

SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH CANCER



POGO Pediatric Interlink Community Cancer Nurses

A PROGRAM OF
POGO
PEDIATRIC ONCOLOGY GROUP OF ONTARIO
FOR KIDS WITH CANCER
FOR NOW, FOR LIFE.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Going to school and maintaining friendships are important aspects of your child's overall sense of well-being. Planning for your child's education following a cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming. It requires an understanding of your child's current academic abilities and social development, as well as the impact of a new cancer treatment plan.

As a member of the healthcare team, your POGO Pediatric Interlink Community Cancer Nurse (POGO Interlink Nurse) is an experienced pediatric oncology nurse who can help you to plan for your child's education during and after cancer treatment.

Is my child permitted to attend school?

In general, children are encouraged to go to school. Your child's treatment team will give you direction on when it is appropriate for your child to attend. Some periods of absence are necessary while your child receives treatment. The length and timing of absences will depend on your child's treatment protocol. Your POGO Interlink Nurse can assist you in determining how to proceed with planning for your child's education.

Is my child able to receive an education while in hospital?

School-board certified teachers are available to accommodate some of your child's educational needs while admitted to hospital (under the Ministry of Education's Section 23 Programs). Teachers are available for children in Grades 1 through 12, including those who have special education needs. Priority is given to patients whose anticipated hospital stay is more than 15 consecutive school days. Children may be wait-listed if space is limited on a teacher's schedule.

Your POGO Interlink Nurse or inpatient nurse can refer you to the inpatient school program.

What information should I share with school staff?

The amount of information that you choose to share with the school is a family decision and will change over time. In general, open communication is encouraged. Your POGO Interlink Nurse will assist you throughout your child's treatment to facilitate this information sharing when needed. This support can be provided through phone calls, letters and meetings with school staff.

Is there support for my child's education in periods of prolonged absence from school?

If your child is part of the public or separate school system, the Ministry of Education is obligated to provide educational support during prolonged absences. Your child is entitled to 3-5 hours per week of 1:1 home instruction delivered by a board-certified teacher. Your POGO Interlink Nurse will facilitate this referral process. Once a referral has been made, there may be a waiting period before home instruction begins.

In addition to home instruction, high school students may be able to earn credits through TVO ILC, the Ministry of Education's partner in distance education. These online courses are facilitated through the student's high school guidance department.

A Grade 11 high school credit program is available through Camp Oochigeas, a summer camp for children and teens with, and who have survived, childhood cancer. A three-week leadership program enables participants to earn a physical education credit. This program is provided during the summer at the camp's Muskoka location (www.ooch.org).

Can my children receive an education if we are living away from home for treatment?

For families living at a Ronald McDonald House, schooling is available for all patients and siblings through an in-house private school that is recognized by the Ministry of Education. Lessons are based on the Ontario curriculum and are available free of charge to students from JK to Grade 12.

If you are away from home and staying at a private residence, your children can be enrolled in a local school.





Does the school require special information when my child returns to class?

Your POGO Interlink Nurse will work with you and your child to identify the information that is important for the school to know. This will depend on the type of treatment your child has received and if they are returning to school during treatment or after its completion. Examples of the information that can be shared might include special considerations for:

- infection prevention
- the presence of a central venous access device
- symptoms teachers need to be aware of and how/when to report them to parents
- physical stamina and safety considerations
- specific information that will help your child's social adjustment

How can information be shared with my child's classmates?

Your POGO Interlink Nurse will offer to visit the school and provide a classroom presentation. The information that is shared will be determined in collaboration with you and your child. The goal of this presentation is to provide accurate and age-appropriate information, to answer questions and to involve classmates in supporting your child.

Are there supports available for my other children?

A cancer diagnosis affects all members of a family, including siblings. Sibling support is a vital component of cancer care. It is important for teachers to be aware of your family's situation and to consider the needs of your other children throughout your child's treatment. Your POGO Interlink Nurse can help you to provide information to siblings' teachers. Changes in routine and emotional considerations can be discussed. A classroom presentation can also help brothers and sisters to share what is happening in their family.

What supports are available to help my child adjust to returning to school?

There are a number supports available to assist you and your child when your child is returning to school. POGO Interlink Nurses can help you to advocate for your child's individual needs and facilitate a connection with the most appropriate support services at school.

Emotional: Many schools have access to social workers who can support your child's emotional adjustment when returning to school. In some school boards, child and youth workers (CYWs), who focus on the behavioural, social and emotional development of students, are also part of the school support team. A referral to a school social worker requires the assistance of the school principal.

Physical: Consulting physiotherapists (PT) and occupational therapists (OT) are available to help your child if they have gross or fine motor challenges that require accommodations or a safety plan while at school. A referral for these supports must be initiated by the school principal. Your POGO Interlink Nurse, in collaboration with members of the healthcare team, will liaise with the school to reflect your child's needs.

Speech/Language: Consulting speech/language pathologists (SLPs) are available to help teachers support your child in the classroom if they have challenges with their speech or language skills. A referral for these supports must be initiated by the school principal.





My child has treatment-related educational difficulties. How can I be helped?

In some cases, children who have been treated for cancer can develop educational challenges related to their diagnosis and treatment. There are several factors that can place these children at increased risk for difficulties at school. These may include:

- their age at diagnosis
- prolonged absences from school
- reduced energy levels
- a history of learning difficulties prior to diagnosis
- cancers that impact seeing or hearing
- cancer therapies that include treatment to the central nervous system

If learning difficulties develop, or if it is known that your child's condition or treatment may contribute to learning difficulties, your child may be referred to the neuropsychology team at your hospital. Neuropsychologists will conduct a comprehensive assessment of your child's neuropsychological, cognitive, academic and behavioural functioning. In some circumstances, similar testing can be initiated by the school. Based on these assessments, comprehensive recommendations for educational planning and interventions for areas of need are developed. These reports are very helpful in contributing to the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) if it is needed.

Your POGO Interlink Nurse, in consultation with the neuropsychologist, can help you to share your child's assessment findings and recommendations with the school. Most schools have in-house special education resource teachers (SERTs) who can help with planning for your child's academic supports.

Are there long-term supports for my child?

Scholarships:

Several post-secondary scholarships are available to children who have received cancer treatment. Your POGO Interlink Nurse can direct you to this information.

Academic & Employment Counselling from POGO:

POGO provides an academic and employment counselling service to assist survivors of childhood cancer or brain tumours, who, as a result of their disease or its treatment, have developed learning difficulties. POGO counsellors facilitate a smooth transition from high school to post-secondary education or employment. Referrals to this POGO program can be made in various ways including through your POGO Interlink Nurse, long-term follow-up team or the POGO AfterCare program.

My POGO Interlink Nurse is:

Contact information:





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