



Our Mission:

Wonders & Worries helps children cope when their parent has a chronic or life-threatening illness like cancer. All Wonders & Worries services are offered free of charge to anyone – and are available in English and Spanish.

Wonders & Worries, located in Austin, Texas, is the only organization anywhere offering children who have a parent with a serious illness free, professional support in individual and group settings.

The impact of a parent's serious illness on a child can be profound. It can affect their mental health, family functioning, school performance, friendships, growth and development, and overall adjustment. Typically, children in these situations are reported to experience behavioral changes, physical complaints, anxiety, decreased use of effective coping skills, and changes in sleeping and eating patterns.

Wonders & Worries counsels children in understanding the situation and handling these potential negative effects. We give parents the resources and support they need to help their family work through such a crisis.

Today, we work with more than 2,500 people in over 500 Central Texas families who are affected by a parent or other adult loved one's life-threatening or chronic physical illness.

What we do:

Our therapeutic programs help children affected by a parent's serious illness by:

- Giving an age-appropriate understanding of the illness, its treatments and side effects
- Facilitating expressions of feelings related to the changes in the family
- Identifying individual coping skills to help ease feelings of sadness, anger, and fear

Our Services:

All Wonders & Worries services are provided by Certified Child Life Specialists – professionals who are specially trained to help children and their families understand and manage challenging life events and stressful health care experiences. Currently, we offer:

- **Individual Sessions** – for children ages 2-18
- **Group Sessions** – helping children ages 5+ meet other children coping with similar experiences
- **Child / Parent Relationship Training Classes** – teaching parents how to reconnect with their children during the illness or following a loss
- **Informal Support / Recreational Group Activities** – allowing families to enjoy being together in a fun, relaxing environment
- **Bereavement Support Sessions** – helping families prepare for the end-of-life, gain the skills necessary to cope with loss, and create legacies

Services may be provided at one of our offices, at schools (with permission), or at another

location when necessary. All services are provided at no cost to families, thanks to the generosity of our donors.

WHY?

The National Cancer Institute estimates that nearly 25 percent of the 1.4 million adults diagnosed with cancer this year will have a child age 18 or younger.

Research shows that a parent's serious illness can profoundly impact their children, and that stress within families is even higher prior to a parent's death than following death. A 2006 study found that 29 percent of children of cancer patients experience symptoms of post traumatic stress (PTS) syndrome in the first year of the illness, with an additional group experiencing increased PTS symptoms as time wears on and they have more time to 'fret' about the parent's disease.

For seven years, Wonders & Worries has helped children and families cope when a parent faces a chronic or serious illness. We recently received an independent evaluation, focusing on parents' perceptions of how they and their children had changed after receiving W&W services. The report found that *Wonders & Worries achieves positive impacts on children in families experiencing life-threatening illnesses*. It shows W&W has a pervasive positive impact in many areas including 97% of the parents reporting improvements or no change in their children's level of security at home. *The perception by only 3% of parents that their children seemed less secure in homes with such high levels of serious illnesses, including several families in which a familial death had occurred, is a notable and very positive result.*

In addition to helping children cope with anxiety, stress and negative behaviors such as sleeping problems, difficulty concentrating at school and with relationships, the report also indicated that W&W services benefit children by preventing such troubles.

How can you help?

Spread the word – Tell anyone and everyone you know that it's important to support the entire family when a parent has a serious illness. In Central Texas, refer co-workers, friends and family to Wonders & Worries, and elsewhere ask them to visit our website for a list of resources they can access.

Donate - Wonders & Worries professional Child Life staff is currently operating at capacity. We need more support from the community to be able to hire more Child Life Specialists and serve more families. We have many opportunities to recognize individuals and organizations, and we truly appreciate every gift.

Volunteer – Wonders & Worries has several opportunities to volunteer, ranging from helping plan the recreational activities for our client families, to serving on our Board of Directors, to helping plan a fun fundraising event like the The Wonder Ball – a Daddy Daughter Dance or our annual gala ¡*Que Maravilla!*!

Contact us

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Overview

Wonders & Worries was founded August 8, 2001 by Meredith Cooper, MA, CCLS, LPC, and Melissa Hicks, MS, CCLS, LPC, RPT, child life specialists and licensed counselors.

It is the only Austin-area organization that provides comprehensive services to children and families impacted by a parent's chronic or life threatening illness.

Our services are free of charge and are provided to people of any age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity – and are offered in both English and Spanish.

Since our beginning in late 2001, more than 2500 children and adults in the greater Austin area have been served by Wonders & Worries' programs.

In addition to its original West Austin location, Wonders & Worries added an office in East Austin in November 2006.

Wonders & Worries was launched with the support of the Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF), which provided funding in spring 2001 to conduct a pilot support group for children who had a parent with cancer. LAF provided an additional grant in fall 2001 to expand services to include a school-age support group, an adolescent support group, individual counseling for children who have a parent with cancer, and a social function for the reunion of all Wonders & Worries participants.

Today, we work with families in all stages of survivorship, who are affected by any life-threatening or chronic physical illness.

Our services are designed to help children by:

Giving an age-appropriate understanding of the illness, its treatments and side effects

Facilitating expressions of feelings related to the changes in the family

Identifying individual coping skills to help ease feelings of sadness, anger, and fear

Currently, Wonders & Worries services include:

Individual Counseling Sessions – for children ages 2 - 18

Group Counseling Sessions – helping children age 5+ meet other children coping with similar experiences

Child / Parent Relationship Training Classes – teaching parents how to reconnect with their children during illness or following a loss

Informal Support / Recreational Group Activities – allowing families to enjoy being together in a fun, relaxing environment

Bereavement Support Counseling Sessions – helping families prepare for the end-of-life, gain the skills necessary to cope with loss, and create legacies



The Need

The National Cancer Institute estimates that nearly 25 percent of the 1.4 million adults diagnosed with cancer this year will have a child age 18 or younger. These are children who watch their mommy lose her hair, who wonder why their daddy is too tired to play, and whose most common worries are “What did I do to cause this?” “Can I catch cancer?” and “What will happen to me?”

Unfortunately, this population remains greatly underserved. Little has been done to help children and their families survive the challenges raised when a parent has cancer.

Research shows that a parent’s serious illness can profoundly impact their children, and that stress within families is even higher prior to a parent’s death than following death. A 2006 study found that 29 percent of children of cancer patients experience symptoms of post traumatic stress (PTS) syndrome in the first year of the illness, with an additional group experiencing increased PTS symptoms as time wears on and they have more time to ‘fret’ about the parent’s disease.

Additional research indicates that psychosocial support and illness education provided to children at an age-appropriate level significantly helps children, eases stress within the family, improves parent’s depressed mood, and increases the parent’s ability to focus on treatment and well-being.

For seven years, Wonders & Worries has helped children and families cope when a parent faces a chronic or serious illness. Unbelievably, there is no other organization ANYWHERE offering these families timely, FREE professional support.

A recent independent evaluation focused on collecting and analyzing parents’ perceptions of how they and their children had changed after receiving the services of Wonders & Worries. The report found that:

- Wonders & Worries has a pervasive and positive impact on children whose parents are experiencing a life-threatening illness.
- W&W has a pervasive positive impact in many areas including **97% of the parents reporting improvements or no change in many important areas, including their children’s level of security at home.** *The perception by only 3% of parents that their children seemed less secure in homes with such high levels of serious illnesses, including several families in which a familial death had occurred, is a notable and very positive result.*
- In addition to helping children cope with anxiety, stress and negative behaviors – such as sleeping problems, relationships and difficulty concentrating at school – Wonders & Worries services may benefit children by preventing such troubles.



What people are saying about Wonders & Worries

From W&W Parents

"As parents, knowing our children were getting regular emotional support and explanations about cancer from trained professionals took a huge burden from us. As a result of so much support, our children faced cancer with hope, encouragement and personal empowerment." - Andrea and Jason

"I can truly say that you have been a lifeline for me as I have struggled to hold my family together over this most difficult 17 months. In my darkest moments you have been a beacon of light, you have provided concrete, reasonable suggestions to help my boys cope (and therefore me)." - Cynthia

"My children were able to learn about cancer and the treatments. They were able to express their fears, feelings and concerns in a group of children that were also experiencing families with illness. It is hard to tell your friends that your Mom has breast cancer, especially for a teenage boy." - Amy

"You helped our son discover and address some core questions that he had about cancer and his mother's treatment. He became more familiar and at ease with her chemotherapy, surgery and radiation. Moreover, you helped him understand that pregnancy doesn't cause cancer. You also helped him understand that his new sister didn't cause the cancer. And, most importantly, you helped him understand that he didn't cause the cancer. Today, when he hugs his sister and plays with her, we are so grateful for Wonders & Worries. We know that your works has laid the foundation for the love they are going to share in the future." - George

"Your special techniques help address the child's concerns without pressure, in a non-invasive kind of child play. My children truly looked forward to each of their sessions and now feel equipped with a new set of tools to handle their fears." - Patti

"You were able to teach my daughter a lot about what her dad was going through as well as give her ideas on how to handle the anger she was feeling. Because of you we are all doing well now." - Lynne

"I believe that the greatest benefit of Wonders & Worries has been that it has given my daughter the confidence to confront, accept, and cope effectively with both her own illness and her dad's as well." - Debbie

"You helped my sons through the first most difficult weeks preceding and following their mother's death. They came away with both an understanding that what they were feeling was normal and some skills to help them cope with those feelings. Wonders & Worries also helped me understand how to include the boys in my wife's memorial service in a meaningful way." - Jeb

From W&W Children

"Thank you for helping me with my worries. It makes me feel better when we talk out my worries." - Jonathan, age 10

"The Wonders & Worries has changed me. I've gained hope, faith, confidence, and memories. I hope that other kids will be inspired just like me." – Alayna

"You taught me that I can't catch cancer" – Mackenzie, age 6

"The body is like the school system. Cancer is like the bullies. The other kids can't get their work done because of the bullies. Something must be done about the bullies." – Grayson

From Other Organizations

"The Wonders & Worries staff embodies a level of professionalism that is exemplary. The staff's ability to problem solve for complex situations is superlative. Their dependability, flexibility, collaboration, and ability to effectively network are noteworthy admirable attributes." - Hospice Austin

"Wonders & Worries offers excellent psychological support to children and families in times of crisis. There is not other an organization in the Austin area that provides such a wide range of care to children coping with the illness of a parent. We couldn't ask for a better partner to care or our families with children." - Cancer Connection (previously cancare)

"It is of great professional comfort to know that I am able to refer to an organization like Wonders & Worries where the therapeutic needs of children can be addressed. You use creative and therapeutic methodologies to deal with the psychological needs of these children and it is imperative that it continue to provide the services that it does." - South Austin Cancer Center