

Online support helps parents of children with cancer

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Parents of children with cancer can benefit from online support, which also makes it possible for more people to receive help no matter where in the country they live. Credit: Uppsala University

Online support can help parents of children with cancer to cope with symptoms of post-traumatic stress and depression. This finding emerges from a study by researchers at the Department of Women's and Children's Health at Uppsala University.

Previous research has shown that a substantial proportion of [parents](#) of children being treated for cancer experience symptoms of post-traumatic [stress](#) and depression. In the new study, the Uppsala researchers show that these parents could benefit from online [support](#), which also makes it possible for more people to receive help no matter where in the country they live.

The study compared parents who had been randomly chosen to undergo a 10-week programme of internet-based self-help, including email support from a psychologist, with parents who were randomly assigned to a waiting list and received access to the intervention later. The results show that parents who received access to the programme reported reduced symptoms of post-traumatic stress and depression to a greater extent than those who were on the waiting list and that these results persisted in a follow-up 12 months after the programme.

The programme, which was based on [cognitive behaviour therapy](#), focused on informing participants about what happens to people in a [stressful situation](#) and making concrete tools available to help parents cope with stress and difficult thoughts, such as relaxation training, problem-solving and various strategies for coping with distressing thoughts and feelings.

"We would like the results to be confirmed by a larger study, but so far the outcomes indicate that this form of support shows promise for parents of children being treated for cancer who regard online support and help as a viable option. In this way, the programme that has been tested could serve to supplement the support currently offered to these parents," says Professor Louise von Essen, Clinical Psychology in Healthcare, Uppsala University.

More information: Martin Cernvall et al. Twelve-Month Follow-Up of a Randomized Controlled Trial of Internet-Based Guided Self-Help

for Parents of Children on Cancer Treatment, *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (2017). [DOI: 10.2196/jmir.6852](https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.6852)

Provided by Uppsala University

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