

What is Pediatric Palliative Care?



This article was contributed by **Lauren Cramer, MSW, LICSW** and the Pediatric Advanced Care Team (PACT) Team at Boston Children's Hospital and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. PACT is a team of interdisciplinary clinicians with expertise in pediatric palliative care, who add an extra layer of support in the care of children with serious illnesses and their families.

1. What is Pediatric Palliative Care?

Pediatric palliative care offers support for children with serious medical conditions and their whole families. The goal is to help children live as well as possible for as long as possible. Pediatric palliative care does this by focusing on the unique priorities and experiences of the child and family, helping make decisions about medical care, addressing the child's symptoms, needs and enhancing their quality of life.

2. Who does it help?

Pediatric palliative care can help families with children of all ages, from newborns to young adults, and at any stage of serious, chronic, or complex conditions. Children might have conditions such as cancer, serious heart conditions, genetic or metabolic conditions, serious neurological impairment, disorders of prematurity, and other conditions. Check with your health care provider to see how pediatric palliative care might be useful for your child's serious medical condition.

3. How does it work?

Pediatric palliative care can differ depending on where you receive care. Generally, a team of clinicians- physicians, nurses, social workers, and specialists- comes together to listen to a family's hopes, worries, and what is most important to them. Based on that knowledge, the team can support and guide families as they consider health care options with their existing healthcare teams and develop care plans best aligned with the family's wishes and priorities.

4. Does Pediatric Palliative Care limit other treatments?

No. Pediatric palliative care can be provided alongside other medical care. It can include a focus on promoting healing and comfort, as well as care directed at a child underlying condition or therapy that might be life prolonging. Palliative care does not mean giving up or limiting care- it provides an extra layer of support for the child and family.

5. Where is it provided?

Pediatric palliative care is often available anywhere a child is receiving care, such as a hospital, a clinic, in the community, or at home. Many insurance plans cover pediatric palliative care service across care settings.

6. How does Pediatric Palliative Care differ from Hospice Care?

Pediatric palliative care is available at any time during a child's serious illness and can be delivered in most settings. Hospice is focused on a person's final months of care (generally 6 months or less). In some cases, children can receive hospice and disease directed treatment simultaneously. Check with your health care team to learn more.

Talk to your health care provider or specialist for a referral to a Pediatric Palliative Care program in your area.

Learn more about the PACT Team at Boston Children's Hospital and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute at <https://www.childrenshospital.org/programs/pediatric-advanced-care-team>; <https://dana-farber.org/pediatric-advanced-care-team/>