

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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What Happens When Someone I Love has Cancer

by Sara Olsner

Discussion Questions:

Suggested Age: Preschool

Tell your child where the cancer cells are located in your body. Tell them how your medical team is planning to get the cancer cells out of your body (ex: what kind of treatment are you having?)

What are some things we can do when I'm feeling tired from treatment? *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 has changed since I got cancer?

Stuart says he feels nervous about his mom's cancer—is there anything you are nervous about?

What is important to you that we try to do most days, even when I have treatment?



Activity Ideas:

Suggested Age: Preschool–School Age

Create your own schedule, with pictures or drawings of different elements of the schedule (e.g., hospital days, rest days, play time, school time, change in caregivers).

Use Legos, blocks, or food like Cheerios to act as cells, building different parts of the body.

Help your child to create their own feelings chart or wheel ([or use one from our website!](#)). Encourage your child to use this to share their feelings—maybe they want to hang it on their bedroom door, or on the kitchen refrigerator. As a parent, you can model emotional expression by talking about YOUR feelings and what you do with them (ex: “I am feeling sad right now because I can't play tag with you. Sometimes taking a few big breaths helps me feel better” [take deep breaths]).

Create a family banner or motto about how you do hard things! This can be on paper, on a big sheet of cardboard, or even on fabric. Consider hanging this in a family room so you can be reminded of your family's strength and resilience.