

Talking about cancer with your kids is hard. **We get it.**

Bright Reads books are one way to start this difficult conversation.

This guide is intended to be used by parents and guardians, grandparents and loved ones, or any loving member of your community. You'll notice the questions are posed from the perspective of a parent with cancer—please change the language to fit your needs.

We've listed suggested ages for the discussion questions and activity ideas, but you know your child the best. These questions may not work for every child depending on language development, understanding of a parent's cancer, and all of the things that make our kids unique.

Here are some helpful questions and sentence starters to use with your child when you are reading together, when a moment of connection opens up, or anytime you need them.

- What did you think of this story? How did it make you feel?
- What is similar (or different) between this story and our family's story?
- What did you learn from this story?



It is helpful to keep sentences short and to the point when telling young children about your cancer diagnosis. Here are some sentences to consider and edit to your specific situation:

I have cancer.

Cancer is a (sickness, illness or disease depending on your family's preference).

You can't catch it. I didn't catch it or get it from you or anyone else.

I am going to the doctor to get better.

I am getting a medicine called chemotherapy / radiation.

The medicine may make me feel sick and tired.

You can hug and snuggle me all you want and you will never catch cancer.

Nothing you did or said caused me to get cancer.

You can always ask me questions about cancer or how I feel.

Please keep in mind that some children will not want to talk about their feelings. Some children will have a million questions. Other children might have huge emotions and big behaviors. It is ALL o.k. Let your children know that you love them no matter what and that they can come to you when they are ready (and over-and-over again).

A big thank-you to the following professionals who contributed to and reviewed these guides:

Carissa Hodgson, LCSW, OSW-C | Sarah F. Pedonti, Ph.D. | Lauren Rabinovitz, MPH, MSW, LCSW-C | Sarah Keyes, MA, CCLS

Butterfly Kisses and Wishes on Wings: When Someone you Love has Cancer by Ellen McVicker

**Check out activities from the book's author at www.butterflykissesbook.com. Here are a few more, if you are interested:*

Discussion Questions:

Suggested Age: Preschool

It's okay to have feelings! What makes you sad? Mad? Scared? Happy?

What are your favorite ways to help me?

Who are other people who love you?

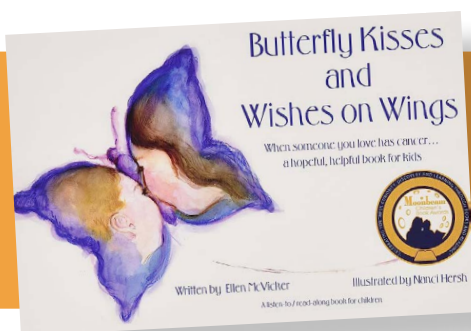
Suggested Age: School Age

Have you ever seen me worried or sad? What was that like for you?

The kid in the story has a lot of questions about cancer. What questions do you have?

In the story, the boy comes up with many ways to help his mom while she goes through treatment. What are ways you might like to help me and our family?

There are so many big feelings that kids, and adults, feel when someone has cancer. Who can you go to when you are having these feelings?



Activity Ideas:

Suggested Age: Preschool–School Age

It's important for kids to feel like they have at least a couple of trusted adults to go to when they have big feelings. Using a piece of paper, draw representations of people who can help your child through big feelings. Perhaps draw a flower for each person, or write their names on branches of a tree. You can also add activities that help your child to feel better—draw clouds in the sky and inside write or draw what makes them feel better (ex: drawing, dancing, taking deep breaths, playing outside, etc.).

The boy and his mom in the story share special butterfly kisses. Invite your child to help you develop a special hand shake, dance, or other interaction that is special just between the two of you.

Suggested Age: School Age

Divide a sheet of paper into 3 equal vertical sections. In the left section, draw a caterpillar. In the middle section, draw a chrysalis hanging on a branch. In the right section, draw a butterfly. Engage your child in decorating the caterpillar to represent life before cancer, the chrysalis as life with cancer, and the butterfly as life after cancer. Have a conversation about what has been challenging since you got cancer, and also what good things have happened since you got cancer. Older children may be able to engage in the metaphor of transformation, and how your cancer has been a transformation in their lives.

The child in the book says radiation is kind of like his toy laser sword. Draw or tell a story about something you would create to eliminate cancer cells.