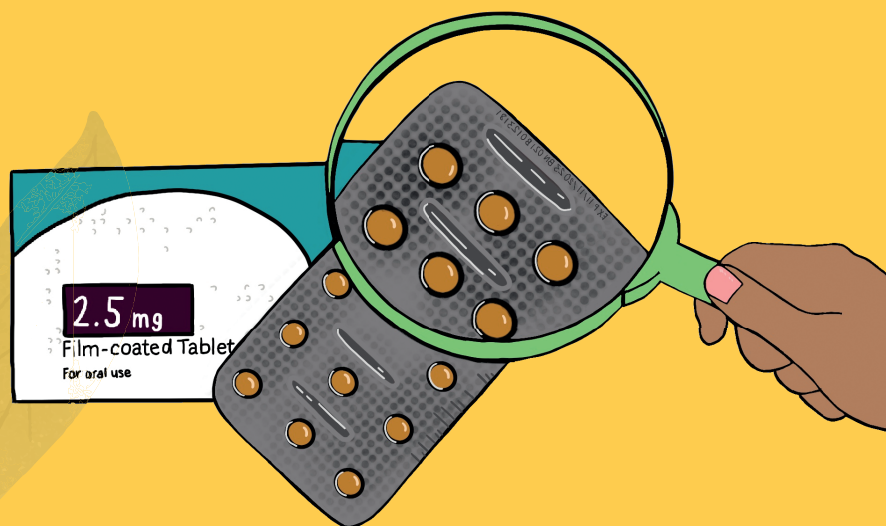


ABOUT YOUR DIAGNOSIS

PREPARING TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS

Don't think of this conversation as one big talk that you have to 'get right', instead think of it as the first of a mini-series. Think of it as a jigsaw puzzle. New pieces of information are added when appropriate.

Do a voice note or write down what you want to say. Create a script, or bullet points, you can refer to if you start to feel overwhelmed.



Rehearse this script in front of a mirror, partner, or friend.

Practice answering difficult questions, like 'Are you going to die?'

Avoid misleading ideas like 'I have a bug' or confusing terms like 'I have the big C'.

Avoid general terms like "I'm sick." Provide the name of the cancer and explain where it is in your body.

Put phones away, turn off the TV.

Try to make sure that you are on the same page with the other parent, if there is one, so you are a united front.

Think of a time when you can sit for a long period and give your child undivided attention - not before school or bedtime.

Weekends are good as it allows your child to process what you have said so if they need to come back to you with questions they can.

Think about how you want to sit. Holding hands and being physically close with them can be comforting. Being on the same level with younger kids, like the floor. Older children might prefer sitting next to each other on the sofa, so eye contact is minimal.

If you have more than one child, try to tell them at the same time.

It can be good if both parents are there, or a family member/friend who the child trusts. They can be there for your support too.

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.

Keep it simple and straightforward. Even older children can get overwhelmed by lots of details.

Try and use the word cancer at the beginning because they are likely they will hear it somehow.

Be consistent with the language you use. For example, if you are saying 'lump' or 'tumour', or 'blood cancer' or 'leukaemia'.

Find out what your child knows about cancer. Children are exposed to information about cancer through many sources. It is common for children to have misconceptions or incomplete information.

Be truthful. That doesn't mean going into every detail. That's rarely helpful.

Give your children time to take the information in - silences can be good as they can show your children are processing what you have said.

Sometimes it can be helpful to ask them to repeat what you have said, so you can pick up any misunderstandings.

Be prepared to repeat this information - many times.

Don't worry about crying in front of them, but don't be hysterical as this might frighten them.

Use resources and props. They can be something you all focus on, fiddle with, as well as provide information.

If you can't deliver the news yourself, try and be in the room with them when they are being told.

Finding the right words and answers is not as important as being reliable, consistent, loving and open.

Be ready to listen but don't expect your child to always want to talk. They usually will when ready, and often to people who are not immediate family.

End your chat with some reassurances and some questions like:

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This is not their fault and they could not have prevented it.

You will be honest with them and keep them informed.

Some things will have to change, for example, some days I won't be able to pick you up from school, but we will work out a plan together, and you will know what is going to happen.

I am always here for your questions.

How do you feel about what I have told you?

Is there anything worrying you right now that we could talk about?

What would you like to know now?

Can you explain what I have just told you to your favourite teddy? What would you say?

How can we look after each other?

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