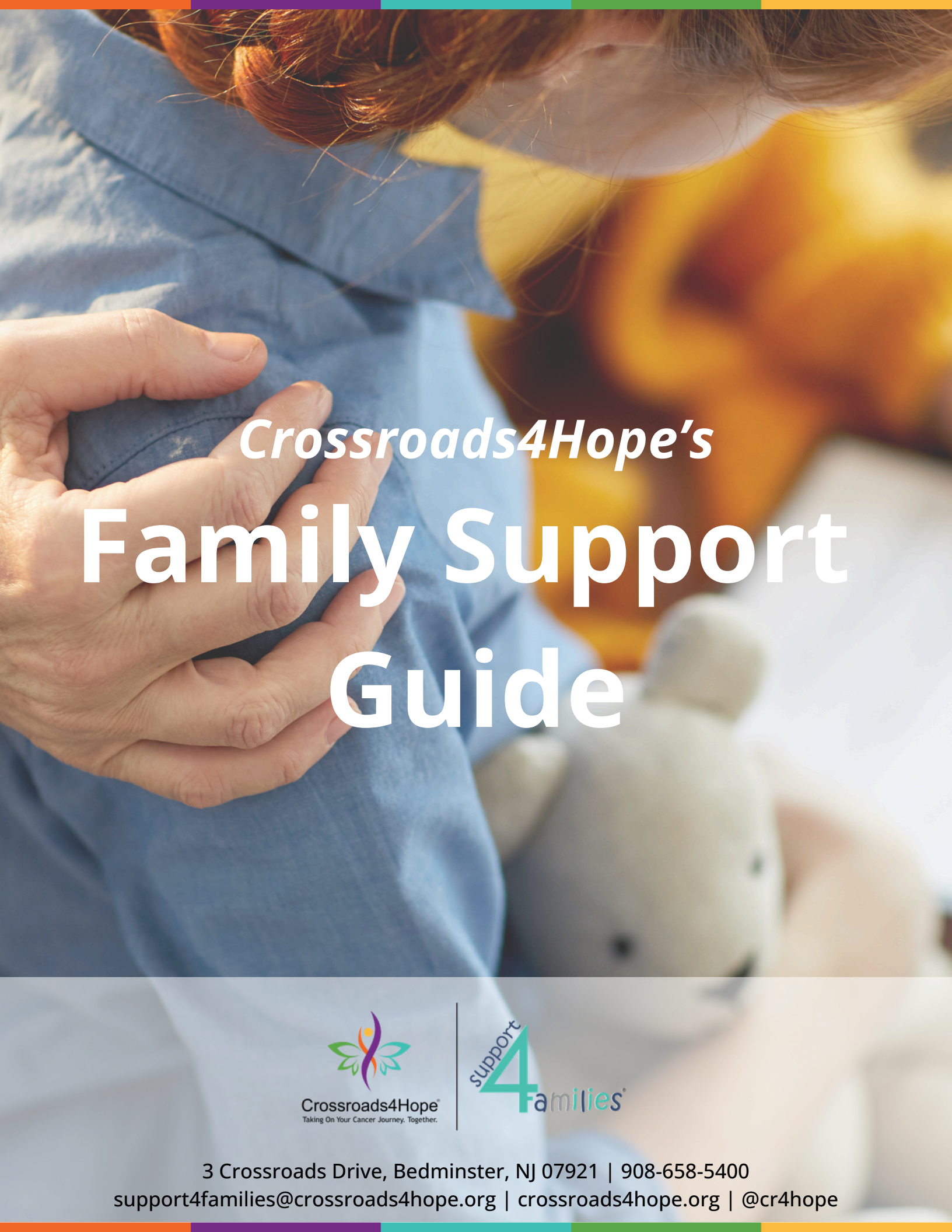




Crossroads4Hope's **Family Support Guide**



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At Crossroads4Hope, we understand that receiving a cancer diagnosis can feel overwhelming and acknowledge the challenges of sharing this news with your children and loved ones. This comprehensive guide contains **tools and insights into how to have these conversations, addresses common questions children may have, and provides tailored considerations based on their developmental stages.** It is designed to help you understand how a child might be processing the changes in their body or in those around them. The goal is to **empower you with knowledge on how to best support the children in your family** at any stage of the cancer journey.

This guide is relevant for understanding an **initial diagnosis, changes in treatment, changes in diagnosis, or even changes in daily routine.** While the ***Family Support Guide*** uses language addressed to a parents or caregivers, the information can be relevant to anyone who needs to explain cancer to children or teenagers. We know that it takes a village to raise children, and we believe that the whole village should be able to access support. This guide is intended as a general resource and **we encourage you to seek out personalized support and assistance.**

Remember, **you are not alone.** Crossroads4Hope is here to provide you with **information, support, and guidance** specific to your circumstances. Please don't hesitate to reach out for additional needs for yourself or your child.

Talking to **Kids and Teens** About Cancer

Why should I talk to my kids about cancer?

Often, children are able to sense when others around them are feeling more stressed or sad than usual. They may assume things are worse than they actually are or blame themselves for being the cause of the problem. Talking to children about a cancer diagnosis creates a safe space for them to express their thoughts openly and truthfully throughout the cancer journey. It increases trust in your relationship and allows open conversations to take place.

When children know what to expect, it can be easier for them to cope with challenging situations. The more a child understands, the less scary things will be for them. Knowledge is power!

Older children have access to technology and other information from peers. In order to prevent misinformation, talking to them directly is your best option.

Why should I talk to my teens about cancer?

Teens have access to a lot of information about cancer. They may be misinformed about what cancer is from TV and movies. It is important to remind them that not all information on the internet is accurate related to your specific cancer diagnosis.

At this age, teens may want to take an active role in your cancer journey. Ask your teen if they want to be involved in decision making. Give them choices and opportunities to support you, while ensuring they don't feel overwhelmed.

Your teen may only want to talk to other's about the cancer journey. Having open conversations with your teen ensures that they have a trusted adult to confide in and ask questions, even if it isn't you.

Talking to your teen about the emotional aspects of a cancer diagnosis is extremely important. Lead by example, demonstrating through both your words and actions that it is okay to express their emotions.

Sharing a Diagnosis

Each family's situation is unique and no two conversations about cancer will look the same. While there is no "right" way to talk about cancer with your child, below are a few different approaches that you can use when talking about cancer.

How to Approach Sharing a Diagnosis

Involve others in the conversation for emotional support. It is okay to reach out for help.

Choose a quiet space for this conversation that doesn't have many distractions. There is no perfect space or time, but you have the power to control where and when you share your diagnosis with your child.

Allow your child to have a break to process the information you provided about cancer before discussing it further. It is normal for them to want to get up and leave.

Tips for How to Communicate

Depending on your child's age, temperament, and previous experiences, their reactions to a conversation about cancer may differ. Even siblings may react differently from each other.

Remember that for many young children, "cancer" is just a word. It does not have the same negative connotation that it does for adults. Using the word cancer is not a bad thing and can reduce confusion and misunderstanding.

Be mindful of your tone of voice, body language, and environment. It's best to have calm and reassuring behavior. It is okay to show your emotions as they arise.

Ask your children what they want to know. Younger children may ask repetitive questions. Older children may be distant when processing. It is okay to not have the answers to all of their questions.

Children may wonder how this will affect their daily life and routine. Share with them how you know it will affect them.

Talk about what they can do to help you when you are undergoing treatment or experiencing side effects. This could be as simple as making their bed!

Common Questions

Keep these tips in mind when answering questions from your child:

Be honest and open. It is okay to say "I don't know". If you do not know the answer, try to find the answer and follow up with your child.

It is okay to use scientific or correct medical terminology when talking about your body and illness. It is okay to say the word cancer.

Share details that are appropriate to your child's age and developmental level.

What is Cancer?

Many children are satisfied with the answer that cancer is an illness or sickness. Other children want to know more. When explaining what cancer is, keep it simple, while being honest. Children need to understand cancer is a different kind of disease than a cold or the flu.

Am I going to Get Cancer?

Children may believe that cancer can spread from person to person. Cancer is not spread through air or any bodily fluids like some other diseases. Cancer occurs in our bodies themselves and cannot be shared to another person's body.

Is the Person with Cancer Going to Die?

Many parents hope their child does not ask this question. A parent's natural instinct is to tell the child that everything will be fine. Instead, parents should balance hope and reality. You can acknowledge that people with cancer do die sometimes, but at the same time many people who get cancer do get better. Everyone's cancer is different and needs different kinds of treatment/medicine. Parents can explain that treatments are improving constantly and this leads to greater odds of survival.

Cancer Dictionary4Kids

Tumor:

A tumor is a ball of cancer cells.

Cells:

Cells are like the building blocks that make up our body, they are super super tiny, you can only see them with a microscope. Humans have over 75 trillion cells in their body. That is a lot of cells!

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis is the word for what is making us sick. For example, when we have a runny nose, our diagnosis could be a cold or the flu.

Cancer:

Cancer is a disease that happens when some cells grow faster or different than the healthy cells in the body. Cancer is not contagious, so it can not be spread like a cold.

Chemotherapy:

Sometimes people shorten this long word to chemo. Chemotherapy is a very important medicine that helps get rid of cancer by fighting cancer cells and stopping them from growing any more.

Intravenous Line:

Also called an IV line. This is a special straw that is put into the arms or hands to help put medicine and water into our bodies.

Oncologist:

An oncologist is a doctor that works to treat cancer.

Scan:

A special machine takes a picture of the body and lets the doctors check for any cancer cells. There are a few different types of machines used for scans, MRI and CT scans are two of them! These machines both look like big donuts with a bed that slides right inside the donut.

Radiation Therapy:

This is a way to treat cancer that uses an invisible beam almost like a laser to get rid of cancer cells! The laser comes out of a big machine, but you can't see or feel it!

Port:

A port an IV line that is placed on the inside of the body to help carry medicine directly to our heart. The port looks like a little button that has a tail coming out of it. The tail is what goes towards the heart. Since our heart's job is to move the blood all over the body, our port is helping to get medicine to the whole body nice and quickly!

Supporting **Children and Teenagers** at Various **Developmental Stages**

While everyone is unique, we can better understand a child's comprehension when we are aware of some common developmental responses to challenging circumstances. **Children at each stage will process and cope in different, but often predictable ways.** The way a child reacts will depend on many factors, and while every child will have unique needs, the following section of this guide **offers information on their potential experiences and offers suggestions for supporting** them.

This resource covers all stages of childhood development, allowing you to understand how children of different ages might understand and respond. This may be helpful as not every child will be on the same timeline and may display behaviors that fall on a different page than their chronological age. It is also important to note that since cancer treatment can sometimes be a lengthy process, a **child's knowledge and coping may evolve throughout the course of treatment** and even beyond it. If you have concerns about your child, please feel free to contact us so we can work together to ensure your child is getting all of the support that they need.



Crossroads4Hope®
Taking On Your Cancer Journey. Together.



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Supporting Children Ages

Birth - 18 months

Understanding of Diagnosis and Illness:

Children at this age will not quite understand illness or a concept as big as cancer. However, they will notice if an important person in their life is sick and absent due to treatment. Children on the older side of this age will begin to understand sickness and some basic information about illness. Children at this age are likely to be affected by changes in their routine and how the cancer diagnosis affects them.

Common Reactions for Children of This Age May Include:

- Displaying increased fussiness or irritability compared to normal
- Having trouble following their typical routine
- Experiencing increased separation anxiety or clinginess
- Facing difficulty sleeping
- Struggling with eating habits
- Experiencing challenges with toileting
- Showing excessive clinginess
- Demonstrating excessive crying
- Having more frequent temper tantrums than usual
- Showing overall distress

Tips for Helping Them:

- Maintain typical and consistent routines
- Make sure familiar caregivers are consistently present
- Continue to take care of basic needs (ex: regular feeding, diaper changes, etc.)
- Provide physical comfort (ex: rocking, hugging, holding, etc.)
- When possible, try to stick to their normal routine (i.e., nap time, bedtime story, snack time)

Supporting Children Ages 18 months- 3 years old

Understanding of Diagnosis and Illness:

Children at this age will not quite understand illness or a concept as big as cancer. However, they will notice if an important person in their life is sick and absent due to treatment. Children on the older side of this age will begin to understand sickness and some basic information about illness. Children at this age are likely to be affected by changes in their routine and how the cancer diagnosis affects them.

Common Reactions for Children of This Age May Include:

- Exhibiting increased irritability
- Having more frequent or intense temper tantrums
- Showing anxiety when separated from caregivers
- Displaying relatively brief outbursts of emotion
- Demonstrating excessive clinginess
- Seeking out more physical contact than normal
- Crying uncontrollably
- Demonstrating developmental regression (ex: may begin wetting the bed again even though they have been toilet trained)
- Asking the same questions over and over

Tips for Helping Them:

- Maintain typical and consistent routines
- Provide comfort when needed
- Provide reassurance when they show signs of distress
- Provide opportunities for them to process their feelings and emotions through play
- When you are comfortable, show your emotions. Even at a young age, it is okay to expose children to actions such as crying. When you do show those emotions, talk to the child. (i.e., "I am crying right now because I am sad."). While the child may not respond, learning to associate emotions with reasons helps the child's emotional and language development.
- Answer questions as honestly as possible
- Provide simple, but doable choices (ex: do you want to wear the red or blue shirt today?)

Supporting Children Ages 3- 5 years old

Understanding of Diagnosis and Illness:

Children at this age are beginning to understand what illness or sickness is, but often associate the words with illness or sickness that they may have experienced such as a cold or the flu. They tend to think that changes in their life or anything that impacts them, are caused by them (i.e., "I didn't eat my vegetables, so I got cancer").

Common Reactions for Children of This Age May Include:

- Becoming uncooperative, irritable, or displaying misplaced anger, hostility, or frustration.
- Having nightmares or developing new fears.
- Demonstrating developmental regressions (i.e., bed wetting once already potty trained).
- Showing signs of separation anxiety.
- Being overly sensitive or emotional (i.e., having tantrums when they may usually not).
- Facing difficulties with transitions, new activities or new people (i.e., school drop off, new teacher).

Tips for Helping Them:

- Explain the diagnosis in a simple, concrete language such as the words cancer.
- Provide reassurance and validation- they need to know that they are being listened to, that they are safe, and that their feelings are valid.
- Be honest and transparent with them about what may affect them or they may experience.
- Answer any questions they ask, even if the questions are repetitive. If you do not know the answer, tell them you don't know.
- Offer them to have control as much as possible by giving choices.
- Offer physical and emotional comforting and nurturance. Give comfort items that they can bring when they are not with you.
- Encourage them to play, this is how children process big feelings.
- Keep as much routine as possible.
- Speak about their feelings with them, providing words for their experiences when necessary.

Supporting Children Ages 6 - 10 years old

Understanding of Diagnosis and Illness:

In this age group, children begin to understand the concept of illness, and can understand the difference between a cold and cancer. Children at the younger side of this age still tend to think that an illness is caused by something that they have control over. Children may think that their loved one's illness is caused by a bad action (i.e., "They were mean so they got cancer). Children may also think that people or objects caused the diagnosis. For example, they may say that someone "caught cancer" from sources like a friend, an animal, food, or germs. Children may also think that cancer is something that you digest and catch (i.e., "I ate a bad apple and now I have cancer"). Children at this age may also begin to have other experiences or associations with the word cancer.

Common Reactions for Children of This Age May Include:

- Having difficulty focusing or performing tasks (i.e., cleaning room, completing homework, needing comfort items they had given up).
- Becoming uncooperative, irritable, or displaying misplaced anger, hostility, or frustration.
- Starting to withdraw from friends and family.
- Having nightmares or developing new fears.
- Hiding or suppressing their reactions for fear of upsetting others.

Tips for Helping Them:

- Explain the diagnosis in a simple, concrete language such as the words cancer, chemotherapy, radiation.
- Provide reassurance and validation- they need to know that they are being heard, that they are safe, and that their feelings are valid.
- Be honest and transparent with them about what treatment may look like.
- Answer any questions they ask, even if the questions are repetitive. If you do not know the answer, tell them you don't know.
- Offer them to have control as much as possible by giving choices.
- Allow for opportunities to speak about the diagnosis, openly and as often as they need,
- Be an active listener.
- Offer physical and emotional comforting and nurturance.
- Give comfort items that they can bring when they are not with you.
- Encourage them to play, this is how children process big feelings.
- Keep as much routine as possible.
- Speak about their feelings with them.
- Inform the people in their life that may interact with them regularly (i.e. teachers, friends, friends parents, etc.), and allow the child to be involved in making choices about who and how people are informed.

Supporting Children Ages 10 - 12 years old

Understanding of Diagnosis and Illness:

Children at this age will begin to transition from thinking the cause of the illness is a person or object to thinking the cause of the illness is a germ (i.e., I caught cancer from a germ). Children may deny that they are sick. If your child is diagnosed, they may begin to blame themselves or their own body for becoming sick.

Common Reactions for Children of This Age May Include:

- Having difficulty focusing or performing tasks (i.e., cleaning room, completing homework).
- Becoming uncooperative, irritable, or displaying misplaced anger, hostility, or frustration.
- Starting to withdraw from friends and family.
- Having nightmares or developing new fears.
- Hiding or suppressing their reactions for fear of upsetting others.

Tips for Helping Them:

- Provide reassurance and validation- they need to know that they are being heard and feelings are often big and complicated.
- Be honest and transparent with them about the diagnosis, treatment plan, and side effects.
- Avoid blaming the body for treatment responses.
- Provide specific compliments (Instead of "You are such a brave girl/boy" try "You did an excellent job of holding still").
- Allow for opportunities to speak about the diagnosis, openly and as often as they need.
- Be an active listener.
- Remember that you do not need to try and make it better. Being there for them is what they need most.
- Talk with adults who have authority in their life who they spend time with (teachers, coaches, group leaders, etc.) about providing support and leeway where appropriate.
- Open conversations about how to share the news of the diagnosis with their peers and friend groups. Ensure that they are an active member of that conversation and offer to support them in whatever ways they would like.

Supporting Children Ages 13 - 18 years old

Understanding of Diagnosis and Illness:

At this age, teens are able to understand more abstract concepts. This means that they will understand that there are many causes of illness and cancer. Teens are likely to ask more questions regarding the specifics of the diagnosis and treatment and understand the effects and outcomes of the treatment and illness.

Common Reactions for Children of This Age May Include:

- Becoming more dependent on adults.
- Having difficulty focusing or performing tasks (i.e., cleaning room, completing homework).
- Becoming uncooperative, irritable, or displaying misplaced anger, hostility, or frustration.
- Starting to withdraw from friends and family or feeling left out of their friend group.
- Having nightmares or increased fear of death.
- Becoming anxious or depressed.
- Feeling insecure in their body image, sexuality, or identity.

Tips for Helping Them:

- When appropriate, include the teens in medical conversations. Provide space for the teens to contribute their own thoughts on the treatment plan and ask questions.
- Even teenagers crave reassurance and for parents to ease their fears and provide comfort.
- Model healthy coping behaviors to show them know that is OK to express big emotions outwardly. If possible, help them find ways to cope (i.e., painting, exercising, talking).
- Remind them that you are available to talk to them about thoughts, feelings and emotions; however, do not force them to talk if they are not comfortable doing so.
- Make sure there is someone in their life to talk to even if that is not you. They may feel more comfortable talking to peers or other adults.
- Engage in conversations about how to share the news of the diagnosis with their peers and friend groups. Ensure that they are an active member of that conversation and offer to support them in whatever ways they would like.

Supporting Teens and Young Adults Ages 18 - 25 years old

Understanding of Diagnosis and Illness:

Young adults are able to understand what cancer is, what causes it, and what the outcomes of the illness and treatment are. Young adults also have access to find their own information from both reputable and non-reputable resources.

Common Reactions for Children of This Age May Include:

- Feeling pressure to take on a caregiver role for their parent or siblings.
- Starting to withdraw from family and friends, or display misplaced anger towards them.
- Experiencing feelings of guilt.
- Becoming angry, anxious or depressed.
- Sensing a loss in their independence at a time when they recently gained it.
- Seeking out constant change as a method of distraction.
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviors such as binge drinking, drug use, or unsafe sexual activity.
- Experiencing shifts or loss in their sense of self or identity development.

Tips for Helping Them:

- Include them in medical conversations and decisions. Allow them to ask questions and be involved in creating a treatment plan, even if they are not physically present.
- Remind them to make themselves a priority. It is important for young adults to engage in their own self-care (i.e., painting, exercising, talking, spending time with friends, etc.).
- Encourage them to keep up with their usual activities and routines as much as they can (i.e. social life, school, job).
- Give them room to react without judgment. Let them know that you care about their safety and tell them how much you appreciate contact with them.
- Advocate for them to seek support. They may feel more comfortable talking to peers or other adults. If they are living away from home, encourage them to seek support where they live (i.e. college counseling center, local cancer organization, therapist in their area, etc.).
- Offer to help connect them to other young adults who may be experiencing similar circumstances (support group, 1x1 connection, cancer support organizations).

If you or someone you know is impacted by cancer,
Crossroads4Hope is here for you.

Our network of support is available to anyone; the diagnosed, their loved ones, and the community that supports them. **All free of charge.**

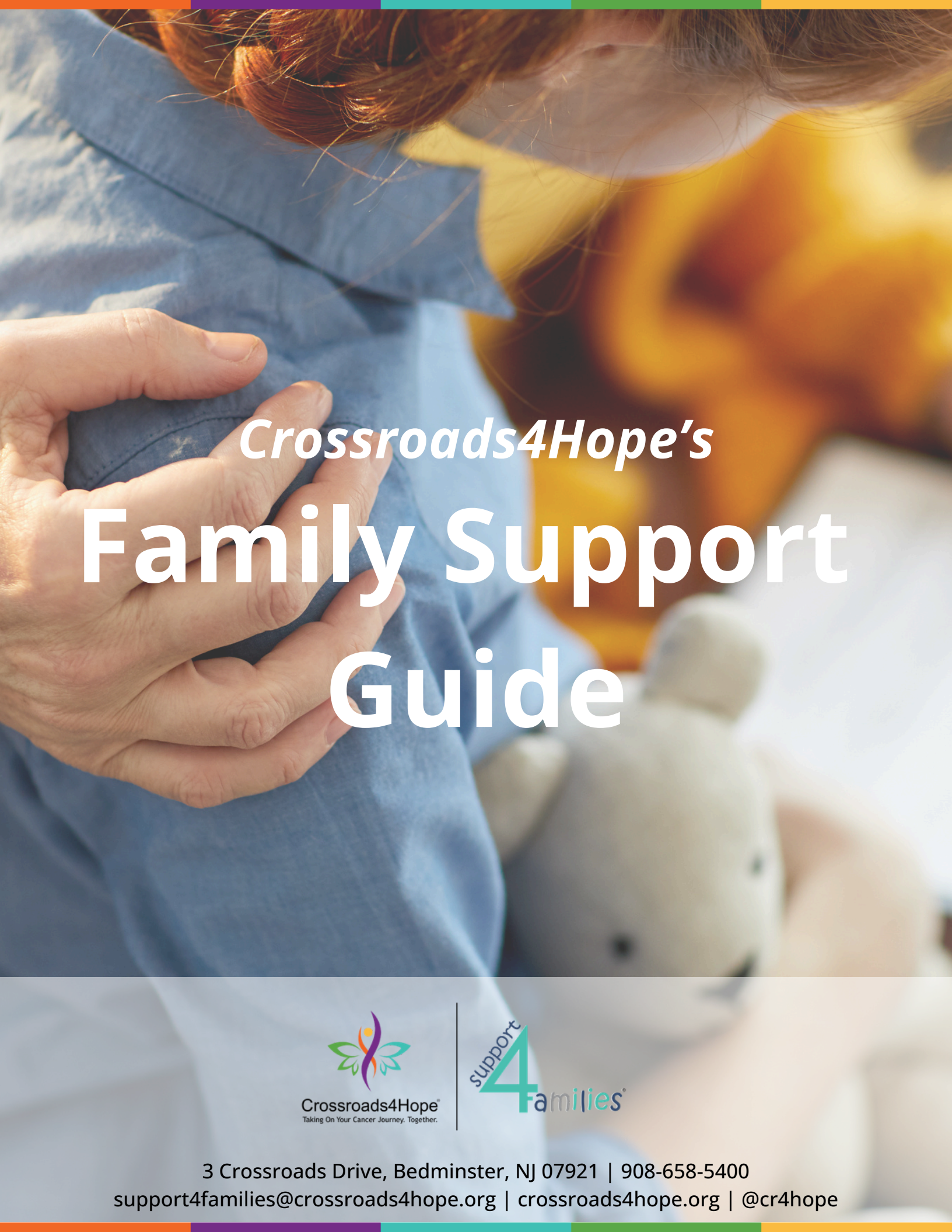


Join our network of support by scanning the QR code to enroll in Crossroads4Hope's MyGo2Support (MG2S) complimentary, mobile support program.

Contact Us!

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