

## WHEN HELP IS NECESSARY

There are three situations in which it is vital to get help for yourself or for others to get help for you before your child dies.

If your denial that your child is dying is combined with several of the following factors:

- feeling uniquely responsible for saving your child
- actively using alternative treatments
- consulting less rather than more with your child's medical team as your child gets sicker
- being physically and mentally exhausted from taking care of your child

Under such circumstances you will be particularly vulnerable to a massive and destabilizing shock when your child dies. If you are unable to ask for help for yourself, your family members need to take matters into their own hands and to communicate their concerns with your child's team— and try not to be angry with them if they do and understand they have your best interests at heart. You *do* need help, and before your child dies.

- If you are seriously considering whether you can go on living if your child dies. We discussed earlier that many parents have fleeting moments of wondering whether they will be able to go on living if their child dies. This is not uncommon. However, if you find these moments are becoming more frequent or are preoccupying you, or if you are thinking of how you would act to accomplish this goal, it is essential you talk with the medical or psychosocial staff and let them know what you are thinking and feeling. Or family members need to tell the medical staff about their concerns for you. And try to understand they are trying to help you. You are under extreme stress and carrying such a heavy burden that you may not be thinking clearly. You may not recognize the enormous loss you would be creating for those who love and depend on you. If the medical staff think you are at emotional or physical risk, they will probably make a plan with you for your own safety, which may include finding you a therapist and speaking with family and community members to ensure your safety. To start with, a psychiatrist would likely consider if any medication might provide a buffer for you against the pain and stress you are feeling or, at minimum, allow you to sleep. Medical staff may also suggest that as your child gets sicker, he or she is taken care of in the hospital, both for his or her own comfort and so that you will have the support of a medical team around you. Lastly, the team will also talk to other family members and people in the community to ensure that they will be available to be with you when the time comes.
- If you are feeling so completely overwhelmed by the news that you are unable to get it out of your mind and are having a very hard time functioning or being with your child because you feel so sad, you need help immediately. You may have become seriously depressed and you need to meet with a therapist and consider a trial of anti depressants. Both options could help you feel better. Therapy, talking to an experienced professional about what you are going through; some behavioral interventions like meditation or relaxation strategies; cognitive therapy, which offers ways you can interrupt your negative thoughts; and anti depressant medication that could help you sleep and eat better—all are interventions that can help you feel better. These interventions can allow you to mobilize your internal strength and energy and be there for your child. If you do

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recognize that you are feeling this way, please agree to try some of these recommendations. They can make an enormous positive difference to both you and your child, immediately and when you look back and remember this time.