

HOW PARENTS CAN PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN FROM MISUSE OF BLOOD

Elders should be alert to review these points with parents whose preteen or adolescent children are facing a medical problem that could require them to take a stand on the misuse of blood. Appropriate points may also be shared when elders learn that a married couple is expecting a child. **Elders may make a copy of this document for their personal use. However, no copies should be made for anyone else.** A copy should be retained in the congregation file along with other medical-related items.

God-fearing parents view their children as a precious gift from Jehovah. They keenly feel their God-given responsibility to train and protect this treasured inheritance. (Ps. 127:3; Eph. 6:4) Having this Biblical view, parents promptly seek appropriate medical care when their children are sick. In seeking medical care, however, blood transfusion may become an issue. What reasonable steps can parents take to protect their children from this misuse of blood?—Eccl. 9:11.

PROTECT CHILDREN—SPIRITUALLY AND MEDICALLY

Firm conviction is vital because a well-meaning doctor may adamantly claim that blood will improve a child's condition.

Parents must be firmly resolved to 'abstain from blood' by refusing it for their children. (Acts 15:28, 29; Deut. 12:23, 25) They should make all health-care providers aware early on of their nonnegotiable stand and of their willingness to accept nonblood alternatives.

Parents should also help their children develop their own conviction and to defend their faith if faced with the prospect of a transfusion. (1 Pet. 3:15) This is important because some physicians may agree to treat minors who have demonstrated sufficient maturity to make their own medical choices. Some courts have upheld the rights of such minors to do so.—*w08* 10/1 pp. 30-31; *km* 12/05 p. 6; *w91* 6/15 pp. 15-18.

Parents should take steps to find a cooperative doc-

tor. Consult with the local Hospital Liaison Committee (HLC) early on in the search for a physician and facility with a good record of respecting our stand on blood and using nonblood alternatives for Witness children.

A good health-insurance policy is practical where possible and can often allow treatment options that might not otherwise be available.—Luke 16:8.

Some physicians or hospitals, based on their medical or legal understanding, will not give 100 percent assurance that they will not use blood when treating young children, infants, and premature babies. Nevertheless, when a cooperative doctor has per-

formed similar procedures without blood in the past, he may assure parents that he will do everything he can to avoid using blood. Under this circumstance, parents may conclude that this is their best option. If they grant permission for treatment, *parents should make it clear in writing that they are not authorizing a blood transfusion for their child.* Parents bear the responsibility for such decisions, and this would not be viewed by the congregation as a compromise. (Gal. 6:5) [Note: Parents have the right to cross out any objectionable language in hospital

Steps parents need to take to protect their children *spiritually* and *medically*:

1. Educate themselves and their children on the importance of obeying Jehovah's command to abstain from blood.—Acts 15:28, 29; Eph. 6:4
2. Train their children to defend their faith.—1 Pet. 3:15
3. Seek the help of the HLC in locating a doctor or medical facility that has an established record of respecting our stand on blood and in using nonblood alternatives
4. Inform physicians and medical facilities early on about their position on blood transfusion
5. Seek prenatal care if pregnant

forms.—*g91* 3/8 pp. 5-6.]

Prospective mothers should endeavor to seek good prenatal care during pregnancy. This helps prevent premature births and helps to identify other potential risks during delivery that often lead to blood transfusion. The HLC can help locate obstetricians

and gynecologists who are skilled in using alternatives to blood.—g 11/09 pp. 26-29.

PROTECT CHILDREN—LEGALLY

A wise parent anticipates court involvement. The law does not give parents unlimited medical decision-making authority to accept or refuse treatment for their children. Parents may not be free to refuse treatment considered necessary for their child's welfare even when their refusal is based on sincerely held religious beliefs.

If doctors and hospital personnel do not have parental consent to use blood, they may seek consent from a judge in the form of a court order. Many court orders are obtained very quickly with little or no notice to the parents.

As natural guardians of the child, parents have a fundamental right to know what doctors, hospital administrators, or child-welfare officials are doing with respect to their child at all times. **If parents have reason to believe that a court order may be forthcoming, they should advise all social workers and hospital personnel that they want notice of any court proceeding so that they can have an opportunity to be heard.**

How can a parent deal with the court proceeding? If there is time, it often is advisable to seek the help of an attorney. If the parent secures an attorney, the organization's Legal Department can share information with him to help him make the best defense possible under the circumstances.

A judge's paramount concern is the physical welfare of the child. The judge needs to see that the parents are not neglectful or abusive but are loving parents who want their child to receive the best medical care.

Parents can inform the court that they are refusing blood on deeply held religious grounds but are not refusing medical care and have no intention of "martyring" their child. This setting may not be the best time for parents to mention their strong faith in the resurrection, as this may convince the judge that they are unreasonable.

They can inform the judge that they would like an

opportunity to find a doctor who will treat the child with acceptable methods of nonblood management. The HLC may already have helped them find such a doctor who will testify in court, perhaps by telephone. The HLC may also share with the judge medical articles that show that the child's medical problem can be effectively managed without blood.

If a mature adolescent is involved, parents can request that the hospital evaluate his decision-making capacity. Request that the court hear from the child prior to making its decision. Often, courts have accorded mature adolescents the legal right to make their own medical choices.

A well-prepared defense in court is important. Judges see more clearly the other side—the parents' side. They are not so quick to authorize a transfusion. They may severely restrict the doctor's freedom to use blood, even requiring alternatives first or giving the parents opportunity to find doctors who will treat the child without blood.

In dealing with those seeking to force a transfusion, parents should never waver in their convictions. Some judges or doctors may ask if the parents would "transfer" the responsibility of making a decision to them so the parents could more easily live with their conscience. **Parents should make clear that they personally feel an obligation to do all they can to avoid a transfusion.**

If a court order is issued despite one's best efforts, continue to ask the physician not to transfuse and to urge that non-blood alternative treatments be utilized.

TRUST IN JEHOVAH

Remember the counsel at

Proverbs 16:20. Parents show insight and trust in Jehovah by making necessary preparations in advance to protect their child from a blood transfusion. Conscientious elders will encourage and support parents in this endeavor.

May parents and children "be firmly resolved not to eat the blood . . . that it may go well with you" because of having Jehovah's blessing and approval.—Deut. 12:23-25.

Steps parents need to take to protect their children legally:

1. Remember that the law does not give parents unlimited medical decision-making authority
2. **Advise all social workers and hospital personnel that they want notice of any court proceeding so that they can have the opportunity to be heard**
3. Inform the judge they are not refusing medical care but are seeking non-blood medical management
4. Ask the judge to hear from doctors regarding available forms of alternative nonblood options
5. If a mature adolescent is involved, request that the hospital evaluate his decision-making capacity and request that the court hear from him