Quality of Life for Children with Cancer

A series of modules on pediatric palliative care

Spirituality
WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

Spirituality is the way we relate to ourselves, other people, and the sacred, be it God, the cosmos, nature, or any higher being. Adults and children seek the ultimate meaning of our lives, our purpose, and transcendence. Spirituality is expressed through beliefs, values, traditions, and practices. **Spiritual care is part of holistic, quality palliative care.**

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DEVELOP SPIRITUALITY?

When your child asks you difficult or thought-provoking questions about cancer, it’s okay if you don’t have all the answers. You may not be able to answer questions such as, “Why did I get cancer?” or, “Why do I have to keep getting chemotherapy if I’m tired of it?” The search for answers to complex and transcendent questions is a journey you can take together as a family. Turn your uncertainty into curiosity. This can illuminate your path towards the discovery and development of your spirituality in a progressive and enriching way.
HOW CAN I DEVELOP SPIRITUALITY WITH MY CHILD?

While no one can tell you exactly what to say or do, there are tools that can guide you in developing spirituality together with your child.

- **Validate your child's questions.** Let your child know that their thoughts about what is sacred, higher, transcendent, or spiritual are important. Share your beliefs and ask your child what they think.

- **Maintain an open dialogue,** regardless of the topic. Children do not need quick answers.

- **Listen to your child's concerns.** Offer the truth in a plain and simple way.

- **Be clear that children have spiritual awareness and needs** that we must recognize and address. Use every situation as an opportunity for analysis and don't be afraid to say, “I don’t know.”

If necessary, contact and consult with your spiritual guide (priest, pastor, or trusted spiritual advisor). Seek information and turn to books of your faith, such as the Bible if you are Christian.
WHY ARE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES WITH MY CHILD IMPORTANT?

Spiritual practices are important because they create inner strength that grows little by little and bears fruit when you are in the middle of the storm and realize how momentous this event is in your own life, the life of your child, and your family.

WHAT SPIRITUAL PRACTICES CAN I DO WITH MY CHILD?

- Pray and worship with your child. Allow them to lead prayers if they want to.
- Practice a religion, become a member of a spiritual group, perform spiritual rituals and sacraments of faith.
- Participate in spiritual groups and practice meditation and relaxation.
- Perform breathing exercises.
- Practice music, draw, and do artistic activities.
- Read, write, and tell stories. For older children, encourage reading poetry, short stories, and novels.
- Keep a journal and write “the thought of the day.”
- Give the child time and space for support and confidential communication.
- Celebrate birthdays and important dates and holidays, such as Christmas.
- Attend plays and share stories and pictures with your child.
- Study sacred books and scriptures, such as the Bible, if you are Christian.
This series of modules on palliative care aims to provide essential information to mothers, fathers, and others caring for children with cancer, so that they can provide the best care and take appropriate actions to meet the developmentally appropriate physical, socio-emotional, and spiritual needs of their loved ones, as well as needs arising from the disease itself.

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