

# Managing Stress and Anxiety During COVID-19: Information for Parents of Cancer Survivors

This information explains how you can manage stress and anxiety as a parent of a cancer survivor during COVID-19.

If your child had cancer, you may have unique challenges and concerns during COVID-19. You may feel more worries right now than parents whose children haven't had a serious medical illness. You may have a lot of questions, including:

- Does my child's cancer history put them at a higher risk for COVID-19?
- How do I talk with my child about COVID-19?
- How do I manage my child's worries and lifestyle changes during this time?
- How do I manage my child's emotional and educational needs without support and access to in-person support from school or other community services?

It's normal to have these questions and feel stressed and worried about COVID-19. As a parent of a cancer survivor, COVID-19 may make you feel a lot of different things. You may feel closer to people who understand your experience with cancer. You may feel like you can cope with or manage social distancing easier than most people. You may have little patience for people complaining about social distancing. These are all normal reactions

to what you're going through. It's okay to feel this way, but it's important to manage your stress and anxiety so you can stay safe and healthy during this time and be there for your child.

## Managing Stress and Anxiety During COVID-19

Remember, there's no right or wrong way to cope with the stress caused by COVID-19. Everyone deals with stress differently. Here are some things you can do to take care of yourself and manage your stress during this time so you can be there for you child. For more information, read *Managing Stress and Anxiety During COVID-19: Information for Cancer Survivors* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/covid\\_cancer\\_survivors](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/covid_cancer_survivors)).

- **Understand your child's risk.** Talk with your child's healthcare provider to learn about your child's health risks during COVID-19 and what you can do to help them stay safe. Having a history of cancer doesn't put your child at a higher risk for COVID-19, but you should still protect yourself and your family by following [CDC guidelines](#), such as [washing your hands often](#) and avoiding close contact with people who are sick or who live outside of your home.
- **Acknowledge your feelings.** Accept that this is a stressful time for everyone, especially people whose children have or had cancer. Remember that you're not alone in this. It's okay to feel afraid or anxious.
- **Stay informed.** It's important to stay updated on news related to COVID-19 related so you know what to do to stay healthy and safe. Make sure to get your information from reliable and trustworthy sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ([www1.nyc.gov](http://www1.nyc.gov)) websites.
- **Disconnect from the news when you need to.** While it's important to stay updated with the news during this time, it can be overwhelming. Take breaks from watching, reading, and listening to the news, including

social media, when you're feeling anxious.

- **Recognize what you can and can't control.** While there's a lot we don't know about COVID-19, focus on what you can do to protect yourself and your family. Make sure you and your family follow [CDC guidelines](#) to protect yourselves. These lifestyle changes we're all going through may be similar to what you experienced while your child was getting cancer treatment, such as worrying about germs and not being able to do some activities. Remember that you're more prepared to follow these guidelines than others.
- **Talk with your child about what's happening.** Let them know you understand these are scary times and that they can ask questions or express their feelings if they want. Each child copes differently and not everyone wants to talk. Let your child know that their feelings matter to you and they can come to you for support. Try to have honest conversations when they're ready to talk so they feel understood and less alone.
- **Spend time with your child.** While you and your child have been through a lot, it's important to stay focused on the present. Try setting aside a few minutes each day to do something together with your child that you both enjoy. You can make time to connect with them through art, play, or another activity of their choice. You may find your child has fun helping to come up with ideas for things you can do together.
- **Stay connected to your family and friends.** While you may not be able to be with your loved ones in person, you can call, text, and video chat with them. You may find it helpful to plan daily calls with your loved ones that you can look forward to. You can also try video chatting with your family during meals or to play games together.
- **Get emotional support.** Talk with people you can trust about what you're feeling. This can be someone that helped you as your child went through cancer treatment or a professional, like a therapist or social worker. You may also find it helpful to talk to other parents of cancer survivors who may be feeling the same way you are during COVID-19.

Talk with your social worker if you'd like to connect with other parents.

- **Take time for yourself.** Remember that this is a stressful time for everyone and that the best thing you can do for your child is take care of yourself. Take time to relax and do something for yourself, like taking a bath or doing an activity you enjoy but don't usually have the time for.

## Resources at MSK

No matter where you are in the world, there is support available to you and your family. MSK offers a range of resources to help you manage stress and anxiety caused by COVID-19. Call your doctor's office for more information or to be connected to any of these resources.

### Social Work

212-639-7020

[www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling/social-work-support](http://www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling/social-work-support)

Our social workers provide emotional support and guidance to patients and their families, friends, and caregivers. Social work offers programs, including both in-person and online support groups. Social workers are available at every MSK location. To talk with a social worker, call 212-639-7020.

If you're interested in joining an online support group, visit the Virtual Programs website at [www.mskcc.org/vp](http://www.mskcc.org/vp) for more information and to sign up.

### Counseling Center

646-888-0200

[www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling](http://www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling)

MSK's counselors provide counseling for individuals, couples, families, caregivers, and groups. They can also prescribe medications to help with anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. For more information, call 646-888-0200.

### Caregivers Clinic

646-888-0200

[www.mskcc.org/experience/caregivers-support/caregiver-services](http://www.mskcc.org/experience/caregivers-support/caregiver-services)

At MSK, the Caregivers Clinic provides support specifically for caregivers who are having difficulty coping with the demands of being a caregiver. For more information, call the Caregivers Clinic at 646-888-0200.

### **Spiritual Care**

212-639-5982

[www.mskcc.org/spiritual-religious-care](http://www.mskcc.org/spiritual-religious-care)

At MSK, chaplains are available to listen, help support family members, pray, contact nearby clergy or faith groups, or simply to be a comforting companion and spiritual presence. Anyone can meet with a chaplain, no matter their formal religious affiliation. MSK also has an interfaith chapel that's open to everyone. For more information, call 212-639-5982.

### **Integrative Medicine Service**

[www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine](http://www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine)

Our Integrative Medicine Service offers many services to complement (go along with) traditional medical care, including music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. To schedule an appointment for these services, call 646-449-1010.

You can also schedule a consultation with a healthcare provider in the Integrative Medicine Service. They will work with you to come up with a plan for creating a healthy lifestyle and managing side effects. To make an appointment, call 646-608-8550.

### **Patient and Caregiver Education**

[www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe)

Visit the Patient and Caregiver Education website to search our virtual library. There, you can find written educational resources, videos, and online programs.

### **Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC)**

646-888-8106

[www.mskcc.org/experience/living-beyond-cancer/services-survivors](http://www.mskcc.org/experience/living-beyond-cancer/services-survivors)

At MSK, care doesn't end when your treatment is finished. The RLAC Program is for patients and their families who have finished treatment. This program has many services, including seminars, workshops, support groups, counseling on life after treatment, and help with insurance and employment issues. For more information, call 646-888-8106.

## Virtual Programs

[www.mskcc.org/vp](http://www.mskcc.org/vp)

MSK's Virtual Programs offer online education and support for patients and caregivers, even when you can't come to MSK in person. Through live, interactive sessions, you can learn about your diagnosis, what to expect during treatment, and how to prepare for the various stages of your cancer care. Sessions are confidential, free, and led by expert clinical staff. If you're interested in joining a Virtual Program, visit our website at [www.mskcc.org/vp](http://www.mskcc.org/vp) for more information.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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