

Understanding Cancer

BY STEVE HERRICK



Mark Golub

Cancer. It strikes fear in the hearts of everyone it affects — including children, who are often confused and frightened when someone they care about is diagnosed with it.

Kathleen McCue, director of children's programming at The Gathering Place, a cancer-support organization with locations in Beachwood and Westlake, has made it her mission to help allay that anxiety. Her new book, *Someone I Love is Sick*, is geared toward helping kids ages 2 to 6 understand and deal with the disease.

"There are quite a few books about cancer that have been written with older children in mind," says McCue, whose career helping kids handle medical situations spans 30 years. "But that's not the case when it comes to preschoolers."

The reason: Explaining such a difficult subject in terms they understand is daunting.

"Children of this age group usually don't know what cancer means," McCue says. "They may recognize the word, and know it is connected to a person who's sick. But they don't think ahead to a possible future without that person. And, since all they've known up to this point are illnesses such as

colds and strep throat that are catchable, kids wonder if they, too, will 'catch' cancer."

McCue adds that when a family is grappling with illness, the emotions children feel are often overlooked. "Kids pick up on the fact that mom is grumpy or sad and that grandpa doesn't want to play," she says. "Those are visible signs that add to their stress."

Someone I Love is Sick comes in two editions: one written specifically about a parent who has cancer, the other about a grandparent.

Published in a loose-leaf binder, the pages can be customized and rearranged according to a family's specific situation: topics include diagnosis, treatment, hospitalization, recurrence and death.

"It was very hard," McCue says, about her decision to include pages dealing with end-of-life issues. "My first inclination I wanted to protect people from having to think about those things."

But the parents she counsels changed her mind. Although some admitted it would be difficult to see those pages in the book, they added that having them there would help everyone face the pain of death together should it occur.

"Hopefully," McCue says, "those particular sheets can be put on a shelf where they'll gather dust forever."

For more information about the book or to order a copy, call 216/595-9546 or visit www.someoneiloveissick.com.