



TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT A CANCER DIAGNOSIS

Using simple language, give a brief statement of what has occurred.

Tell your children

- the name of the illness
- what part of the body is affected
- how it was discovered
- what will be done to treat your illness

Calling your illness a "boo-boo" may confuse children about common illnesses being as serious as cancer.

Ask your children what they know about cancer, and what they want to know.

Tell your children basic facts about cancer.

1. Cancer is no one's fault. Your children have not caused your cancer. Nothing that they have said, done, or thought can cause your cancer.
2. Your child cannot 'catch' your cancer. Cancer is not like a cold or flu.
3. It is not always clear why cancer develops.
 - Children often need to hear the information again, or may ask the same questions.
 - Remind your children that they can always ask questions if they don't understand what is happening.
 - Encourage your children's questions, and reassure them there are no dumb questions.
 - Accept their unwillingness to talk.

Children will talk when they are ready.

Suggestions for helping your children tell others

Your children may not want to tell everyone, or know what to say. It is important for them to let their friends know what they are comfortable talking about, and what they are not. You could tell your children:

“It’s ok to tell other kids. It’s ok to share your feelings.”

“It’s ok too if you don’t want to talk about it.”

“You could say to your friends, ‘I don’t want to talk about it.’”

“Or you could just say that your parent is sick.”

Children at school may feel uncomfortable and not know what to say. Sometimes children may say unkind things or make fun of things they don’t understand. You could say to your children:

“Not everyone has a parent with cancer.”

“Your friends may not understand how you feel.”

“You might feel awkward or weird around them.”

“If your friends say hurtful remarks, you could ignore it, or ask how they would feel if their parent had cancer.”