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**The Gathering Place Introduces New Tool to Help
Children Understand Cancer in the Family**

Cleveland, June 11, 2009 – One of the most difficult challenges for those facing cancer is telling their young children or grandchildren that they are sick. Avoiding the conversation can be harmful. Approaching it without careful thought can leave scars that may never heal.

That's why a well-respected [cancer support center](#) has designed a unique, customizable tool to help.

“Someone I Love is Sick” is the first tool of its kind designed to help children ages two through six cope with a parent’s or grandparent’s cancer. It uses colorful, age-appropriate illustrations and simple statements that focus on the feelings and realities of cancer situations in a non-threatening manner. The tool is meant to offer educational information while initiating a safe, open conversation between parent and child during every point of the cancer journey, from diagnosis to treatment, recurrence, hospitalization, and end of life.

The book’s pages are unbound, so parents and professionals can arrange pages based on the stage of the cancer journey and the family’s specific situation. Oft-addressed emotions and questions are explored, including “Can I catch cancer?” “Mommy will be getting a special treatment,” and “Did I cause your cancer?”

The innovative tool, whose proceeds will support those touched by cancer, is already earning accolades.

“Now that I am a dad, I can really understand how difficult it would be as a parent trying to help young children understand cancer,” says [Lance Armstrong](#), seven-time winner of the Tour de France, cancer survivor and father of three. “This book offers a unique method of helping parents communicate with their own children. It is truly empowering.”

“Someone I Love is Sick” was developed by The Gathering Place, an [Ohio cancer support center](#) that provides free programs and services to those touched by cancer. The book is authored by Kathleen McCue, The Gathering Place’s director of children’s programming, the author of “How to Help Children Through a Parent’s Serious Illness” and a child life specialist with more than 30 years of experience devoted to the mental health of children facing medical situations.

“A parent’s cancer diagnosis is more frequent than abuse, more widespread than natural disaster and more common than automobile accidents, yet resources designed to assist families and children are extremely limited and often not age appropriate,” says McCue. “A severe parental illness can cause children distress and developmental problems, but when managed well, the family crisis can produce resiliency and strength.”

The Gathering Place is donating “Someone I Love is Sick” to more than 500 hospitals and cancer centers nationwide for professionals to use with patients and their families. [The public can purchase](#) either the parents’ or grandparents’ version of the book for \$21.95 at www.SomeoneILoveisSick.com or by phone at 216.595.9546.

All proceeds will support those touched by cancer by funding the free programs and services offered at The Gathering Place. Additional tips and resources are available at www.SomeoneILoveisSick.com.

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ABOUT THE GATHERING PLACE

The Gathering Place is a non-profit, community-based cancer support center that focuses on the social, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of individuals with cancer and their family and friends. With programs provided free of charge, The Gathering Place's services are designed to complement traditional medicine with a mind-body-spirit approach. Since its inception, The Gathering Place has helped more than 18,500 people touched by cancer with more than 94,000 visits. Visit The Gathering Place online at www.touchedbycancer.org.

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Author/Illustrator Bios for *Someone I Love Is Sick*

Kathleen McCue, Author

Kathleen McCue is the author of *Someone I Love is Sick* and *How to Help Children Through a Parent's Serious Illness*. She also serves as the Director of Children's Programming at The Gathering Place, an Ohio cancer support center. Through her work as a licensed social worker and child life specialist at The Gathering Place, McCue has helped hundreds of children cope with a loved one's cancer diagnosis through unique, non-threatening programming specifically developed for children.

Prior to her role at The Gathering Place, McCue served as clinical director of the Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Critical Incident Stress Management Team; as a child life specialist in the emergency department at Cleveland's University Hospitals and as a supervisor in the child life program in the Cleveland Clinic social work department. Her earlier roles include director of child life development at St. Louis' Cardinal Glennon Memorial Hospital for Children and a patient activity specialist at the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles.

McCue has been published in several industry trade journals and publications, including the *Handbook of Child Life*, *Child Life Beyond the Hospital* and *Pediatric Nursing*, among others. She also has conducted clinical and research presentations for the American Psychosocial Oncology Society, the Child Life Association of Greater New York and University Hospitals Pediatric Grand Rounds in Cleveland.

McCue has served as both the president and secretary of the Child Life Council and as a board member of the Child Life Certifying Commission. Her extensive experience has earned her the Child Life Council Distinguished Service Award for her outstanding contributions to the field of child life and the Beech Brook youth services agency Hearts of Hope Award for going "above and beyond" to help children in need.

McCue received her bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Texas and her master's in clinical psychology from the University of Southern California.

Jenny Campbell, Illustrator

Jenny Campbell is the illustrator of *Someone I Love is Sick* and the creator of *Flo and Friends*, a daily syndicated comic strip that follows a group of senior citizens and friends.

She began her career as a journalist with *The Arizona Republic* and moved on to the *Pasadena Star-News* where she wrote a weekly local column and covered features. It was during a stint as a general assignment editor with *The Orange County Register* that illustration began playing a greater role in her career as she turned doodles and sketches into illustrations for the paper's Friday entertainment supplement.

Campbell would later establish a niche as a children's illustrator with a list of clients including several respected textbook publishers and the well-known magazine *Highlights for Children*. In 2000 her book, *Lazy Daisy*, was chosen by Barnes and Noble as a national notable book of the month.

Jenny graduated from Arizona State University with a bachelor's degree in journalism.



Testimonials for *Someone I Love is Sick*

The Gathering Place has received support from dozens of parents, grandparents and other cancer survivors who have applauded *Someone I Love is Sick* as an excellent resource for children of parents and grandparents facing cancer. Among them:

- “Now that I am a dad, I can really understand how difficult it would be as a parent trying to help young children understand cancer. This book offers a unique method of helping parents help their own children. It is truly empowering.”
-Lance Armstrong, Seven-time winner of the Tour de France, Founder and Chairman of the Lance Armstrong Foundation, and cancer survivor
- “Words sometimes fail us. This little book enables our hearts to speak comfort directly to those who have no words, the smallest of our children. *Someone I Love is Sick* is a blessing for parents and grandparents in difficult times.”
-Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, Author of Kitchen Table Wisdom and My Grandfather's Blessings
- “*Someone I Love is Sick* allows parents to quickly create their own highly effective Life Book to help their children deal with the challenging issue of cancer in their family. I believe very strongly that this book will be a unique and valuable resource for families to help children understand what cancer means and to make sense of what they feel.”
-Arthur Lavin, MD, Advanced Pediatrics, Author of Who's the Boss? Moving Families from Conflict to Collaboration and Baby & Toddler Sleep Solutions for Dummies
- “Remembering the challenge of explaining to our children that their grandfather had cancer, with all of its life changing realities, I applaud this wonderful book. It is a warm, supportive, easily understood way to put it in perspective what is and what will be, without scaring the child who needs reassurance. It's wonderful.”
-Geraldo Rivera, Geraldo At Large, Fox News
- “*Someone I Love is Sick* was written just for you. It's easy. It's fun. Talking about family illness is the first step toward helping children grow strong through adversity. This book begins the healing by helping you open the lines of communication with your very young children.”
-Wendy S. Harpham, MD, FACP, Internist, Author of When a Parent Has Cancer, and long-term cancer survivor



Fast Facts: Cancer and Communication

National Statistics

- An estimated 1,437,180 new cancer cases were diagnosed in 2008. One in four had a child younger than 18.
-American Cancer Society
- After first learning of a parent's cancer, 29 percent of studied children showed post traumatic stress symptoms serious enough to justify psychological help.
-Reuters, Post Traumatic Stress Hits Kids of Cancer Patients, September 2007
- Anxiety levels of children who were told about their parent's cancer diagnosis were lower than those of children who were not told.
-E. Rosenheim and R. Reicher, Informing Children About a Parent's Terminal Illness, 1985
- High anxiety scores among adolescent children of parents with cancer were linked to an inability to discuss the illness with the parents.
-E. Nelson et al, Children Who Have a Parent with Cancer, 1994
- Parents underestimate the impact of cancer on their children. In the months after a diagnosis, parents reported little or no evidence of emotional distress or disruptive behavior. The children themselves reported greatly increased psychological symptoms.
-A.S. Welch et al, Adjustment of Children and Adolescents to Parental Cancer, 1996

Focus Groups Findings

The Gathering Place conducted a series of focus groups in October 2008 for professional caregivers, as well as parents facing a cancer diagnosis. Among the findings:

- Caregivers reported that parents are often too preoccupied with their initial cancer diagnosis and overlook the emotional needs of their children.
- Caregivers agreed that the first consideration in a parent-child cancer conversation should be the intellectual and emotional levels of the children.
- While all caregiver panelists were aware of cancer-related books for young children, none could recall a specific title or author.
- Prior to being shown Someone I Love is Sick, caregivers noted an ideal book for helping children cope with a parent's cancer would be customizable, age appropriate and emphasize visuals.
- Parent panelists appeared to be most concerned about their ability to communicate cancer-related issues with their children without creating fear or uncertainty.
- Most parent panelists said they have looked for children's books to help them discuss cancer issues. However, all said they were disappointed with that they found.
- Parents commented that the books they did discover were not age appropriate or were too grim.



Talking to Your Child About Cancer

Cancer is a tough topic to discuss with children but one that must be addressed. Keep in mind that it is important to structure cancer-related conversations. The open dialogue should be based on a parent's comfort level, a child's need and his or her age.

Though each child is different and there is no way to know exactly how a child will respond to a diagnosis, parents may want to prepare responses to some commonly asked questions and keep the following guidelines in mind.

Tips for Talking to Your Children

(Age should be taken into consideration with each of the below)

- Use the word "cancer" -- Trying to hide the word sets children up to hear it elsewhere, where you can't immediately address their fears. Be specific about which part of your body is impacted.
- Ask what they think cancer is -- Their answer will help determine what they already know and how you should start the conversation. Additionally, asking this question lets you understand any misconceptions your child may have and gives you the opportunity to correct them.
- Explain what will happen next -- It is important they know that, to get better, you will be going to the hospital more often or that you may need an operation. Let them know that as you go through treatment, your mood will change. Some days you won't feel sick at all, but other days you might be more tired, sad or irritable.
- Reinforce that you still love him or her -- This is often a child's greatest fear because they think the illness will make their parent love them less. They also worry that no one will be there to take care of them. Assure them you are still their parent and that, even though you're sick, they are still loved and will be taken care of.
- Ask if they have any questions or what they find scary -- You can assess how much they understand and what needs further clarification. This open dialogue also lets your children to know they can always talk about how they're feeling.
- Don't make promises you may not be able to keep -- Tell the truth, and use caution when making promises to your children. Let children know when you don't know something or when a plan is tentative.
- Don't limit it to one conversation -- As time passes, your child will absorb and process more information, which will result in more questions or a change in attitude.

Tough Questions to Prepare For

- How do you get cancer? -- It's OK to tell your children that you don't know exactly why you got sick, and neither do your doctors. Remind them you didn't want to get sick and that no one got you sick. Cancer is something that sometimes happens inside the body.
- Can I get cancer? -- When children hear the word 'sick,' they often assume they can get sick too. It is important to explain that cancer is different than the flu or a cold, and reaffirm that cancer isn't contagious.

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- Did I cause your cancer? -- When a parent is diagnosed with cancer, children often believe they somehow caused it. Tell them nothing they said, did or thought lead to your diagnosis.
- Will you still look the same? -- Children should be prepared for the physical changes you will undergo. Let them know you may lose weight, that your medicine may cause your hair to fall out or that you may look tired.
- Will you still help me with my homework? -- Children will want to know how their life will change as a result. They need to know that they will still go to soccer practice, piano lessons and school like before, though mommy or daddy may not always be there with them.
- Are you going to die? -- This is often the most troubling question for parents since death is a possibility. You might say 'Well sometimes people do die from cancer, but I am taking strong medicine, and I have doctors who are helping me get better. I hope to get well and if things are ever different I will let you know.'