

A Review of the We Can Cope Family Support Program

By Dr. Lea Baider

Director of Psycho-Oncology, Sharett Institute of Oncology
Hadassah University Hospital, Jerusalem, Israel

In the first of the 3-part video program, a group exploration is being led by a skilled therapist specializing in teenage boys and girls whose mothers and/or fathers have cancer. The discussion centers on their own feelings about their parent's illness and how this new reality has affected their lives. The therapist expertly guides the adolescents as they express their views, fears, interpretations and individual coping styles through the trajectory of the illness.

The second part of the video program features younger children, ranging in age from 4 to pre-teen, and their parents discussing the children's feelings and fears through the trajectory of the illness. At times, a parent attempts to force an issue or prompt the child to respond. However, the overall impact of the dialogue succeeds in conveying how well a child is capable of perceiving the reality of the illness – albeit in his or her own timeframe.

The third part concentrates on the parents, with a professional oncologist (herself a survivor of breast cancer) serving as the narrator. Through the oncologist's ability to share the understanding she gleaned from her own personal encounter with the illness, the viewer is given a straightforward formula for dialogue that can be used by professionals as well as parents and their children in seeking coping stratagems.

The video program is an invaluable tool for teaching how to better understand the family's coping mechanisms when one of the parents is afflicted with cancer. It provides glimpses into the long and painful process that both parents and children experience of uncertainties, anxieties, anger, silent monologues, and a need to go back to the known – the routine – as a way of normalizing and dealing with today in preparation for the unpredictable future. The program provides an avenue for professionals, parents and children to touch subjects that were until now forbidden and to sense the experience of others in their battle to live a quality life with cancer.

The participating parents and children should be congratulated on their willingness to expose their private feelings and fears in front of an impersonal camera for the sake of helping others.