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Parenting While Caring for a Parent With Cancer [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board \[2\]](#), 04/2015

Key Messages:

- To reduce burnout from balancing your children's and parent's needs, simplify your routine, stay organized, and ask for help.
- Create a safe environment for your children by talking with them about cancer and helping them express their feelings. Maintaining a regular schedule and giving them some undivided attention each day will also help.
- Talk with your parent about his or her needs and expectations. Each month, re-evaluate your current situation to prevent confusion and tension between you and your parent.
- Give yourself permission to take care of your own needs so that you can continue to be an effective caregiver.

Tips to reduce risk of burnout

Parenting young children while caring for a parent with cancer can be filled with practical and emotional challenges. Here are a few tips to help you juggle your roles and reduce your risk of burnout:

Simplify. Start by making a list of what you need to do. Then, divide these tasks into those you must do and those that can wait. Prioritize the activities that are most meaningful to you and your children. Remove any tasks that you can. Finally, delegate tasks such as laundry, cooking, and cleaning to others if you can. Ask your older children to help you choose which activities are important to them.

Organize. Create an organization system that works for you and enables other people to

support you and your family. You may want to track and store the following items:

- Important contact information
- Details about your parent's medical history, cancer diagnosis, and cancer treatment plan
- Notes taken during appointments
- Copies of health insurance cards and legal documents
- Financial information.

In addition, consider using a calendar or a task list to record your parent's appointments and your family's commitments. Find more [tips for organizing care](#) [3].

Ask for help. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance. Most friends and family members are willing to help, particularly when given specific suggestions. Although you may feel uncomfortable or guilty because you cannot do it all, delegating is important. Delegating tasks allows you to spend more quality time with your children, spouse, and parent. And, it allows you to take time to care for yourself, which benefits your family in the end.

Consider assigning a "captain of kindnesses" to be the contact person for others who would like to be helpful. This person could be a close friend or family member. He or she can coordinate the help you need and help prevent unwelcome intrusions in your family time. Learn more about [sharing caregiving tasks](#) [4] and [other options for caregiving](#) [5].

Tips for caring for your children

Consider the following tips to create a safe, secure environment for your children while you care for your parent:

- Give your children age-appropriate explanations about your parent's illness. Let them know that nothing they did caused the cancer. And, ask if they have heard anything about cancer that they don't understand and encourage them to ask questions. Learn more about [how to talk with your children about cancer](#) [6] and [how children understand cancer at various ages](#) [7].
- Explain that it is normal for people with a family member who has cancer to be worried and sad sometimes. Encourage them to express their feelings in ways they find helpful. They choose to do this by talking with someone, writing a story, drawing a picture, or playing with toys.
- Maintain a regular schedule and routine as often as possible. Most children find comfort in structure. It also helps to make emergency back-up plans for childcare and tell your children about these plans in advance. For example, say, "Aunt Susan will stay with you at our house if I need to take care of Grandma." Or, "Mrs. Jones will pick you up from school when I take Grandpa to the doctor."
- Tell your children's daycare or school and their friends' parents about your parent's illness, providing updates when necessary. Consider sending a letter or an email so that adults who interact with your children will have consistent, accurate information. Many parents

find it helpful to guide other adults in how to talk in a positive way with their children.

- Enlist the help of neighborhood or school-based parent groups. These groups can help with carpooling, childcare, and after school activities.

Despite the challenges, parenting and being a caregiver helps model for your children how family members care for each other.

Tips for caring for your parent who has cancer

Talk with your parent about his or her needs and expectations upfront. Set up a time to re-evaluate how things are going at least once a month. If this is difficult for you, ask a health care professional, family member, or member of the clergy to guide the conversation. You may also want to consider taking the following steps:

- Request a home safety evaluation. A visiting nurse or occupational therapist can do these. The provider will recommend devices and services to enhance your parent's safety and ability to function on their own.
- Ask other for help caring for your parent while you are at work or caring for your children. Other family members or friends may be able to do this. If not, consider asking the health care team for referrals to resources in your community.
- Make caregiving back-up plans for your parent so that someone can relieve you on short notice.
- Use technology to stay in touch with your parent when you're not there in person.

Learn more about [how to manage common caregiving tasks](#) [8].

Tips for caring for yourself

Taking care of yourself physically and emotionally is essential to healthy caregiving. Try to use some of the suggestions below:

- Use resources available through your employer, such as the Family and Medical Leave Act and Employee Assistance Program.
- Take advantage of local caregiver [support groups](#) [9], as well as [online communities for support](#) [10].
- Make a balanced diet, regular sleep, and exercise a priority.
- Plan periodic activities with family or friends that do not involve discussions or tasks related to your parent's cancer.
- Allow yourself some time, even in small intervals, to relax in the ways that work for you. This may involve hobbies, [writing in a journal](#) [11], or daily quiet time.
- Maintain your social support as much as possible.
- Create time for you and your spouse, partner, or friends to stay connected.

Learn more about [how to care for yourself while caregiving](#) [12].

More Information

[Caregiver Support](#) [13]

[Being a Caregiver](#) [14]

[14]Additional Resources

[Family Caregiver Alliance: Caregiving Issues and Strategies](#) [15]

[National Cancer Institute: When Someone You Love is Being Treated for Cancer](#) [16]

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/caring-loved-one/parenting-while-caring-parent-with-cancer>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25065>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25032>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25029>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25311>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25300>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25236>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25383>

[10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24634>

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31561>

[12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25031>

[13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25009>

[14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25233>

[15] <http://caregiver.org/caregiving-issues-and-strategies>

[16] <http://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/when-someone-you-love-is-being-treated>