

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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Too Many Cells by Lauren Candies

Discussion Questions:

Suggested Age: Preschool

What is a cell? *Answer: a tiny small building block of our body.*

What has been different since I got cancer?

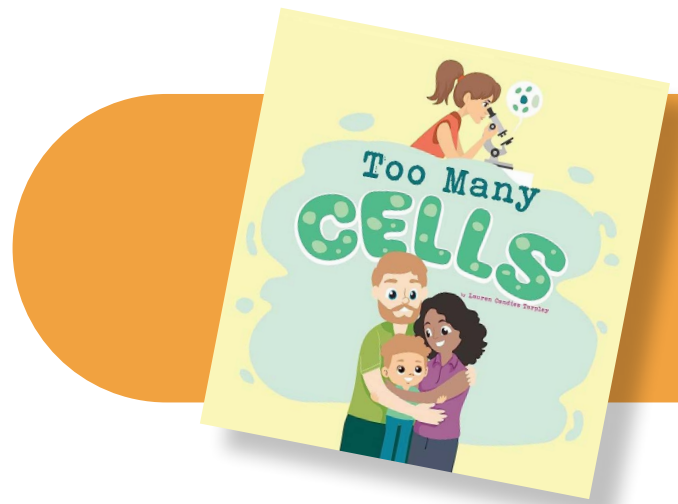
When I'm going through treatment I may feel tired or sick. What can we do together while I'm lying down? *Note: The book [Horizontal Parenting: How to Entertain Your Kids While Lying Down](#) by Michelle Woo and Dasha Tolstikova offers some clever activities.*

Suggested Age: School Age

What are some of the feelings you have about my cancer? Does it ever feel like you have too many feelings at once?

Have you heard other names for cancer? How is cancer like other diseases you know about? How is it different? *Reinforce in this discussion that cancer is not contagious—you cannot catch cancer like the cold/flu/Covid. Also, remind children that they did not cause cancer.*

If you could ask my doctor or medical team a question, what would it be? Would you like to write it down for them?



Activity Ideas:

Suggested Age: Preschool–School Age

Use a stamp or marker to make “cells” on a piece of paper. How fast can you fill up the whole sheet? What might surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation to these cells look like? For example, cutting out some of the cells with scissors, using different colors to shade cells, or turning some of the cells into something new (like drawing lines around cells or connecting them to make a creature/person/object).

Suggested Age: School Age

Invite your child to put together a comfort bag for you to take to treatment. This might include a sweater, cozy socks, book, crackers, ginger, tea bags, essential oils, or special notes/pictures drawn by your child.

Invite your child to make you a special coupon book that includes real activities they can do to help. This may include hugs, snuggles, sharing a blanket, singing a song, helping to make a snack, taking the dog for a walk, etc.