

WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

TELLING YOUR CHILDREN

YOU HAVE CANCER

You might feel more in control if you have the first sentence written down so you can read it aloud. Your kid won't care whether you are reading it or not.

Have some props or resources with you. Not only can you fiddle with them and focus on them, but they can also help with your child's understanding. Download the free app *A Kid's Guide To Cancer* by Camp Equality.

It doesn't matter how old your child is, the key aims are to reassure them, show them love and security, and to open a safe space for them to ask questions.

3-5 YEAR OLDS

Most young children need to simply hear that cancer is a sickness, that you are trying to get better with the help of the doctors.

Don't be surprised if they want to go and play and react like nothing has happened.

EXAMPLES OF THINGS TO SAY

"Daddy is sick, or Daddy is sick with something called cancer. Have you heard him coughing? He will be in the hospital for a while. The doctors are working to help him."

"I have an illness called cancer. It means some lumps are growing inside my body that shouldn't be there. I have many doctors and nurses who are helping me"

"Nothing you did, said or thought made me get cancer"

USING AN ANALOGY

Being a little bit more creative, and talking about something they can visualise, can help children understand better. It can make it more meaningful.

Try the Lego or Weeds story (see the resource *Kid Friendly Ways to Explain Cancer*).

6-10 YEAR OLDS

This age group start to understand more about the body, cells and illnesses.

They will probably have lots of questions, but not have the same fears as adults.

EXAMPLES OF THINGS TO SAY

"I have an illness called cancer. The doctor is giving me medicine to help me get better. The medicine might make me feel sick or tired some days, but I might feel fine on other days."

"I have an illness called cancer. It means some lumps are growing inside my body that shouldn't be there, and they're making me sick. I am going to have an operation in hospital to have the lumps taken out. Then I'll have some more medicine to make sure they don't grow back."

"The doctors say that Mum has a problem with her blood. That's why he's been very tired lately. The illness is called [type of cancer]. Mum's going to have treatment to try and make her well again."

"We've had some bad news. I've got cancer. We don't know what we're dealing with yet, but I'm going to have surgery so that the doctors can have a look and find out."

"You know that Mum has been sick a lot lately. The doctors told us today that the tests show she has cancer. The good news is that she has an excellent chance of beating it."

11+ YEAR OLDS

Teens can understand much more and will want and need to know much more.

They probably will have lots of questions, so prepare some answers.

Teens have said they don't want the news sugar-coated.

EXAMPLES OF THINGS TO SAY

"Our cells make copies of themselves; they divide so we can grow or replace damaged or old cells. Cancer cells are cells in our body that have an error in their on/off switch and make too many copies of themselves. This interferes with the healthy cells and functions in the body. Sometimes cancer cells create a tumour in one place and sometimes they can travel to other locations in the body."

"Even though your school friends say that cancer is really bad and I will get very sick, they don't know everything about this cancer. I will tell you what I know about my cancer."

"There are lots of different types of cancer and they're all treated differently. Even though Uncle Noel had cancer, it might not be the same for me."

"The doctor doesn't know why I got cancer. It doesn't mean that you'll get cancer too. It's not contagious (you can't catch it) and the cancer I have is not genetic (it doesn't run in families)."

**BE
TRUTHFUL**

FOCUS ON WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW

For example "Right now I feel mostly OK. On Monday I will start taking medicine called chemotherapy which is to help get rid of cancer cells. I may feel sick and my hair will start to fall out. This is normal. These are side effects (unwanted effects) of the medicine, not the cancer itself."

TELL THEM

"You have done nothing to cause the cancer, and you can't cancer so you can carry on giving lots of hugs"

"I might not know the answers but I will try to find out"

"I will update you if you would like on what is happening, so you don't need to worry about my all the time"