

# School and the Impact of Childhood Cancer

**DECEMBER 16, 2020**

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# About POGO

Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario (POGO) works to ensure that everyone affected by childhood cancer has access to the best care and support. We partner to achieve an excellent childhood cancer care system for children, youth, their families, survivors and healthcare teams in Ontario and beyond. POGO champions childhood cancer care, and as the collective voice of this community, is the official advisor to Ontario's Ministry of Health on children's cancer control and treatment. POGO is a non-profit organization with charitable status, here for kids with cancer, for now, for life.



# POGO's Mission and Vision

## MISSION

We partner to achieve the best childhood cancer care system for children, youth, their families and survivors in Ontario and beyond.

## VISION

A valued partner. An excellent childhood cancer care system.

# POGO Programs & Services

- POGO Pediatric Interlink Community Cancer Nurses
- POGO Financial Assistance Program
  - Help with accommodations, some out-of-pocket costs
- POGO School and Work Transitions Program
  - Counsellors facilitate a smoother transition from high school to appropriate school and work opportunities
- POGO Provincial Pediatric Oncology Satellite Program
  - 8 POGO Satellite Clinics in community hospitals bringing care closer to home
- POGO Provincial Pediatric Oncology AfterCare Program
  - 7 POGO AfterCare Clinics monitoring the health of survivors
- POGO Ambassadors
  - Informal program; families, survivors share their story to raise awareness of childhood cancer



# POGO Interlink Nurses

- 11 POGO Interlink Nurses across Ontario
- Provide health teaching in hospital and at home.
- Support families to navigate the healthcare system so they can access hospital and community resources.
- Work with schools and communities to build support systems for children with cancer.
- Share knowledge of cancer and its treatment with community caregivers.



# Childhood Cancer and School

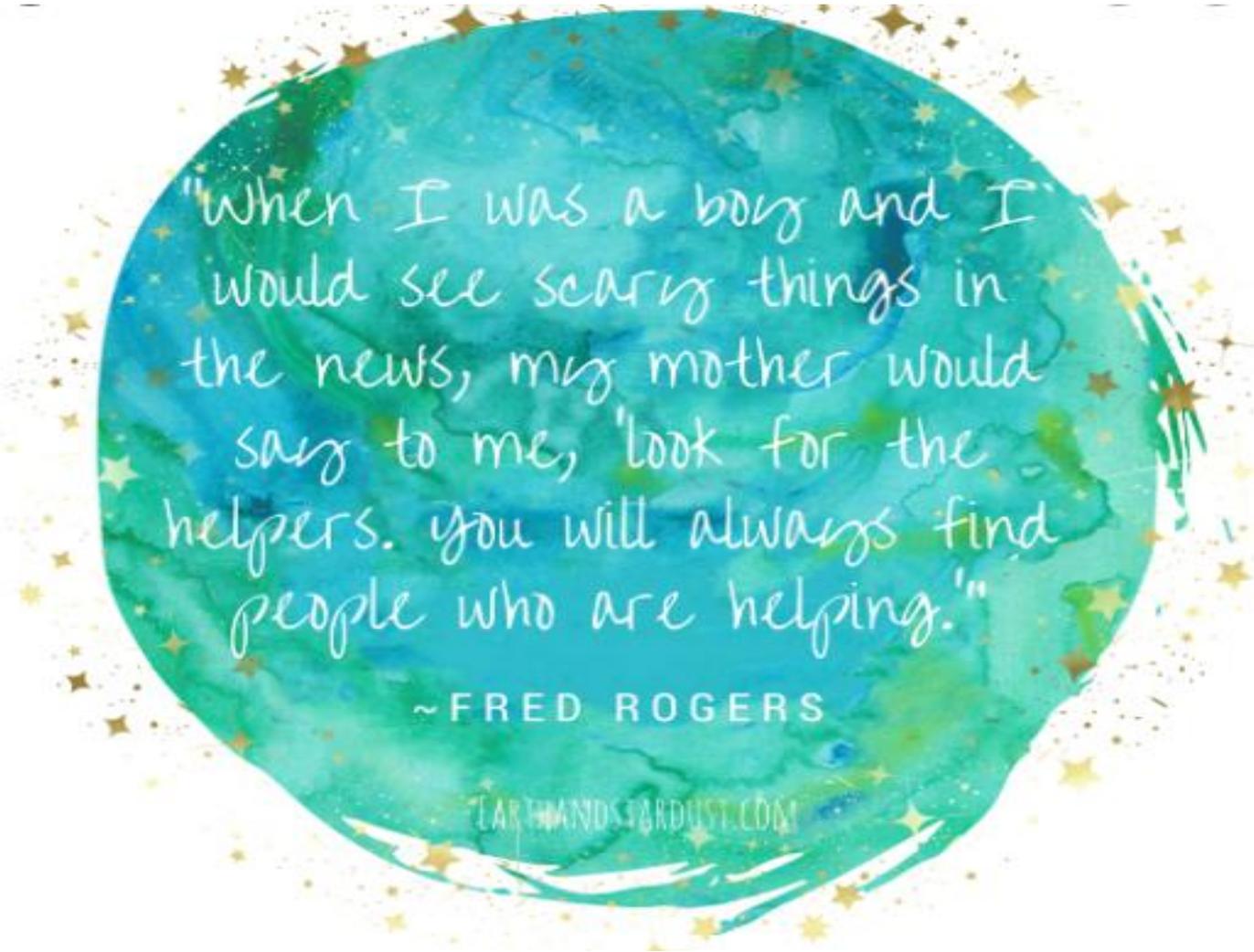
Participating in school and maintaining friendships are important aspects of a child's overall development and sense of wellbeing.

# Cancer and COVID-19

## Ontario Pediatric Oncology Expert Opinion Guidance Statements:

- Recognition of the importance of school on child development and wellness.
- Current available evidence suggests that risk of severe illness for those children in Ontario with cancer or a history of cancer is very low.
- Advisability of sending your child to in-person school is highly **individualized**. With some exceptions, those well enough to go to school pre COVID can attend in-person schooling.

<https://www.pogo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Back-to-School-Consensus-V6.8-18Aug2020.pdf>



"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'look for the helpers. you will always find people who are helping.'"

~ FRED ROGERS

EARTHANDSDUST.COM

# Education Structure during COVID-19

## Elementary school:

- In-person learning
- Virtual learning – synchronous and asynchronous learning
- Home instruction – virtual, 3 hours of 1:1 instruction
- In-hospital TDSB teacher

## High school:

- In-school day model – quadmester system
- 100% Remote learning – quadmester; synchronous/asynchronous
- Home instruction
- TVO-ILC - independent learning courses; remote learning; no set times
- In-hospital TDSB teacher

# Things to Consider when Planning for Education – New Diagnosis

- Diagnosis and the demands of treatment
- Side effects
- Age and grade
- Academic abilities prior to illness
- Work habits – motivation and ability to work independently
- Connection to peers

**My child is unable to return to school  
due to the demands of treatment**



- Home instruction

- Unable to attend other forms of education in a meaningful way
- Liaise with school principal, teacher, home instruction teacher
- Physician referral and time limited

- Virtual schooling

- Providing a new option for some children – JK/SK, post BMT
- Exemptions if unable to attend the required hours of synchronous learning
- Liaise with virtual teacher to facilitate streamlining content, build in flexibility in assignments and test taking, individual check-ins



# **My child is returning to school on treatment or after the completion of treatment**



# School Planning Meeting

Thoughtful, collaborative planning will include addressing **physical**, **emotional**, **academic** and **social** needs.

- Administrator, teacher(s), guidance, parents
- Child is welcome to join
- Consider the needs of siblings



# Physical Considerations

- Immune System
  - Review best infection control practices; reporting of infectious illnesses in the classroom; reporting if child develops fever or appears unwell while at school
- Fatigue
  - Flexible attendance; build in periods of rest; modifications to physical activity; buddy system
  - Negotiate reasonable workload; assistance with prioritizing work; flexibility with due dates, extended periods for test taking; handouts or links to content over note-taking; two sets of texts



# Physical Considerations

- Nutrition
  - Accommodate flexible nutrition and water breaks;
- Mobility
  - Consider school layout when planning schedule; initiate school safety assessment; accommodations to phys ed.; facilitate transportation
- Hearing/Vision/Speech
  - Functional assessments through school board itinerants; consider seating arrangements, assistive devices



# Physical Considerations

- Hair Loss
  - Head coverings allowed if desired; education of peers
- Mood/Behavioural Changes
  - Inform teachers if your child is receiving a medication that effects mood; share strategies
- Central Lines
  - Keep an emergency CVL kit in your child's backpack; POGO Interlink Nurses can teach school staff emergency line care



# Emotional Considerations

- How is your child feeling about return to school
- Younger children might have a difficult time separating from parents and returning to routines they have not participated in for some time
- Some children worry – will they connect easily to friends, will they be able to keep up, body image concerns

**Support** – school social workers; school child and youth workers (CYWs)



# Siblings

- A cancer diagnosis impacts all members of the family
- Siblings experience a disruption in routine, may take on added responsibilities, must manage their own emotions and sometimes need to navigate questions from teachers, classmates and neighbours
- Include siblings' teachers in communication with the school (administrators, teachers)
- Research has shown that giving siblings an opportunity for a class visit positively impacts their wellbeing

# Academic Considerations

- Developing an educational plan is often fluid and might require revisions depending on how your child is feeling.
- As teachers begin their assessments, they may identify gaps and provide resource material that will assist your child
- It is important to have a point person with whom educational and goals for socialization can be reviewed at intervals

**Support** – home room teachers, resource teachers, guidance counsellors



# Social Considerations - Peers

- Sharing simple information helps classmates to better understand how to support your child based on accurate messages
- How and what information you choose to share is a family decision. Before sharing, it is important to know what your child understands
- Help your child to formulate simple answers to questions
- It is always ok not to know the answers

[Support](#) - POGO Interlink Nurse class visit



# POGO Interlink Nurse Class Visit

- Establish understanding
- Accurate, age-appropriate description of cancer and treatment
- Cancer is not contagious, nobody's fault, friend is receiving best care
- Involve peers in supporting



# Treatment-related Educational Difficulties

Some cancers and their treatments during childhood and adolescence may affect learning

- Diagnosis at a very young age
- Numerous prolonged absences from school
- A history of learning difficulties prior to diagnosis
- Cancer therapies that impact seeing or hearing
- Cancer therapies that include treatment to the central nervous system

# What to Watch for

- Attention difficulties
- Difficulties in organizing and completing work
- Taking longer to complete tasks
- Difficulties with reading and comprehension
- Changes in motor skills – handwriting, copying text
- Changes in short-term memory

**Support** - neuropsychological assessment

- psycho educational assessment
- IEP – individual education plan
- Identification, Placement and Review Committee



# Long-term Supports

- Scholarships
- POGO School and Work Transitions Program
  - Survivors of childhood cancer and brain tumours who are 16 and older who have developed learning difficulties due to their cancer or treatment



# Connect with POGO

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#ChampionChildhoodCancerCare | #POGO4Kids

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