

FOR PARENTS:

Stress Warning Signs in Children

When your children find out that you have been diagnosed with cancer, they will probably react in many different ways:

- Your 7-year-old hugs you one moment, and ignores you the next.
- Your 6th grader moves between thinking you are going to die before his next birthday, to forgetting that you are even sick.
- Your teenage daughter alternates between feeling very sad and acting angry. Maybe they have trouble sleeping or can't seem to concentrate in school.

All their actions, thoughts, and feelings are normal. No matter how your kids respond, you might find yourself worrying that your illness is placing too much of a burden on them. How can you tell when your concerns are justified?

Possible indicators that your child is stressed include:

- Having nightmares or trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep
- Experiencing problems at school.
- Behaving in ways that seem more appropriate for a much younger child, such as wetting the bed or thumb-sucking
- Crying frequently or throwing tantrums
- Acting "clingy" or having trouble separating from you
- Complaining more frequently of headaches, stomach pain, nausea, or other physical problems
- Eating too much or not enough
- Being overly responsible or "good"
- Disobeying your usual family rules and neglecting normal responsibilities
- Refusing to take part in usual activities and friendships
- Abusing alcohol or drugs, or engaging in other dangerous or risky behavior



If your child shows any of the following signs, he or she might need some additional help:

- Intense preoccupation with your cancer, so that your child can think of little else
- Fears that you, and perhaps other family members, will die even though you repeatedly offer reassurances that you are not dying
- Ongoing difficulty focusing on day-to-day routines and activities
- Recurring thoughts of death, or thoughts of wanting to die
- New fears or phobias

The following list describes some possible signs of emotional stress:

- Being afraid of you and your illness
- Feeling different, and ashamed, because of your illness
- Feeling mad, worried, or anxious most of the time
- Reacting with anger toward, or being overly attached to, substitute caregivers
- Worrying that others don't like them
- Assuming guilt for things that are not their responsibility
- Crying too easily or too often
- Worrying that they will be abandoned
- Feeling discouraged most of the time