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Adaptive Style and Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress in Children with Cancer and Their Parents

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Objective To examine symptom levels of posttraumatic stress (PTS) in children with cancer and their parents as a function of patient and parent adaptive style. **Method** Participants included 162 pediatric cancer patients and their parents. Patients completed self-report measures of PTS and adaptive style. Parents reported on their own adaptive style and PTS, as well as levels of PTS in their child. **Results** Adaptive style was a significant correlate of PTS. Children identified as low anxious (LA) or repressors (REP) obtained lower levels of PTS than did high anxious (HA) children, both by self-report and parent report. Parents identified as LA or REP self-reported lower levels of PTS than HA and also reported lower levels of PTS in their children. **Conclusions** Patient and parent adaptive style are significant determinants of PTS in the pediatric oncology setting. These findings, in combination with the generally low levels of PTS in the pediatric oncology population, raise questions about the utility of the posttraumatic stress model for understanding the experiences of children with cancer, although such a model may be more applicable to parental response.

Key words: adaptive style; anxiety; childhood cancer; posttraumatic stress; repression.

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