

The Cellie Cancer Coping Kit

Overview

The invasive and painful medical procedures, emotions, and changes to daily life that come with cancer and its treatment can be overwhelming for children and families. To help address children and caregivers' need for emotional support during pediatric cancer treatment, our team at *The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia* developed the [Cellie Cancer Coping Kit](#) (Cellie Kit). The Cellie Kit is a developmentally-targeted, research-based tool designed to help children and parents cope with cancer treatment. It provides evidence-based, cognitive-behavioral coping techniques for a range of stressors. The Cellie Kit can be used across settings (at home, at clinic, in the hospital, during procedures) and across providers (nurses, doctors, child life specialists, therapists).



The Cellie Kit includes the following:

- **Cellie** is a stuffed, washable toy used for engagement and integrated within some of the coping tips.
- **The Cancer Coping Cards** are a set of 30 cards which provide kids with over 100 tips for dealing with cancer-related stressors such as medical procedures, hospital visits, and feelings of fear and uncertainty.
- **The Caregiver Book** offers tips for parents to help children with cancer cope, as well as advice for dealing with parents' own cancer-related challenges (e.g., caring for siblings, working with the medical team).

Research has suggested that the Cellie Kit is a promising tool for children with cancer and their families. In the process of developing and refining the Cellie Kit, we conducted [two studies](#) to evaluate this tool. These studies suggest that the Cellie Kit has the potential to help fulfill specific needs for families and medical teams. The results indicated that:

- Children and their parents found the Cellie Kit engaging and helpful. Specifically, children and families reported that the Cellie Kit was relevant to their cancer experience, comprehensive, and easy to use.
- The Cellie Kit helped families learn new information and skills for dealing with cancer, its treatment, and medical procedures.
- The Cellie Kit improved communication between parents and children about cancer-related challenges.
- Families were able to use the Cellie Kit independently, with minimal outside support from the health care team.

See the [research paper featuring the Cellie Kit](#) for more detailed information about study methods and results. You can also learn more about the Cellie Kit by reading the [CHOP Research Institute 2012 Annual Report](#), a [family's personal story](#) about using the Cellie Kit, and/or by viewing a [presentation for patients and families](#) about how to use the Cellie Kit.

If you are caring for a child being treated at the CHOP Cancer Center and would like to request a Coping Kit [please contact us online](#). For patients and families outside of CHOP, you can [order the Cellie Coping Kit](#) online.



What makes The Cellie Cancer Coping Kit unique?

There are some excellent resources for children with cancer and their families. However, The Cellie Cancer Coping Kit fills an important gap. The Cellie Coping Kit:

- **Is easy for kids to use.** Child-friendly language, artwork and go-anywhere design makes the Kit accessible to children and easy to use in any setting without the help of a behavioral health professional.
- **Is packed with advice.** In total, the Kit includes over 150 coping tips for children and families facing cancer, with “here and now” advice for parents to use to help their children cope.
- **Was developed from diverse sources.** The Kit provides coping strategies for children and families that come from research done at CHOP and other institutions, advice directly from families that have faced cancer, and experts in pediatric cancer.
- **Addresses cancer challenges.** The Kit identifies stressors that are specific to cancer treatment – such as spinal taps, chemotherapy, hair loss, nausea, and long hospital stays – and suggests a variety of coping tips for each stressor.
- **Is customizable to every family.** Families can choose the cancer stressors that are most relevant to their experience and the coping strategies that work best for them. Children can include their own ideas on writeable coping cards.
- **Can be integrated into treatment.** Whether a child life specialist is demonstrating a procedure on the toy, or a psychologist is talking through stressors and coping tips with the child, the Kit can be incorporated into many elements of care.
- **Encourages communication.** The topics covered in the kit encourage important, productive conversations between parent and child, parent and healthcare provider, and child and healthcare provider.

Tips for Providers

Introducing the Cellie Kit

Here are some suggestions for introducing Cellie to families and patients.

- “Cancer and treatment can be really tough. The Cellie Cancer Coping Kit was developed to help children and their families deal with cancer and its treatment. I wanted to show it to you and tell you about it if that’s ok.”
- **To Child:** “This is Cellie, and here are some coping cards. You can use Cellie and the coping cards to help you with your treatment. On the top and front of each card, you’ll see something about cancer treatment that some kids have told us is tough to deal with. For example, this card says [*select a stressor relevant to that child, if possible*]. Then there are tips for how to deal with or make yourself feel better in that situation. For example, one tip on this card is [*read tip, ask child if they have ever tried that tip or others*].”
- **To Parents:** “This is a book for caregivers/parents. The table of contents lists topics related to cancer and treatment. Each topic has a color assigned to it, and these colors match your child’s coping cards. On the top of each page, you’ll see a stressful aspect of cancer and some strategies that you can use or help your child use to deal with that stressor. This book goes along with your child’s coping cards and also has information for parents about caring for other family members, and about caring for yourself.”
- Provide family with examples for how to implement the Kit (e.g., squeezing Cellie during a procedure or looking through the coping cards together to promote discussion around cancer and treatment).

Helping families use the Cellie Kit

It may be helpful to provide families with ideas for ways they can use the Kit in different situations. If the family has difficulty naming stressors, prompt them with a stressor they may have already mentioned or discuss stressors commonly experienced by families undergoing cancer treatment.

- “Now that we’ve talked about the Kit, let’s talk about how your family might use it. Can you give me an example of something that is hard for you about cancer or treatment?”
- Help the family select applicable coping cards or pages in the parent book. If the family reported that the child has difficulty with needles, present the child with the needle stick coping card and direct the parent to turn to the needle stick section of the book.
- Help the family read through and select which tips may be most helpful for dealing with the stressor identified.
- Remind parents to act as teachers for their child by using the Kit and implementing the strategies together throughout their medical care.
- Follow up with the family regarding their use of the Kit. If the family experienced any difficulties in using the Kit, brainstorm with the parent new ways to use it and offer helpful suggestions on ways the Kit can be more helpful.

Further Reading

- Marsac, M.L., Hildenbrand, A.K., Clawson, K., Jackson, L., Kohser, K., Barakat, L., Kassam-Adams, N., Aplenc, R., Vinsel, A., & Alderfer, M.A. (2012). Acceptability and feasibility of family use of the Cellie Cancer Coping Kit. *Supportive Care in Cancer*, 20(12): 3315-3324. doi: 10.1007/s00520-012-1475-y.

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Disclaimer:

None.

Disclosure:

Dr. Meghan Marsac and Anne Vinsel, MFA are co-inventors of the Cellie Cancer Coping Kit. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia has filed a patent for the Cellie Kit and may benefit financially from it.