#### **WONDERS & WORRIES**

# Resources For Communicating About Parental Illness & Supporting Children Throughout



# **Illness Focus: Oncology**

#### **BOOKS FOR PARENTS**

*How to Help Children Through a Parent's Serious Illness* by Kathleen McCue and Ron Bonn (2011): McCue offers a broader view of parenting children through any parental illness and provides guidance for parents on supporting their children and helping them cope with the many challenges and changes illness brings.



 ${\mathscr S}$ 

*Cancer in Our Family* by Sue P. Heiny and Joan F. Hermann (2013): A comprehensive book published through the American Cancer Society, this publication offers information and activities for parents to help children cope.

When a Parent has Cancer: A Guide to Caring for Your Children by Wendy Schlessel Harpham, M.D. (2004): This book for families offers clear, direct, and sympathetic advice to parents trying to raise healthy children while fighting a potentially life-threatening illness.

*How to Raise an Emotionally Healthy Child when a Parent is Sick* by Paula Rauch and Anna Muriel (2006): This book explains how you can address a child's concerns when a parent is seriously ill.

*What Do I Tell the Kids by Cancer Support Community* (free download): A free PDF guide overviewing children's understanding through different age groups, how to talk about cancer and tips for answering common questions?



#### **BOOKS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN (4-11 Year Olds)**

*I Wonder What It's Like When a Parent Has Cancer: Max's Story* by Jacquelyn Rebecek, MS, CCLS (2023): The first book in the series follows the story of a boy, Max, as he learns about and copes with his dad's cancer diagnosis. Strategies for sharing information with Max and his sister about cancer are brought to light. Max explores common feelings and questions throughout the book and challenging points in the story are supported with "helpers" and coping ideas that assist Max along the way.

Let My Colors Out by Courtney Filigenzi (2009): This book provides coping ideas to support children after learning about a parent's cancer diagnosis. In Let My Colors Out, a young child is dealing with his mom's diagnosis and treatment of cancer. He experiences a range of emotions—scared, sad, jealous, feeling fine, denial, anger—that together form a rainbow of hope through this critical time.

What Happens When Someone I Love has Cancer by Sarah Olsher (2019): When Sara Olsher was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 34, her first thought was how to tell her six-year-old daughter without scaring her. As it turned out, explaining cancer was only the beginning. Treatment is long and causes a lot of ongoing changes in the family—all of which can be confusing, scary, and isolating for kids. Join Mia and her stuffed giraffe Stuart as they explain the science of cancer and how a loved one's diagnosis

and treatment affects a kid's day-to-day life.

The Rainbow Feelings of Cancer by Carrie Martin & Chia Martin (2001): This book invites children to share their thoughts, feelings, and questions when a life-threatening illness has touched a parent or someone they love. Written and illustrated by a mother and daughter experiencing their own diagnosis of cancer, it is appropriate for preschool to elementary-age children.

Butterfly Kisses and Wishes on Wings by Ellen McVicker and Nancy Hersh (2018): Ellen McVicker shares the story of a young boy who learns about his mother's cancer and finds hope and strength. Can be used with children as young as 4.

S

*The Hope Tree* by Laura Numeroff & Wendy Harpham (2001): This book is a compilation of stories from children whose mothers have breast cancer. The children describe life in their family from the time of diagnosis through treatment.

*When Mommy Had a Mastectomy* by Nancy Reuben Greenfield and Ralph Butler (2016): It tells the story of a mother and daughter discovering new ways to show they care despite the painful illness of breast cancer and subsequent breast reconstruction surgery.

*Our Shadow Garden* by Cherie Foster Colburn and Children's Cancer Hospital at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center (2010): When a beloved grandmother becomes ill and unable to be out in the sun, her creative grandchild is inspired to help her feel better. With Poppa's help, the child secretly transforms Nana's garden into a place where she can once again be with creatures and plants that bring her joy.

*Nana, What's Cancer?* by Beverlye Hyman Fead (2009): This tale captures the questions of a young teen girl as she asks her grandmother about her cancer. The book provides honest answers to her questions and addresses questions related to recurrent cancer.

#### **BOOKS FOR OLDER CHILDREN (12-17 Year Olds)**

*Both Sides Now* by Ruth Pennebaker (2002): As the control of Liza's once predictable high school life unravels, she sees her mother's courage facing recurring breast cancer in a whole new light.

*My Parent Has Cancer and it Really Sucks* by Marc Silver and Maya Silver (2013): Written by 15-year-old Maya whose mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011. Provides practical guidance including how to talk about the diagnosis, outlets for stress, friends, school, and therapy.

**The Year My Mother was Bald** by Ann Speltz and Kate Sternberg (2003): Clare keeps a journal that describes the medical treatments her mother undergoes for breast cancer, her family's experiences, and her own feelings and concerns.

*Nana, What's Cancer*? by Beverlye Hyman Fead (2009): This tale captures the questions of a young teen girl as she asks her grandmother about her cancer. The book provides honest answers to her questions and addresses questions related to recurrent cancer. [This book is also referenced above for younger children – may be appropriate 10 years and older.]

# **Illness Focus: Multiple Sclerosis**

#### **BOOKS FOR PARENTS**

Someone You Know has Multiple Sclerosis (MS): A Book for Families (free download): A free PDF book about Michael and his mother who has MS. An indepth explanation of Multiple Sclerosis, coping, and adapting to changes after a diagnosis.

#### **BOOKS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN (5-12 Year Olds)**

*Some Days: A Tale of Love, Ice Cream, and My Mom's Chronic Illness* by Julie A. Stamm and Chamisa Kellogg (2021): Even when Wyatt's mom isn't feeling her best, he still thinks she's a superhero! Rosie and Wyatt go on adventures every day: On sleepy days, they build a cozy pillow fort just for two. On wobbly days, Wyatt gets out Rosie's magical walking stick and they cast spells on his toys. And on one super-special day, the whole family heads to town for the big "funraiser"!

*My Mom is Sick and It's Okay* by Angie McPherson and Asiri Kulathunga (2019): Morgan's mom has multiple sclerosis or MS, for short. Sometimes she worries about her mom's illness. But she's found out over time, it might not be as scary as she thought. Join Morgan as she talks about what her family life is like living with a chronically ill parent. There is a resource guide at the back of the book if more information is needed on MS and family life.

# Illness Focus: Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)

#### **BOOKS FOR PARENTS**

Talking with Young People about ALS – for schools (although applicable to all) (free download): This booklet covers the basics of ALS and how best to support school children if their parent is diagnosed with the disease.

#### **BOOKS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN (5-12 Year Olds)**

J

*Real Kids Talk about ALS* (free download): This book provides information about ALS in a child friendly way and provides examples for how to talk about hard topics.

When Pete's Dad Got Sick by Kathleen Long Bostrom and Cheri Bladholm (2004): A story about a dad who has an illness that impacts his energy level and the use of his legs. He uses a cane and a wheelchair. The illness is never named and the book could apply to a variety of chronic conditions including multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue etc. The story does have a Christian focus and references prayer, God, and the Bible but the pages with Christian references could be skipped

*Walk Like Penguins* by Brandy Lay (2016): Gabby adores her Pop-Pop; they have so much fun together! But lately, Gabby has been wondering why Pop-Pop cannot do all the things other grandpas can do, like taking her fishing or going swimming with her.

### **Hospitalization | General Illness Focused**

#### **BOOKS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN (5-12 Year Olds)**

*Kids Worry Too* by The Nebraska Medical Center: A free PDF guide for adults to help children understand hospitalization. Interventions to increase coping and examples of feelings and behaviors that may be expressed during a hospitalization.

*Franklin Goes to the Hospital* by Paulette Bourgeois and Brenda Clark (2011): This is a book about Franklin, the turtle, going to the hospital to get surgery. The book introduces many hospital concepts and describes his trip (and associated feelings) in a gentle way. This book would be appropriate to use if a parent is going to the hospital and they are looking for a tool to prepare and explain more information to their child.

Family Ties Through and Advanced Serious Illness

This toolkit includes four resources for families living with the advanced serious illness of a family member. Through activities, games, and practical information, Family Ties can help you strengthen relationships, spark meaningful conversations,

andworries.org

create lasting memories, and have fun too! Included in Family Ties: Activity journal for kids and teens, adult guidebook with activities for families, huddle or hoopla game, and heart note cards.

# **Parenting Support**

#### **GENERAL BOOKS FOR PARENTS**

**The Explosive Child** by Ross W. Greene (2010): Explosive kids are lacking some crucial skills in the domains of flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem solving, and they require a different approach to parenting. Throughout this compassionate, insightful, and practical book, Dr. Greene provides a new conceptual framework for understanding their difficulties, based on research in the neurosciences.

*Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* by Dr. John Gottman (1997): This book is a guide to teaching children to understand and regulate their emotional world.

*Parenting from the Inside Out* by Dan Siegel (2003): In *Parenting from the Inside Out*, child psychiatrist Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and early childhood expert Mary Hartzell, M.Ed., explore the extent to which our childhood experiences shape the way we parent.

*The 5 Love Languages of Children* by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell (2016): This book helps young children understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them.

*The 5 Love Languages of Teens* by Gary Chapman (2016): This book helps young children understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them.

*Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* by Daniel J. Siegel (2014): Dr. Siegel shows parents how to turn one of the most challenging developmental periods in their children's lives into one of the most rewarding.

*How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber (2012): This bestselling classic by internationally acclaimed experts on communication between parents and children includes fresh insights and suggestions, as well as the author's time-tested methods to solve common problems and build foundations for lasting relationships.

#### **COPING AND MINDFULNESS**

Breathing Makes it Better by Christopher Willard and Wendy O'Leary (Ages 3-7): This book emphasizes how breathing can help bring a sense of calm despite any situation you are in.

**Don't Pop Your Cork on Monday** by Adolf J. Moser and Dav Pilkey (2019) (Ages 9-12): Explores the causes and effects of stress and offers practical approaches and techniques for dealing with stress in daily life.

*Be the Boss of Your Stress* by Timothy Culbert (2007) (Ages 6 and up): Be the Boss of Your Stress speaks to kids ages 8 and up with this message: When your body, mind, and spirit are balanced—working together—they help you stay healthy and positive, even when you have stress. Stress is your body's reaction to things that worry you or make you feel unsure.

*A Terrible Thing Happened* by Margaret Holmes, Sasha Mudlaff, and Cary Pillo (2000) (4-8 years) (Spanish version available): This book follows Sherman after he sees something terrible happen. He becomes anxious and angry, but when a caring adult helps him talk about these emotions, he feels better.



*Moody Cow Meditates* by Kerry Lee Maclean (2009) (3-7 years): Children can develop greater joy and concentration through the practices of mindfulness and meditation, and Moody Cow Meditates is the perfect way to introduce them. This vibrant and funny children's book is a playful way to introduce children to the power of meditation.



#### **FOSTERING SENSE OF CONNECTION**

**The Kissing Hand** by Audrey Penn and Ruth Harper (2007) (Ages 3 and up) (Spanish version available): School is starting in the forest, but Chester Raccoon does not want to go. To help ease Chester's fears, Mrs. Raccoon shares a family secret called the Kissing Hand to give him the reassurance of her love any time his world feels a little scary.



#### **EMOTIONAL EDUCATION**

**The Way I Feel** by Janan Cain (2005) (ages 2-6): A book to help children learn more about potential feelings and helps to validate the range of feelings that come with the ups and downs of life.

# **Coping and Self-Expression**

#### **ACTIVITY BOOKS**

S

*When Someone Has a Very Serious Illness* by Marge Heegaard (1992) (General; ages 9-12): A book to help children understand more about illness and to refine coping strategies to support them throughout.

**Talking with My Treehouse Friends About Cancer: An Activity Book for Children of Parents with Cancer** by Peter R. van Dernoot (2007) (Oncology; for ages 6-12): This activity book, written by the founder of The Children's Treehouse Foundation, is designed to help children cope with the news that their parents or grandparents have cancer. The diary provides ageappropriate explanations and allows kids to express their feelings through drawing, coloring, pasting, and writing.

# **End of Life and Bereavement**

#### **BOOKS FOR PARENTS**

**Dying to Know: Straight Talk About Death and Dying** by Tani Bahti (2006) This book is for adults who are facing the end of their life – and for their caregivers. Easy to read in short bursts, the book is filled with valuable information about end-of-life care. A nurse who has worked in hospice care for many years, Bahti honestly and gently answers important questions about the dying process and teaches us how to gently let life go. Readers have found comfort and peace in this practical book.

#### Men Don't Cry, Women Do: Transcending Gender

Stereotypes of Grief by Kenneth Doka and Terry L. Martin (1999): Emphasizes many ways to cope with grief and offers readers a refreshing change from the popular gender stereotypes of grief. Looks at grief patterns and theories of grief, patterns of coping that may influence grief and interventions on how to be effective with different types of grievers.

Helping Children Cope with Death by The Dougy Center: This guidebook offers a comprehensive, easy-to-read overview of how children grieve and strategies to support them. Based on Dougy Center's work with thousands of grieving children and their families, you will learn how children understand death, how to talk with children about death at various developmental stages, how to be helpful, and when to seek outside help.

Helping Teens Cope with Death by The Dougy Center: This practical guide covers the unique grief responses of teenagers and the specific challenges they face when grieving a death. You will learn how death impacts teenagers and ways that you can help them. The book also offers advice from parents and caregivers of bereaved teens on how to support adolescents and how to determine when professional help is needed.

#### BOOKS FOR ALL AGES (THESE CAN BE USED BEFORE AND AFTER A DEATH)

*Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death* to Children by Byran Mellonie (1983): Lifetimes is a moving book for children of all ages, even parents too. It lets us explain life and death in a sensitive, caring, beautiful way. Lifetimes tells us about beginnings. And about endings. And about living in between.



*The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst and Joanne Lew-Vriethoff (2018) (Spanish version available): In this relatable and reassuring contemporary classic, a mother tells her two children that they're all connected by an invisible string. "That's impossible!" the children insist, but still, they want to know more: "What kind of string?" The answer is the simple truth that binds us all: An Invisible String made of love. Even though you can't see it with your eyes, you can feel it deep in your heart, and know that you are always connected to the ones you love.



*Gentle Willow: A Story for Children About Dying* by Joyce C. Mills and Cary Pillo (2003): Amanda the squirrel is upset that she is going to lose her friend Gentle Willow, but the tree wizards give advice that help both her and Gentle Willow accept the change that comes with death.

S

*Wherever You Are My Love Will Find You* by Nancy Tillman (2012): Love is the greatest gift we have to give our children. It's the one thing they can carry with them each and every day.



*The Memory Box: A Book About Grief* by Joanna Rowland (2017): From the perspective of a young child, Joanna Rowland artfully describes what it is like to remember and grieve a loved one who has died. The child in the story creates a memory box to keep mementos and written memories of the loved one, to help in the grieving process.



#### **BOOKS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN**

*The Goodbye Book* by Todd Parr (2005): Through the lens of a pet fish who has lost his companion, Todd Parr tells a moving and accessible story about saying goodbye. Touching upon the host of emotions children experience, Todd reminds readers that it's okay not to know all the answers, and that someone will always be there to support them. An invaluable resource for life's toughest moments.



*I Miss You: A First Look at Death* by Pat Thomas (2001): When a close friend or family member dies, it can be difficult for children to express their feelings. I Miss You helps children understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them to have following a loved one's death.

#### **BOOKS FOR OLDER CHILDREN**

What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies by Trevor Romain (1999): For any child who has lost a loved one or other special person, What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies? is a simple, insightful, and straightnfrom the heart book about what death means and how to cope.

*Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas* by Alan Wolfelt (2001): With sensitivity and insight, this series offers suggestions for healing activities that can help survivors learn to express their grief and mourn naturally. Acknowledging that death is a painful, ongoing part of life, they explain how people need to slow down, turn inward, embrace their feelings of loss, and seek and accept support when a loved one dies.

#### **ACTIVITY BOOKS FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN**

- After a Death: An Activity Book for Children by The Dougy Center (Ages 6 and up): This easy-to-use workbook is designed for children ages 5 to 12 who have experienced the death of a family member or friend. With a mixture of creative activities and tips for dealing with changes at school, home and with friends, this is a great tool for all grieving children.
- Help Me Say Goodbye by Janis Silverman (1999) (Ages 6 and up): An art therapy and activity book for children coping with death. Sensitive exercises address all the questions children may have during this emotional and troubling crisis. Children are encouraged to express in pictures what they are often incapable of expressing in words.
- ${\mathscr S}$

**Deconstruction/Reconstruction: A Grief Journal for Teens** This journal was specially created for grieving teens. Whether a teen has experienced the death of a parent, sibling, grandparent, close friend, or other family member, this Deconstruction Reconstruction grief journal is a place where teens can draw, write, paint, and transform whatever they're thinking and feeling.

# **Resources for the Clinician**

### **ACTIVITY BASED**

Wonders and Worries Activity Book by Wonders and Worries (2020):

The activities compiled in this book provide ways to engage with children impacted by illness. Topic covered include: developing rapport, illness education, coping and hopes and wishes for the future. For clinicians not working within the realm of illness, activities can be adapted for the patient population you serve.

Memories Matter: Activities for Grieving Children

and Teens: Memories Matter features 85 activities designed to help children process their unique grief. The activities can be used with children and teens in peer support groups or for parents to use with their children.

1-844-WE-WO

#### **SELF-CARE**

S

*Trauma Stewardship* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky and Connie Burk (2009): A longtime trauma worker, Laura van Dernoot Lipsky offers a deep and empathetic survey of the often-unrecognized toll on those working to make the world a better place. We may feel tired, cynical, numb, or like we can never do enough. Through Trauma Stewardship, we are called to meet these challenges in an intentional way – not by becoming overwhelmed but by developing a quality of mindful presence.

#### **Resources for the Teacher**

#### **ILLNESS FOCUSED**

- **Toolkit to Help Educators Support Children of Parents with Serious Illness (free download oncology focused though can be adapted for any illness)**: A parent's serious illness is one of the most difficult challenges a child can face. Life at home may change overnight. For some children, school can be a refuge—a place where life goes on as before. For others, worries about the parent may result in changes in the child's behavior and in his or her ability to handle schoolwork and relationships with peers. This is a guide to assist teachers in their supportive role.
  - *Talking with Young People about ALS for schools* (free download): This booklet covers the basics of ALS and how best to support school children if their parent is diagnosed with the disease.

#### **BEREAVEMENT FOCUSED**

The Youngest Grievers: A guide for loss and life transitions by The Dougy Center (free download): When a loss happens, whether through the death of a family member, a divorce, family involvement in child welfare, or a move to a new neighborhood, young children can feel the effects deeply. Some may also experience the loss of a family member due to military deployment, incarceration, or adoption. For children grieving a loss, the support of a compassionate and informed adult can help them thrive, even amid significant changes in their family and lives. Helping the Grieving Student by The Dougy Center: In the United States, one in 14 children will have a parent or sibling die before they turn 18 years old. Therefore, at some point, every teacher will encounter a student who has been affected by a death. This guidebook is an essential resource for elementary, middle, and high school teachers, offering practical tips and information for how to respond to a death.

After a Death: Ten Ways to Help Grieving Students and Their Peers (brochure):

This multi-page brochure provides information designed to help teachers and school personnel support students who are grieving.

When Death Impacts Your School by The Dougy Center (for administrators): A valuable resource for school personnel who are faced with a death or tragedy in their school community. This guidebook includes suggestions for how schools can help students—by addressing concerns, organizing memorials, and offering support. It also includes instructions for developing a school intervention plan after a death, how to address issues related to suicide and violence and how to know when outside help is needed.



Professional support for children through a parent's illness or injury.

We will, together.