

Health Care Professional's Resource: Actions to Take

1. Maintain Communication Within The Health Care Team

- Make sure you are up-to-date on the medical details of the person's cancer and what the family understands about it.
- Make sure that all members of the health care team are up-to-date on what information the family has been given and how the team understands how the family is coping.

2. Learn About the Family

- Ask the parents general questions about the children: names, ages, personalities, interests, typical coping strategies, how they're doing.
- Ask the parents what their understanding is of the illness (don't assume they have understood everything that was said to them).
- Ask the parents what they believe the children understand about the illness.
- If the opportunity arises to talk with the children, consider asking questions like these:
 - I am sorry to hear your dad has cancer. What can you tell me about his illness? (Don't assume that they have understood everything.)
 - I am sorry to hear about your sister's illness. How are you doing?
 - Are there questions you want answered? Do you know how to get those questions answered?
 - Who do you usually go to when you want to talk about things?
 - What are you finding most helpful through this?
- Be attuned to ways that you can clarify any misconceptions. (For example, Children and teens may worry about inheriting cancer. In a very small number of cases, cancer is caused by an abnormal gene that is inherited. What is inherited, however, is only the abnormal gene that can lead to cancer, not the cancer itself. If a child or teen expresses worry about this, encourage the family to consult with experts at the cancer centre, or with their family physician.)
- Find out who in the family or community is involved in helping them and the children during the illness. Be alert for support that is missing (e.g., childcare, household duties, emotional support, financial concerns).

3. Support The Parents In Being Open With Their Children

- Respect that open communication and support is difficult for some parents because it can make the situation more real for them.
- Ask questions to determine how you can support the family in communicating about cancer:
 - Would they like to read something about talking to their children about cancer?
 - Would the parents like to talk more with you or with another professional?

4. Be Familiar With The Resources You Can Access

- Psychosocial oncology clinicians (social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, spiritual health specialists, specialty nurses) in major cancer centres have expertise in this area and can be consulted in person or by phone or videoconferencing.
- Health libraries and other health and social services may also be helpful.