

Saying goodbye – Childhood Cancer Switzerland launches a new awareness-raising campaign

The death of a child is one of the most painful experiences anyone can ever have – and still very much taboo in our society. Many families feel abandoned in their grief, partly because those around them often react helplessly as they simply don't know what to do. With a new awareness-raising campaign, the umbrella organisation Childhood Cancer Switzerland will be drawing attention to this taboo subject from 1 September 2025 onwards and calling for more openness, solidarity and support. The launch of the campaign was deliberately scheduled in Gold September, the global awareness month for childhood cancer.

Around 350 children and adolescents are diagnosed with cancer every year in Switzerland. While most of them can be cured, one in five children does not survive the disease. Families are thus confronted not only with loss, but often also with the experience of social isolation. People from their circle of friends and acquaintances as well as colleagues remain silent or tend to withdraw because they do not know how to deal with the situation. Affected parents explain: *"We are afraid that our daughter will be forgotten if no one talks about her anymore. That's why we appreciate being able to talk about her, even though it can sometimes be very painful."* This statement shows how important it is to have an open environment that does not exclude grief but creates space for encounters and conversations.

Bereaved parents and grieving siblings

For families, the loss of a child is devastating, something that changes their lives forever. Grief often begins during the illness, as hope starts to fade and the end draws near. *"Every family and every farewell is different. Grief doesn't follow a linear path. It doesn't simply vanish, but changes over time,"* says Kathrin Hauri, MD, senior physician for Paediatric Palliative Care at the University Children's Hospital Basel (UKBB). Palliative care for children and adolescents does not begin in the final stages of life but can be integrated into the treatment process at an early stage. It brings security, reduces fears and opens up opportunities to consciously shape the time that remains. The focus is always on quality of life and support for the whole family – parents and siblings – until the child's death and beyond.

Strengthening families – giving grief space

Open conversations, small gestures of sympathy, shared memories and rituals can help to integrate grief into a new life one step at a time. An environment that listens, offers specific support and does not look away can help. *"We know from experience that, in addition to professional services and a supportive social environment, talking to parents who have had to suffer a similar fate also plays an important role, for example in bereavement groups such as those offered by our member organisations. The new digital information platform from Childhood Cancer Switzerland is a further important contribution. It offers guidance, support and valuable advice on living with and after childhood cancer,"* says Elena Guarnaccia, CEO of Childhood Cancer Switzerland.