

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

Cancer Hates Kisses

by Jessica Silwerski

Discussion Questions:

Suggested Age: Preschool

What is a wound? *Explain with terms your child will understand, such as boo-boo or ochie.* What are some wounds that you have had? Do you think that I have any wounds from cancer? How can we help them feel better?

How do hugs and kisses make someone feel better? How do you feel when you get hugs and kisses?

What can we do together 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.*

What does "brave" mean? How can we be brave?

What do you think of my bald head?

Suggested Age: School Age

What superpowers do I have to help me feel better? What are your superpowers?

What are my warrior wounds? How can we help these places to heal?

Why do you think chemo/radiation is so exhausting?

What do you think about me losing my hair? How does a bald head look to you?

How do you feel when you see me cry? Get angry?

What makes you laugh? How does laughing help you feel better?

What makes me brave? How are you brave?



Activity Ideas:

Suggested Age: Preschool

Have your child draw you, themselves, or other members of their family as superheroes. Encourage them to make up a story about how each person uses their superpowers to help them get through the cancer diagnosis.

If you've lost your hair, allow your child to decorate your bald head with washable paint, markers, shaving cream, or stickers! You can also make hats out of materials around the house (using paper, cloth, or existing objects like bowls). Take turns trying them on and having a fashion show.

You and your child trace your hands on 2 separate pieces of paper. Decorate your hands with words, pictures, or colors that make you feel brave and strong. When you are finished, cut out the hands and tape them together, giving a high-five!

Suggested Age: School Age

Encourage your child to create a story using text, drawings, comic book style, photos or even video depicting you, themselves or members of their family as superheroes.

Design a hat/cap/wrap/turban from materials around your house (newspaper, extra fabric) for a bald(ing) head that shows off its beauty.