

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:

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Lost in the Clouds: A Gentle Story to Help Kids Understand Death and Grief by Tom Tinn-Disbury



**Note: For young children, it is important to discuss what “dead” means. For example: When someone dies, their heart stops beating, their lungs stop breathing, they no longer need to eat or drink. Kids are magical thinkers and tend to think dead people will come back to life. You may need to revisit this topic many times to remind them their loved one will not be alive again. Remind children that it is NOT their fault the person died. If you have a spiritual belief about what happens to someone’s spirit/energy after death, it is valuable to discuss your ideas with your child, and invite their thoughts about what happens. Regardless of your spiritual beliefs, it is helpful for children to know that the love between them and their deceased parent will always exist.*

Discussion Questions:

Suggested Age: Preschool

How do you feel today? *Remind your child any feeling is okay, and the uncomfortable feelings do not last forever.*

Share memories you have of the person who died, including ones of the child and parent interacting. Referencing the person normalizes it for your child, letting them know it is okay (and good) to talk about the person.

Suggested Age: School Age

Billy notices his dad acts differently since his mom died. Do people in your family act differently since your parent died?

Billy says bad days are like thunderstorms. What are your bad days like? What do you do on bad days?

Billy talks with his mom, even though she is dead. Do you talk or imagine talking with your mom/dad?

Who are 2 people you feel safe talking to about your feelings?

The book says, “Something beautiful can grow in the stormiest weather.” What is something positive that has happened in your life since your parent died?

Activity Ideas:

Suggested Age: Preschool–School Age

Go outside (or to a window) to look at the sky on a clear, cloudy, or stormy day. Can you imagine some things your parent who died might enjoy watching you do (ride a bike, jump in rain puddles, etc.)?

Suggested Age: School Age

Draw or paint a rainbow on a sheet of paper. Consider adding one or more of the following:

In each color of the rainbow, write a word (or sentence) about a memory or something you loved about your parent who died.

Draw cloud shapes around the rainbow that represent a favorite memory with your parent.

Add a tree. On each branch, write the name of someone who loves and cares for you.

Consider adding hobbies or activities you do to help you with big feelings (ex: reading, playing, breathing, singing, dancing, etc.)

Is there an animal, flower or plant that reminds you of your parent? Add it somewhere in your drawing!