The average five-year survival rate for all types of childhood cancer is 77% (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2002). About one in every 1,000 young adults ages 20–29 is a survivor of pediatric cancer (ACS, 1999). One implication of increased survival rates is that many forms of childhood cancer are becoming more like chronic illnesses rather than terminal diseases. Although a large body of research has addressed the psychological impact of cancer on the lives of children and adolescents, limited research exists on the long-term social implications of the disease. Nurses and others who work with chronically ill adolescents should be aware of the specific developmental needs of adolescents and the effects of illness on social development. With more adolescents with cancer surviving into adulthood, the need to examine the social implications of living with diagnosis and treatment is imperative (Kazak, 1993; Kliewer, 1997). Nurses are in a unique position to use social support as a coping tool for teenage patients.

**Social Support**

Social support can be defined as the social aspects of an environment that provide support to an individual (Krahm, 1993). Researchers have found that perceived support is one of the most critical and effective factors in helping adolescents (Hartup, 1993) and adults cope with and adjust to life changes (Krahm; Sandler, Wolchik, MacKinnon, Ayers, & Roosa, 1997). The nature of adolescence requires almost constant adjustments in cognitive, physical, and social development. The importance of perceived social support during this phase of life cannot be underestimated. Clearly, a cancer diagnosis during this already turbulent time requires significant effort and adjustment (Manne & Miller, 1998).

**Key Points . . .**

- High survival rates of child cancer necessitate examining the social impact of living with and surviving the disease.
- The findings of this study suggest that adolescents with cancer had social supports that compared favorably with those of healthy adolescents.
- Adolescents with cancer should be afforded every opportunity to maintain their social networks of friends and family throughout treatment.

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**Sources of Social Support: Adolescents With Cancer**

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