

Coping With a Parent's Cancer While in School

Dr Reni Joseph Foundation

About the Workshop

Cancer can change more than a family's health:

When a parent or family member is diagnosed with cancer, school, friendships, activities, and everyday responsibilities do not just stop. Being able to balance different parts of life while dealing with the fear and uncertainty of cancer can feel overwhelming. This workshop dives into this issue and creates ways to help students identify the challenges they are facing, explore strategies for managing school and personal responsibilities so they can build a way for them to manage all the things that are happening in their life.

In this workshop we will explore:

- recognizing how a family member's cancer can affect everyday life
- how to manage schoolwork alongside family responsibilities
- communicating with teachers and other trusted adults
- identify people you can turn to for support
- create a personal plan for difficult or overwhelming days



How Has Life Changed?

When someone you love has cancer, changes can happen gradually or all at once. Maybe you have to take on new responsibilities, find it a lot harder to focus at school, or notice changes in your relationships. It is important to just take a moment to recognize what has changed for you before trying to fix the change.

When my mom was diagnosed with cancer, there were many changes I noticed.

At school, it became harder for me to concentrate because I would constantly think of my mom and what she was going through, and wonder whether or not she was okay. With my friends or activities, I would have a hard time concentrating or even paying attention to what people would say. I would miss important details or funny jokes because my mind was so absorbed in what was happening at home. Looking back, I feel like one thing is that I wish I had told people and built a support system of people who knew what was happening and could be there for me all the time.

Understanding What You're Carrying

- When someone in your family has cancer, your responsibility does not replace things you were currently doing but rather adds to them. You are still expected to stay on top of assignments, attend activities, spend time with friends, and plan your future while worrying about your family's health.

School

Homework, tests,
attendance, grades, college
planning, and
extracurriculars

Home

Chores, caring for siblings,
helping your family,
transportation

Check in with yourself

Which area feels the
heaviest right now?

☐ School

☐ Home

☐ Emotions

☐ Relationships

☐ Something else:

What's one responsibility
you wish you had more help
with?

Emotions

Worry, sadness, uncertainty,
frustration, guilt, or simply
feeling distracted

Relationships

Keeping up with friends,
explaining what's happening,
asking for help, or wanting
space

When Everything Feels Important

When school, family responsibilities, and emotions pile up, it can make everything feel urgent. A way to help is to break responsibilities into smaller categories and decide what needs attention now and what can wait.

1. MUST DO

Things that genuinely need your attention soon. Ex: an assignment due tomorrow, taking medications to a family member, and an important appointment

2. SHOULD DO

Things that matter but may have some flexibility. Ex: studying for next week's test, answering an email, practicing for an activity

3. CAN WAIT

Things you can postpone, shorten, or ask someone else to help with

Questions to think about:

What is one thing you want to focus on first?
Can anyone help make it easier?

Your Goal:

Your goal is not to accomplish everything. It is to decide what deserves your attention right now.

Handling the Hard Days

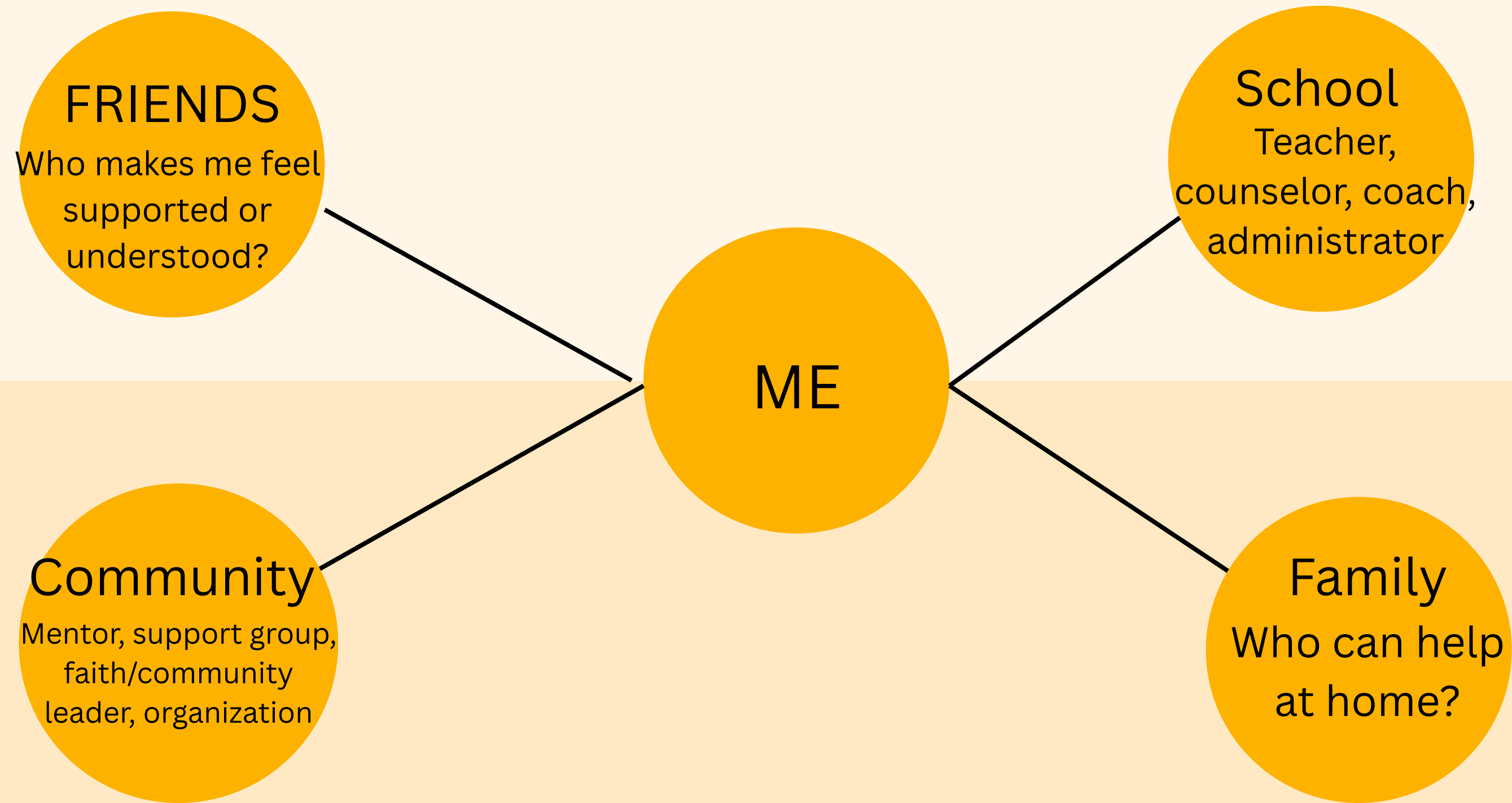
When the day feels like too much:

Some days may feel very hard compared to others. You could feel an excess of anxiety, frustration or you could feel very distracted. Here are a few ways to help with that:

1. Pause: take a few minutes away from what you are doing to just breathe. Take a few deep breaths, walk, or just listen to music
2. Next, just simplify your tasks by asking yourself what you actually need to finish today and push the other stuff for later so it does not feel like the workload is too much.
3. Reach out to people: Text, call, or talk to someone to support you
4. Lastly, give yourself some space: A difficult day doesn't mean you've failed. Plans sometimes need to change when your family is going through something difficult.

Build your support Network

- Different people can help with different aspects of what you are going through. Think of the people already around you and whom you could turn to when you need support.



My Personal Support Plan

This page is for you to make your own plan:

- The biggest challenge I'm dealing with right now:
- One thing I can change about how I'm handling school:
- Someone I'm going to ask for help:
- What I want to ask them:
- Something I can do for myself on difficult days:
- One action I will take this week:

You DON'T HAVE TO BE ALONE

Cancer can affect an entire family, and it is okay to ask for help.
Hopefully, this workshop helped you identify some of the people,
strategies, and resources that can make things a little more manageable.

Additional Support:

American Cancer Society

Cancer information and support resources for patients and families.

National Cancer Institute

Evidence-based information about cancer, treatment, and coping.

CancerCare

Professional support services and resources for people affected by cancer.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

For people in the U.S. experiencing a mental health or emotional crisis.

Thank You

Dr. Reni Joseph Foundation

Supporting children and families affected by cancer.

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