

How the end-of-life of a child unfolds can impact the surviving family members for years.

The stated wishes of a child about end-of-life care, even in generalities, impact parents deeply.

Children with cancer can experience repeated life-threatening crises. High-tech interventions often save lives, and families may develop unrealistic expectations of continued success.

If a parent believes a child's life can be extended, they will almost always want to try. Even for health care professionals, it may be difficult to know if and when to stop curative treatments.

Children and adolescents have an ever-evolving understanding of illness and death that should be reassessed repeatedly. This necessitates an understanding of the family's spiritual, religious, cultural and health care beliefs.

Early and repeated communication between the health care team and the family about palliative and end-of-life options can reduce turmoil and crises for a family as a patient approaches death.

Effectively utilizing the expertise and combined efforts of the health care team members is the key to providing holistic comprehensive care.

Health care professionals need to understand their personal responses and feelings when dealing with death and dying, and how to articulate their feelings and get support as needed.