

## Talking with your child about Cancer

When a child has cancer, every member of the family needs support. Parents often feel shocked and overwhelmed following their child's cancer diagnosis. Honest and calm conversations build trust as you talk with your child and his or her siblings. Taking care of yourself during this difficult time is important; it's not selfish. As you dig deep for strength, reach out and let others support you.

We share tips to help you talk with children of all ages about cancer.

As you talk with your child, begin with the knowledge that you know your child best. Your child depends on you for helpful, accurate, and truthful information. Your child will learn a lot from your tone of voice and facial expressions, so stay calm when you talk with your child. Work to be gentle, open, and honest – so your child will trust and confide in you.

**I learned as much as I could about the cancer my son had, but mostly I did what parents do best – I loved and was always there for my child.**

The age-related suggestions below may be helpful, as you work with the health care team so your child knows what to expect during treatment, copes well with procedures, and feels supported.

**If your child is less than 1 year old:** Comfort your baby by holding and gently touching her. Skin to skin contact is ideal. Bring familiar items from home, such as toys or a blanket. Talk or sing to your child, since the sound of your voice is soothing. Try to keep up feeding and bedtime routines as much as possible.

**If your child is 1 to 2 years old:** Very young children understand things they can see and touch. Toddlers like to play, so find safe ways to let your child play. Toddlers also like to start making choices, so let your child choose a sticker or a flavor of medicine when possible. Prepare your child ahead of time if something will hurt. Not doing so may cause your child to become fearful and anxious.

**If your child is 3 to 5 years old:** To help your child understand his treatment better, ask the doctor if he can touch the models, machines, or supplies (tubes, bandages, or ports) ahead of time. If a procedure will hurt, prepare your child in advance. You can help to distract your child by reading a story or giving her a stuffed animal to hold.

**If your child is 6 to 12 years old:** School-aged children understand that medicines and treatment help them get better. They are able to cooperate with treatment but want to know what to expect. Children this age often have many questions, so be ready to answer them or to find the answers together. Relationships are important, so help your child to stay in touch with friends and family.

**If your child is a teenager:** Teens often focus on how cancer changes their lives—their friendships, their appearance, and their activities. They may be scared and angry about how cancer has isolated them from their friends. Look for ways to help your teen stay connected to friends. Give your teen some of the space and freedom he had before treatment and include him in treatment decisions.