

Giving Care

care and education
for cancer patients and those who love them



MAPLE TREE CANCER ALLIANCE

Childhood Cancer

Childhood cancer is a general term for a large group of diseases that can affect any part of the body. Like adult cancer, they involve abnormal cells that grow in an uncontrolled way, and may metastasize and spread throughout the body. However, there are many unique features that distinguish childhood cancer from adult cancers. They include:

- **Cause:** Unlike adult cancer, childhood cancer is often the result of a DNA mutation, rather than lifestyle factors.
- **Long-suffering:** the treatment for childhood cancer can last between 3-5 years and often requires several long-term hospital stays.
- **Response to treatment:** children respond to treatment differently than adults. For example, the use of radiation is limited in children because it can often cause more serious side effects than seen with adults. On the other hand, childhood cancers often respond well to chemotherapy because they tend to be cancers that grow fast. Likewise, children are generally able to recover from high doses of chemotherapy better than adults.

Having a child with cancer is one of the most difficult situations a family can face. It is a stark reminder that this world does not operate the way it should. Children aren't supposed to get sick. They aren't supposed to suffer and die. This was not a part of God's original intent for life. As such, the faith of the parents of childhood cancer patients is often shaken. *If God is good, why did their child get sick? If God is powerful, why didn't He stop the cancer from growing?* Yet, God sent His own Son to suffer on our behalf! He understands suffering and has been there. He also assures us that He has a plan to eventually wipe away every tear.

How you can support families affected by childhood cancer:

- Parents often feel tremendous guilt when their child is diagnosed with cancer. They need reassurance and encouragement that their child's cancer was not the result of anything they did "wrong".
- Cancer is a scary word for children. Encourage parents to be gentle when talking about it with their child. Children do better when they know what to expect from a treatment, so open and honest communication will help ease anxiety. Remind parents to listen to their child and give them space to communicate their feelings, and look for every opportunity to build the trust of the child.

Remember that the body of Christ
"should have equal concern for
each other. If one part suffers,
every part suffers with it; if
one part is honored, every part
rejoices with it" 1 COR. 12: 25-26

- Help the child cope by remaining calm and hopeful. Remind them of how they may have gotten through difficult times in the past. Allow them to express their feelings through drawing or writing. Encourage them for every effort they make while in treatment.
- Ease hospital stays for the child by gifting them with photos, games, books, and music to cheer them up. Parents can also be supported with gas and grocery cards, as well as money to pay for parking and food in the hospital.
- Siblings of the child with cancer often feel overlooked and ignored, because the treatment for childhood cancer is so time consuming for the parents. Encourage the parents to set aside time everyday for the other children – even if it is just for a few minutes. Keep them involved with the treatment as much as possible by including them in visits to the hospital, if possible.
- Offer to take siblings to extracurricular activities. This will keep things as normal as possible for them, and ease the workload of the parents.
- Childhood cancer can be very straining on a marriage. You can support the couple by offering to babysit other children (free of charge) for a few hours so they can get out and reconnect as a couple.
- Encourage the family with Scripture-based text messages and cards whenever you think of them. Let them know that they don't have to respond, but you just wanted them to know you were praying for them.
- Take care of outdoor chores without asking. If you see that their grass needs cut, mow their lawn. If their gutters are full, clean them out. Rake leaves. Weed flowerbeds. Perhaps even assemble a pretty flower pot for their front door!

Dr. Karen Wonders, PhD, FACS, Executive Director
Life Enrichment Center • 425 N. Findlay Street • Dayton, OH 45404
937478213 (phone) • 937424.0677 (fax)

MapleTreeCancerAlliance.org

Maple Tree Cancer Alliance is a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization.

