

## **We Can Cope: Helping Parents Help Children When A Parent Has Cancer**

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It is widely understood that a diagnosis of cancer affects more than just the patient. The diagnosis and uncertainty is felt by close friends and family and is often more difficult when children are involved. How does a parent approach the subject with their child? How much can the child handle? These answers differ from family to family and with the age of the child. The advice of other parents and children, who have dealt with a diagnosis of cancer, can help make these decisions easier.

The We Can Cope video series consists of three age-appropriate tapes, one for parents (40 Minutes), one for teens (30 minutes), and one for young children (16 minutes). The tapes present the first hand experiences of seven families and their children through discussions with a facilitator and interactions between family members. The program was developed with funding from The National Cancer Institute and has been recognized with several awards (Silver World Medal at New York Festival's International Award 2000, Silver Award at WorldFest / Houston International Film Festival 2000, and Award of Distinction at The Communicator Awards 2000).

The parent tape is narrated by Wendy S. Harpham, MD, who is a physician, mother of three, and a long-term cancer survivor. Her personal experiences allow her to give advice in a caring, professional, and credible manner. Dr. Harpham presents advice on handling issues such as disclosing diagnosis, how much information to give children, who else to tell, dealing with physical changes, and explaining cancer to children. The tape gives some specific guidance on communicating with children of different age groups. The families shown on the tapes had good prognoses, and although some children did ask about death, it was not a central issue for them. This may leave a void for families that are facing a terminal diagnosis. The accompanying guidebook reviews the topics covered on the tapes and provides a list of additional resources for families.

The teen and child tapes are narrated by age-matched children and include age-appropriate music and graphics. Each tape covers topics such as understanding the diagnosis, what will happen to me?, how can I help?, and what to expect from friends. The topics vary between the tapes and are

geared towards the needs and interests of that age group.

Although the series may not provide all the answers, it can provide guidance for families who are new to the diagnosis of cancer. The advice teaches families the importance of communication, helping them better handle future difficult situations. The series would be a beneficial addition to any cancer center, support program or social worker's library. The cost may prohibit some families from purchasing the tapes, but it could be shared amongst a community such as a church or school where, unfortunately, there are families facing this difficult time.