

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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Mommy Has Cancer: What I Learned about Cancer and How I Helped my Mommy

by Corey L. Stevenson Jr.

Discussion Questions:

Suggested Age: Preschool

What do you think of my bald head?

There are many things I love and appreciate about you—what do you think some of them are?

When I'm going through treatment I may feel tired or sick. What can we do together while I'm lying down? *Note: The book [Horizontal Parenting: How to Entertain Your Kids While Lying Down](#) by Michelle Woo and Dasha Tolstikova offers some clever activities.*

Suggested Age: School Age

What are activities you can do to be helpful for me or the family when I'm feeling sick and tired?

What are you worried about me not being able to do when I'm in treatment?

The boy in the story says he learned a lot—what have you learned about cancer and our family?



Activity Ideas:

Suggested Age: Preschool–School Age

Plan a celebration for a milestone in your treatment. Maybe you are ending chemotherapy? Maybe your hair is long enough for its first haircut since it fell out? Maybe you are taking a break? Or maybe you are celebrating surviving x months/years of living with cancer (for parents living with chronic/metastatic cancer). Consider being creative in what you celebrate (even events that may seem small).

Trace your child on a large sheet of paper or piece of cardboard—if you don't have anything large enough, draw the outline of a body on a small piece of paper. Allow your child to color/collage what they feel in different parts of their body. Where do they feel sadness? Anger? Fear? Joy? What does it look like/sound like/feel like? Have a discussion about what they can do with these feelings when they have them (ex: move their body, jump on a trampoline or couch cushions, punch a pillow, listen to music, take deep breaths, talk to a trusted adult, make art, etc.)

Suggested Age: School Age

List or write out what you've learned about cancer. If your child is interested in learning more, find trusted sources to research different cancer topics. Perhaps your child can accompany you to a medical appointment or treatment to better understand the process