



Sibling Outreach Program

Helping Families and Siblings When Cancer is Diagnosed — The diagnosis of cancer in a child is a life-changing event for a family. Today, a small but significant body of research on the psychological and social outcomes of siblings of children diagnosed with cancer reveals that these children and young adults have special needs to be addressed as well.

BACKGROUND

The Sibling Outreach Group at Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital is a program designed to address the educational and psychosocial needs of these siblings who are touched by cancer. We are an interdisciplinary team that includes psychology, nursing, social work, child life and medicine.

OUR PROGRAM INCLUDES

- Social events designed for siblings of different ages to allow them to have fun and get to know each other
- Annual Half Day Conference for siblings and their parents
 - Speakers (*i.e.*, *psychologists, social workers, child life specialists*) for parents about family and sibling adjustment to the cancer diagnosis
 - Age-based intervention groups throughout the day to allow for medical play, socialization, and education
 - Disease-based groups to allow siblings of patients with similar diagnoses to meet and discuss various aspects of the diagnosis and treatment
 - Food, games, entertainment, and family atmosphere
 - For older children, relaxation and guided imagery sessions with pediatric psychologist to assist with stress or anxiety, as well as group-like opportunities for support
 - Screening by a pediatric psychologist to address any additional psychological issues experienced by siblings, and to identify more individualized care if necessary
- Distribution of educational materials to parents and siblings to assist with adjustment and expectations throughout the treatment process
- Age-based Support Groups led by a pediatric psychologist

WHEN TO SEEK ADDITIONAL HELP

For many families, the first weeks and months after a child is diagnosed with cancer are the most difficult. Routines are disrupted and children and parents respond accordingly. Many children respond to these changes by showing anger, temper tantrums, anxiety, or depression. But how do you know when your child needs additional assistance?

POTENTIAL SIGNS

- If your child becomes more withdrawn and is refusing to talk to or interact with peers or family members.
- Your child is having temper tantrums at home and school that are disrupting relationships with family members, peers, and teachers.
- Your child's grades begin to slip and his/her teacher is expressing concern that your child seems overly depressed.
- Your child begins to show signs of high anxiety in situations that did not previously cause anxiety, and consoling is very difficult.
- Your child is demonstrating physical symptoms that seem inconsistent with a medical condition (*i.e.*, *daily headaches, severe abdominal pain, sleep problems.*)
- Your child is sleeping and eating less, even when physically feeling better.
- Your child is not taking his or her medications.

These symptoms can appear in your child with cancer or your well children. If you see these signs or have other reasons to be concerned about your children and how they are adjusting, it is time to seek further intervention. Contact your child's pediatrician, oncologist, the behavioral medicine department, or the Sibling Outreach Program for more options to help your child adjust.

To learn more, or to join in our Sibling Outreach Group, contact Tara Malbasa, CNP (216.444.8356), or Margaret Richards, PhD (216.445.2450). Our staff is available to answer your questions or recommend individualized care as needed. [To learn more about Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital, visit **www.clevelandclinic.org/KIDS**.](http://www.clevelandclinic.org/KIDS)