

A child who is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness or who is suffering serious, life-threatening trauma needs medical diagnosis and intervention, as well as nursing assessment and care—sometimes for a short time and sometimes over a lengthy period. When cure is no longer possible and life-prolonging measures result in pain, suffering, and distress to the child, parents need information about care options that are available to assist them in deciding how they want the remaining time with their child to be managed by the health care team. It is important that families are reassured that although their child cannot be cured, active care will continue to be provided to maintain the child's comfort. Support is provided to assist the child and family during the dying process. As a result, nurses may care for children and families who are making the difficult transition from curative or restorative treatments to palliative care.

## Principles of Palliative Care

Palliative care involves a multidisciplinary approach to the care of children living with or dying from chronic, complex, or potentially life-limiting conditions with a primary focus on symptom control, supportive care, and quality of life rather than on cure or life prolongation in the absence of the possibility of a cure ([Field and Behrman, 2004](#)). The [World Health Organization \(1996\)](#) defines **palliative care** as the “active total care of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment. Control of pain, of other symptoms, and of psychological, social, and spiritual problems is paramount. The goal of palliative care is the achievement of the best possible quality of life for patients and their families.” This goal is certainly compatible with care for patients who are pursuing curative or life-prolonging therapy. Therefore there should be a distinction between palliative care and end-of-life care. End-of-life care is a part of palliative care, but the goals of palliative care extend to all aspects of a patient's quality of life and can be established early in the trajectory of a patient's disease. The [World Health Organization \(1998\)](#) amended the definition of palliative care for children to include:

- Palliative care for children is the active total care of the child's body, mind, and spirit and involves giving support to the family.