Psychological Functioning, Post-Traumatic Growth, and Coping in Parents and Siblings of Adolescent Cancer Survivors

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Since the 1980s, the incidence rates of childhood and adolescent cancer have increased and the mortality rates have decreased in the United States and Canada (National Cancer Institute, n.d.; National Cancer Institute of Canada, 2008). This has resulted in a growing population of young cancer survivors with a unique set of psychological issues. Researchers have explored some of these issues, including survivors’ moods, anxieties, and coping strategies (Dejong & Fombonne, 2006; Schultz et al., 2007; Turner-Sack, Menna, Setchell, Mann, & Cataudella, 2012). However, the focus is often on the negative aspects of childhood cancer, such as depression, with fewer studies addressing a more positive aspect, such as positive changes in perspectives, life priorities, and interpersonal relationships (Kamibeppu et al., 2010; Seitz, Besier, & Goldbeck, 2009). In addition, the experiences of young cancer survivors’ families often are ignored.

The diagnosis and treatment of cancer in childhood or adolescence can be exceptionally stressful not only for the young patients with cancer, but also for members of their family. Several studies suggest that parents of children and adolescents with cancer experience psychological distress, post-traumatic distress, post-traumatic growth, and coping strategies (Dejong & Fombonne, 2006; Schultz et al., 2007; Turner-Sack, Menna, Setchell, Mann, & Cataudella, 2012).