



Helping Teenagers When a Parent Has Cancer

Adolescence is a time of exploration, experimentation and introspection. Teenagers strive to be independent while still wanting to be taken care of by their parents, and are challenged by experiencing these feelings at the same time. When a parent is diagnosed with cancer, it presents new and unique challenges to the teenager and his/her family.

Here are *CancerCare's* 10 tips for supporting a teenager when a parent has cancer:

1. **Teenagers are unpredictable.** Recognize that there are a variety of responses teenagers may have, and keep in mind that teenagers may be uncomfortable with some or all of their feelings and thoughts about your cancer.
2. **Teenagers want detailed information.** This is especially true when it comes to information about diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. They may seek out further information on their own in addition to what you have provided.
3. **Teenagers need to know the truth** and may feel particularly sensitive to information they feel is incomplete or inaccurate.
4. **Teenagers need privacy.** They may or may not want to talk about the experience with their family. Reassure your teenagers that they can receive support from other sources, like an aunt, a friend's parent, a teacher, clergy person or another member of the extended family.
5. **Teenagers often write about and reflect upon their inner thoughts.** Encourage your teenagers to share these feelings and concerns. They can also channel this energy to athletics, journaling or other creative arts.
6. **Teenagers who want to contribute to caregiving** should be allowed to participate in tasks that respect they are not adults, and yet no longer young children.
7. **Encourage teenagers** who want to accompany their family member to treatment in order to see the facility and meet the treatment team. This can help them feel more in control about how your medical care is provided.
8. **Teenagers need consistency.** Make an effort to ensure that they will still attend normal activities and social events.
9. **Teenagers struggle with the need for independence.** A parent's illness may make this more difficult. Encourage your teenager to spend time with friends in age-appropriate activities.
10. **Teenagers are often self-conscious.** A teenager whose parent has cancer may feel even more different. To help your teenagers understand that there are others going through a similar experience, you might suggest that they participate in a support group, peer-to-peer network or online chat room.

Conclusion

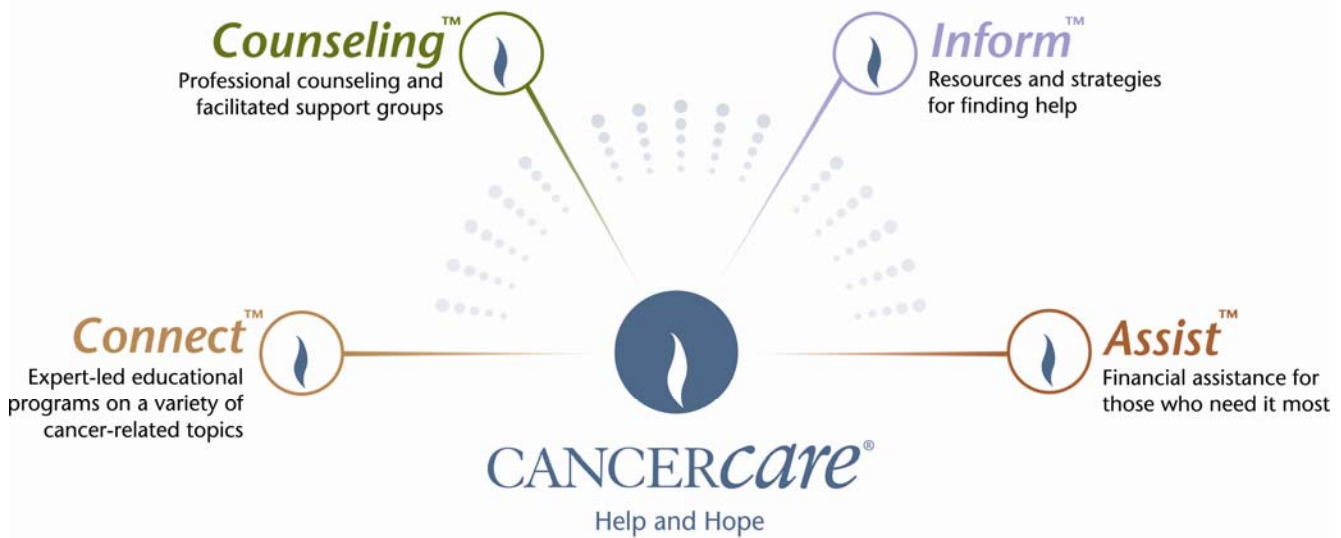
The teenage years are a roller coaster of ups and downs under normal circumstances, and a parent with cancer adds additional challenges to a teenager's transition from childhood to adult life. Parents need to continue to be a "home-base" as the teenager tests out being more adult. The comfort you give teenagers comes in the form of praising them, respecting their needs and including them in your life.



CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's staff of professional oncology social workers offers parents with cancer and teenagers individual counseling and support groups via the telephone, online, or in person. CancerCare also offers education, practical help and referrals to other resources that can help you cope with a cancer diagnosis. All of our services are completely free of charge.

The CANCERcare® Constellation of Services



CancerCare's services are provided free of charge to anyone affected by cancer

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