



American
Brain Tumor
Association®

Providing and pursuing answers™

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Educating Children and Teenagers

When cancer happens, it impacts the entire family and social network. Social, emotional and information support is an essential complement to medical care when cancer is in the family. Adults and children have very different life experiences. Adults go to work; children go to school. This is a normal part of their daily life and becomes routine. School is not only a place for learning, but also for fun and friendship. Often, returning to school after a brain tumor diagnosis is the hallmark of returning to routine and normalcy. As a result, children and teenagers with brain tumors may look forward to the moment when they are medically able to return to school.

However, this may not be the case for everyone. Now they are navigating a new “normal” and have experienced a loss of social life, routine and independence. Some children or teens may be hesitant or anxious about returning to school for fear they will be viewed differently by other students. They may be concerned about whether their classmates will ask them about the cancer or how they will be treated. One practical approach may be to work with your child or teen on how to answer questions in a way that feels comfortable to them. Some may wish to talk about it at school, while others may not, so they should be prepared with simple answers to common questions.

The need to conform and be accepted by peers is quite common in elementary, middle school and high school. However, typical peer pressures may intensify due to the psychological, social and/or physical effects associated with a brain tumor diagnosis and treatment. It is important to educate parents, teachers and students on what cancer is, how to talk about it and ways to support someone living with cancer. This information should be given in an age-appropriate manner. Fear and anxiety surrounding a cancer diagnosis are minimized when people are empowered by knowledge and myths are dispelled. By encouraging open communication amongst peers, empathy and support for the child or teen diagnosed are enhanced. Knowing leads to understanding, and understanding leads to compassion. Teachers can learn how students respond to illness and recognize when students need additional resources and support.

Once the child or teen returns to school, he/she may exhibit difficulties with class work, tests and homework due to side effects from treatment. These obstacles may be due to the short-term or long-term effects associated with medical treatments for a brain tumor. Examples of special accommodations could include, 2 sets of books – one for at home and one for school, P.E. restrictions, hall/elevator pass, water bottle or snack allowed in class, or permitted to wear a hat in class so they feel more comfortable. Some performance abilities that could become affected include: memory, concentration, problem-solving, comprehension and processing. Since each child's diagnosis is unique, it is not possible to predict how children will be impacted. However, physical, intellectual and neuro-psychological testing can be performed to assist in defining these effects. Psychological changes may include: social, emotional and cognitive

aspects of the child. If determined as a need, the school can develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan. Examples of cognitive accommodations in these plans are needing *extra time* for homework, quizzes and tests, or a *smaller workload* assigned.

Communication between the family, school personnel and healthcare team is an integral component to preparing and facilitating the child's return to school. It is also important to monitor and review the child/teen's progress during each academic year. By keeping open communication and a team approach to progress, the child or teen can flourish in an academic program specified to meet his/her individual needs.

Educating Children and Teenagers was developed for parents, teachers and school staff to bring some of these challenges to the forefront. More specifically, this resource highlights organizations which specialize in a variety of areas and are available to help. Topics addressed in this resource include: social/emotional support, assistive technology, cognitive late effects, learning disabilities/special education, online support, school re-entry and transition resources/vocational rehabilitation. For further reading and information, a bibliography list for parents, teachers and school staff is also included.

Additional Resources:

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Gilda's Club Chicago
312-464-9900

www.gildasclubchicago.org

Gilda's Club Chicago offers free programs for men, women, children and their family and friends whose lives have been impacted by any kind of cancer. The mission is to ensure that all people impacted by cancer are empowered by knowledge, strengthened by action and sustained by community.

Bear Necessities Pediatric Cancer Foundation
312-214-1200

www.bearnecessities.org

The mission of the Bear Necessities pediatric cancer Foundation is to eliminate pediatric cancer and to provide hope and support to those who are touched by it.

Make-A-Wish Illinois
800-978-9474

www.wishes.org

Make-A-Wish Illinois grants wishes to children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human spirit with hope, strength and joy.

12 Oaks Foundation
847-508-1168

www.12oaksfoundation.org

12 Oaks mission is to provide a resource that will help defray the cost of sports and community programs for children of families suffering financial hardship, with a focus on families struggling with the burdens associated in fighting cancer.

Super Sibs!
847-462-4746

www.subersibs.org

Super Sibs! works to ensure that the siblings of children with cancer, ages 4 to 18, are honored, supported and recognized so they may face the future with strength, courage and hope.

Starlight Children's Foundation Midwest
312-251-7827

www.starlight-midwest.org

The Starlight Children's Foundation helps seriously ill children and their families cope with their pain, fear and isolation through entertainment, education and family activities.

Children's Oncology Services, Inc
312-235-6838

www.onestepcamp.org

Children's Oncology Services, Inc. (COSI) believes that a diagnosis of cancer should not prevent a child from experiencing the simple joys of childhood. Our programs offer fun friendship, and support in a safe and nurturing environment.

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana
708-423-5285

www.rmhccni.org

The Ronald McDonald Houses provide a "home away from home" for families of pediatric patients receiving treatment in Chicagoland hospitals in an effort to reduce stress, keep the family intact, and enhance the quality of life.

SCHOOL RE-ENTRY

Gilda's Club Chicago
312-464-9900

www.gildasclubchicago.org

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Cancer in the Classroom is a free school-based educational and support program for students with cancer or with cancer in the family – customized for elementary, middle and high school students.