

## Video Review

# 'We Can Cope' Helps Parents With Cancer Help Their Children

By Norman Straker, M.D., Editorial Advisor, [www.oncology.com](http://www.oncology.com)

Parents faced with the heart-wrenching task of telling their children that their mother or father has cancer now have a place to turn for guidance. A set of three videotapes and a guidebook entitled "*We Can Cope, Helping Parents Help Children When a Parent Has Cancer*," has recently become available to families who have just been forced to confront the frightening reality of a cancer diagnosis in a parent.

The format encompasses three videotapes, one for the parents and two to be viewed by children in two different age ranges--one specifically for teenagers and one for younger children. The parents are instructed to view the parents' video and read the guide without the children before deciding whether or how they might like to show the videos to their children.

The narrator of the parents' video is Wendy Harpham, M.D., a mother of three children and a survivor of cancer. She speaks candidly about her own emotional reactions, especially in relation to how she helped her children cope with her diagnosis. This is done through the use of interviews of many different families and by Harpham, one topic at a time. Some of the topics discussed include: how to make the decision to tell your children; what to tell them; the need to use the word "cancer"; how to encourage children to talk about their fears; how to explain cancer and its treatments; and what to tell others. In addition to these questions, the emotional reactions of the parents and the children are demonstrated with accompanying suggestions on how to cope. If the parents decide after discussing their own reactions to the videos that they want to have their children watch the age-appropriate videos with them, they will have been well prepared to deal with their children's questions and emotional responses.

The younger children's and teenagers' videos are sensitively created to reflect the ages of the viewer. The communication is child to child, teenager to teenager, allowing the viewers to hear from many of their own peers exactly what they need to know and to feel reassured. They are encouraged to speak openly to their parents about their worries and concerns and are shown children who role-play for them in talking to their parents, friends or [in the teenager video] speaking in a support group.

I cannot find the words that would adequately praise this extremely helpful tool for families in crisis after they have been faced with a cancer diagnosis. The content is clearly presented, understandable and age-appropriate. The advice is thoughtful, sensitive, very sensible, relevant and extremely useful. I believe that it should be distributed widely so all parents who find themselves in this crisis situation have the tapes that clearly deserve the title "*We Can Cope, Helping Parents Help Children When a Parent Has Cancer*." I also strongly suggest that oncologists view the videos, as they would be most likely to find them a very helpful tool in their management of the psychosocial aspects of their patients.

*Dr. Straker is a consultant at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and an associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the Cornell University College of Medicine in New York.*