Involve siblings in the treatment if possible and arrange for them to visit the hospital when possible. They can feel helpful by spending time with their brother or sister playing board games or watching TV or a movie together.
- Make sure school teachers, nurses and guidance counselors in each of your children's schools know what is happening. Do not assume they communicate with one another.
- Help your children identify a "safe" person at school to talk to when they are feeling scared or sad. Request a hall pass so that the children are able to leave class to talk to that person when needed.
- Ask your hospital's social worker or psychologist, or your school psychologist, if your community has programs especially for siblings of children with cancer.
- Remember that brothers and sisters still have their own problems, unrelated to their sibling's cancer, that are real and require your attention.
- Provide consistent, fair discipline. This is just as important as ever, even though it may be more difficult right now.
- Let siblings know that you love them and are proud of them.

