

Help for when An Adult in a Child's Life Has Cancer

Shannon's Child Life Department is available to provide educational and emotional support for families in the healthcare setting.

Things We Know Are Helpful

- Forthcoming, timely, and gentle conversations from caregivers.
 - Avoid forcing a child to listen or talk if they don't want to.
- Let school, daycare, and other care providers know what is going on and keep them updated.
- It is beneficial for all caregivers to tell the children consistent and non-conflicting information.
- Calmly answer all questions.
 - Children will ask questions, sometimes at the most inconvenient time and place.
 - Having those questions consistently and calmly answered in a timely manner is ideal.
 - It is okay to say, "I don't know," if you don't know.
- Some children and teens may need to be told or talk about things repeatedly; this is how they process.
- Some will not be willing to talk at all.
- Remember that children are always listening, even when they appear asleep or engrossed in play.
 - Be mindful of the conversation taking place around children.
- Children understand speech long before they can speak.
- Accept and validate feelings, both yours and theirs; none of them are wrong.
- Be available, when able, for when children and teens want to talk, play, or do something together.
- It is important for children to be told that they did not cause the illness and they did nothing wrong for their loved one to be ill.
- Let the child know they cannot "catch" cancer, it is not contagious; they cannot get sick from being around their loved one.

Online Resources - www.shannonhealth.com/childlife

The following resources on the Shannon Child Life page have helpful information and links:

- **Wonders and Worries:** Nonprofit in Austin/San Antonio area providing online and phone resources
<https://wondersandworries.org/> See "parent resources" for information on explaining a cancer diagnosis.
- **Bright Spot Network:** Resources, support groups, events and parental education available.
You can also order free books about cancer diagnosis directly from their site:
<https://www.brightspotnetwork.org/bright-reads>

It is recommended caregivers, parents, and grandparents read "A Tiny Boat at Sea" which can be ordered from the above Bright Spot Network site or Amazon.

- A Teddy Bear Clinic uses medical play to help children understand common medical procedures. It gives kids space to ask questions, explore emotions, and feel more confident especially when a parent is going through cancer treatment. Kits are recommended for children 2-10 years of age or those with intellectual disabilities. Order your kit: <https://www.brightspotnetwork.org/teddybearclinic-at-home>

Reading developmentally appropriate books to children about cancer can be beneficial. Caregivers should read the books themselves first. An excellent book available on Amazon or The Bright Spot Network site is "I Have a Question About Cancer."

Our Child Life Specialist can assist you with these conversations.
If you desire support and/or assistance, please reach out to the
Child Life office: 325-747-6198 or elizabethbailey@shannonchildlife.org

