

# The Emotional Experience and Perceived Changes in Siblings of Children With Cancer Reported During a Group Intervention

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Simard, Hancock, and Barrera contributed to the conceptualization and design. Barrera provided direction and support. Neville, Simard, Hancock, and Barrera provided the content analysis. All authors completed the data collection and contributed to the manuscript preparation.

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To examine the experiences and perceived changes in siblings of children with cancer while participating in a group intervention program.

**Research Approach:** Repeated observations during group participation and content analysis.

**Setting:** A tertiary pediatric health center in Ontario, Canada.

**Participants:** Twenty-two siblings (aged 7–18 years) of children with cancer.

**Methodologic Approach:** Siblings participated in the Siblings Coping Together program, an eight-week group intervention designed for this population. Data consisted of materials completed by siblings (49 homework sheets, 33 pieces of artwork), and 31 logs recording events within group sessions.

**Findings:** Three categories emerged from the data: (a) siblings' emotional experience (related to cancer, their affected brother or sister, and the family), (b) siblings' role change (increased responsibility; becoming a caregiver, helper, and entertainer for the ill child), and (c) changes during the eight-week group intervention (bonding with other siblings; increased participation, trust, and interactions; increased coping strategies).

**Conclusions:** These findings provide rich insight into siblings' own views of changes in themselves and within the family, as well as the perceived benefits of group participation.

**Interpretation:** Methodologically, this study demonstrated that the inclusion of visual materials as data is a valid methodology for future research. Clinically, these findings can help nurses in their daily care of children with cancer and their families.

A diagnosis of childhood cancer and its treatment is a devastating experience for the ill child, parents, and siblings, and it can lead to psychological difficulties (Alderfer et al., 2010; Prchal & Landolt, 2012). Siblings have reported a reduction of parental attention (Chesler, Allswede, & Barbarin, 1992; Freeman, O'Dell, & Meola, 2000; Sargent et al., 1995; Sloper, 2000); missing parents and the ill child when apart (Havermans & Eiser, 1994; Prchal & Landolt, 2012); a sense of jealousy, anger, and loneliness (Chesler et al., 1992; Dolgin, Somer, Zaidel, & Zaizov, 1997; Havermans & Eiser, 1994; Sloper, 2000); and a loss of a family way of life (Woodgate, 2006). Siblings have also reported feeling worried (Nolbris, Enskär, & Hellström, 2007) and guilty for the illness (Bendor, 1990). These experiences and emotional responses may lead to psychological maladjustment in a subgroup of siblings (Alderfer et al., 2010; Alderfer, Labay, & Kazak, 2003; Kaplan, Kaal, Bradley, & Alderfer, 2013; Sidhu, Passmore, & Baker, 2006). Combined, these studies suggest a need for developing preventive interventions targeting the psychosocial difficulties of siblings of children with cancer. Systematic reviews of the literature have reached similar conclusions (Barlow & Ellard, 2006; Houtzager, Grootenhuys, & Last, 1999; Packman, Weber,