Talking to Children About Cancer

A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES AND CARE PROVIDERS



HOPE&COPE
L'ESPOIR C'EST LA VIE

Revised Edition

OPEN COMMUNICATION HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT

Our children and adolescents are growing up in a stressful, complicated world. They are living through an evolving pandemic, politics that divide us, climate change alarm, and local and global violence. It is understandable that parents may want to "protect" their children from difficult news about a cancer diagnosis and treatment, but there has never been a time when open communication is more important for children's and adolescent's emotional health and well-being. Your cancer diagnosis and treatment are an opportunity for you to model how to face challenges together with sensitivity and open communication. When life is hard and confusing, you want your child to look to you and other key caring adults in their lives as trusted guides through difficult times.

- by Paula K. Rauch, MD

INTRODUCTION

When a family member is diagnosed with cancer, it can cause fear and uncertainty for everyone, especially children. How a child reacts to the news of a cancer diagnosis depends on how parents or other close adults handle the crisis.

This booklet gives parents and caregivers general tips on talking to their children about cancer using words that they will understand. It's important to keep the lines of communication open, to encourage honest conversation and to provide reassurance whenever possible. You are the expert when it comes to your child and know the best way to communicate with him or her. Here are some things to think about when talking to children of any age.



How to Start?

Start with basic information: the name of the cancer, the part of the body where it is located, how it will be treated, and how their own lives will be affected. Explain this to them using basic words and anguage that they can understand. You may wish to talk to each child separately so that information can be tailored to each child's age and level of understanding. Try to avoid telling only the older children as this can place an unnecessary burden on them.

When is the best time?

Choose a quiet time and place when you won't be disturbed. Weekends might be best since weekdays are usually busy with school activities, homework, appointments, or extracurricular activities. It should be a time when the ill parent is well-rested and energized. Avoid telling children just before bedtime for they will need time to process this information.

Who should be included in the discussion?

Decide in advance who are the best people to tell the children. If possible, it should be the parent who has the cancer along with the other parent. If you are a single parent, have a trusted or familiar adult present during your discussion. A caring health care professional could also help with the explanation.

Communication should be ongoing: whether it is after diagnosis, during treatment or after treatment.

TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL

Your first reaction may be to keep the news from children or to delay telling them. Parents are naturally concerned about their children's reactions or worry the diagnosis will disrupt their children's school performance or friendships. Secrecy can make things worse and add to your stress. No matter how hard you try to hide a cancer diagnosis, most children will suspect something is wrong. They will notice changes at home, such as your sadness, whispered conversations, closed doors, an increase in the number of phone calls or visitors, and possibly changes to family schedules.

Benefits of talking/communicating	Effects of not talking/not communicating
Honesty can build trust with your child.	Your child may feel frightened because they do not know what is going on.
By observing open and honest communication, your child will learn to express how they feel and be comfortable asking questions.	Children may be worried that something they might have done caused the cancer.
Your child will feel included and not left out of information and decisions.	Your child may feel that they are not important enough to be included or feel alone with no one to talk to.
Knowing the truth will make children feel more secure and less anxious.	Children may become angry or upset if they find out from someone else.
Your child will be reassured about who will care for them if changes in schedules and activities occur.	Your child may think that there is something worse than the actual reality.
This is an opportunity for children to learn about uncertainty and how to cope when life does not go as planned.	Children may fear about what will happen to them.
It may help them cope with difficult situations later in life.	Your child has a right to know about anything that affects their family.
They may be a comfort to you.	By not telling them, you may lose their trust.



HELPFUL TIPS FOR TALKING TO CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

1. Be truthful and reassuring about your diagnosis and use age-appropriate information. Let them know that they can come to you at any time with questions and concerns. If you do not know the answer to a question, tell them you will try and find out and let them know. Keep in mind that there may be questions you are not be able to answer.
2. Start simply and give out information in small doses rather than overloading them with everything at once. You may have to repeat information more than once.
3. Keep in mind the age difference between each child in the family. They may need to be told different information at different times. A “family meeting” may not always be appropriate.
4. Take advantage of all resources available your community. Asking for professional help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength.
5. Share your family health situation with any significant adult in your child’s life such as teacher, coach, or mentor. This will help them to understand and to report to you any changes in behavior that might occur. These adults may also help maintain your children’s routines, as well as listen to their feelings and concerns.
6. Enlist family members or friends to help, thus reassuring the child that their daily lives will remain as normal as possible and that they will be well looked after.
7. Keep them in the loop. Explain as much as possible about treatments, side effects or hospitalizations in advance so that your child will understand what to expect.
8. Give you child choices: “who would you like to pick you up at the schools bus, grandma or our neighbor Anne?”
9. Be a good listener. Listen to all their worries or concerns, no matter how trivial you think they may be. Encourage dialogue and questions and help them find ways to express themselves such as drawing pictures, writing poems or journaling.
10. Balance hope with reality but do not make promises that you cannot keep.
11. Be mindful that it is normal for children to have many emotions. It is okay to laugh, cry or even be silent. Anger, fear, anxiety, and depression are all normal emotions experienced by children of any age.
12. Although it may be difficult, it is important to set boundaries (e.g., discipline, routines, responsibilities).
13. Think of things to do together that do not take a lot of energy: watching a movie, cooking simple recipes, reading, or playing quiet games.



TIPS FOR SINGLE PARENTS

Being a single parent with young children can be difficult at the best of times. Being on your own with young children and having a cancer diagnosis brings a whole range of different challenges. Although the information in this booklet is of a general nature, here are some points that may be helpful if you are a single parent:

1. When first telling your child about your diagnosis, it may be a good idea to ask a close relative or friend to be there. If that is not possible, you may want to choose any health-care professional who knows your history, such as a social worker or nurse.
2. For single parents, the key issue is choosing the best caregiver for your child or children. For some, family members may not be an option, but it's less scary for the kids if it's someone they know or can get to know before beginning treatments or are hospitalized.
3. This may be easier said than done but remember that it is very important to take care of yourself. If you're feeling unwell or simply exhausted, it's often hard to carry on doing the things you normally would. Keep in mind that self-care, a little exercise, rest, and a good diet are all ways you can be good to yourself.
4. Set small boundaries and goals for yourself as a parent.
5. As a single parent, you have struggled to achieve independence. However, it may be necessary to ask for help from time to time. Take advantage of any other parents who might be willing to help. Do not isolate yourself or turn down help.
6. Getting the right support is essential. Find out what services and programs are available in your community.
7. You may be able to get some financial support. Work with your hospital social worker to see if you are eligible to receive grants or take advantage of government or private-funding assistance.
8. Use the buddy system. You may be able to hook up with another single parent in a similar situation both to talk to and to share resources, responsibilities and even childcare.
9. Get active in the cancer community. Become involved in local cancer walks and activities to support others.
10. You may need the help of your older children but be mindful of giving them too much responsibility.



TALKING TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Children with learning or developmental disabilities can find change hard. It will be easier to them for adjust if you are honest. Remember to explain everything clearly about the changes that the child might go through, such as changes in schedules or people caring for them. It is normal for most people to resist a major change or have difficulty adjusting to new circumstances. This is especially true for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental challenges.

Here are a few pointers:

- Remind them frequently when there is a change in routine. This will help your child understand what to expect.

  "Remember that Uncle Joe will be picking you up at the bus stop instead of me today."

- A visual timer or clock may be helpful, depending on the age.

  "Mommy will be resting for 60 minutes."



- Your child might be comforted by a favorite object or stuffed animal, especially if they need to go to another place for caregiving or accompany the parent to an appointment.
- Give the child a quiet or special space for thinking, drawing, or playing.
- Have a plan for the unexpected. Something may happen with the school, parent's hospitalization or transportation which might upset their routine and cause anxiety or stress.
- Use honest, clear language and do not be afraid to use the word "cancer."
- You may need to use picture stories or books.
- Prepare the child in the event there are physical changes: "You may not be able to hug me as tightly as before." or "I may lose my hair but usually it will grow back."
- A daily, weekly, or monthly visual schedule can be very helpful. Post on a place for all family members to see. This will provide reassurance about daily routines.
- Partner with other significant people in your child's life for support.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF CHILDREN

Age is an important factor in deciding what and how much you should tell a child about a cancer diagnosis. The goal should be to tell the truth in a way that children are able to understand and thereby prepare themselves for the changes that will happen in the family. Each child is different and unique. You know your child best and how to communicate with them.

PRESCHOOLERS (3-5 YEARS OLD)

Children of this age have a basic understanding of illness. They think simply and concretely. They understand today, yesterday, and possibly that something happens later: not an abstract concept such as the "future." They view "hurt" or "sick" as short-term events. "Very sick" or "really sick" may not mean more to them than just "sick."

They believe that their thoughts and actions affect the world around them ("magical thinking"). Therefore, when told about a parent's cancer, they may think such things as: *Did I cause it? Can I catch it? Who will take care of me?*

Getting better will just happen by itself or will come by doing what the doctor says.

Reactions/How Children Cope

A toddler's reaction to a parent's illness is generally centered on themselves and how it affects them and the changes in their routines. They may:

- Revert to earlier behaviors because they are not getting the usual attention from the sick or healthy parent (e.g., bedwetting or waking up in the night).
- Be angry at all family members for the changes and disruption the sickness is causing.
- Attach themselves very closely to a "substitute" parent (neighbor or teacher).
- Become more active, aggressive, or extra quiet. This does not mean they are unaffected.
- Listen to your explanations of what is happening and then quickly return to play.
- Act by imitating others (e.g., if others are crying, they will cry).
- Seek comfort by using a security blanket or favorite toy.
- Develop fears (e.g., darkness, strangers, monsters, nightmares).



How a Parent Can Help



- Try to be patient and give your children extra love and attention whenever you can. Hug your child and maintain physical closeness. If this is not always possible, try to find someone they trust to spend extra time with them.
- Try to keep your child in familiar surroundings.
- If a parent is hospitalized, keep some of your child's games, toys, and books at the hospital for his or her visits.
- Encourage expression of emotions through music, art, or physical activities.
- Explain and reinforce that they did not do anything to make their parent sick and neither did the parent. Be matter of fact and brief with information.
- Share your feelings (e.g., "*I hurt inside*," or "*I am sad too*"). Reassure them that they and the well parent are not sick. Use a calming voice when explaining what is happening.
- Use picture books, dolls, or stuffed animals to help with explanations or answers to questions.
- Reinforce that they cannot catch cancer and it is ok to hug and kiss.
- Encourage them to keep having fun and to be physically active every day.
- Continue with regular discipline and limit- setting.
- Watch TV or movies together and talk about their school day.

YOUNG SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (5-8 YEARS OLD)

Children of this age group have an understanding about the past and present but are still unclear about the long-term future. They may have heard about cancer but have a very basic understanding. They may ask questions such as “How did mommy get cancer?” or, “Will I get it?” They know that treatment and medicine can help you get well, but usually don’t fully understand that illness can be life threatening. They continue to play but have started to think logically and will express feelings about what is happening. It is important to remember that children will quickly return to the security of playing or pretending when they have heard enough.

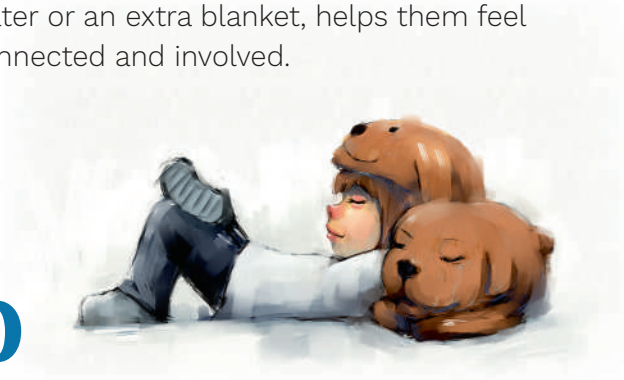
Reactions/How Children Cope

Children of this age react both physically and emotionally when they hear that a beloved parent has cancer. They may:

- Be angry if the sick parent promised to go do something with them and now cannot, or if their usual activities are disrupted.
- Focus on hospital equipment and technical things.
- Want to continue with normal outside activities, as if the parent is not sick.
- Have difficulty adapting to changes.
- Become angry or hostile towards parents, friends, or other family members.
- Have trouble concentrating or are easily distracted.
- Complain of physical ailments such as stomach pains or headaches.

How a Parent Can Help

- Be prepared to explain the illness, treatment, and equipment honestly and in age-appropriate language. Books and stories can be helpful.
- Try to be patient when children seem selfish about how the illness is affecting them.
- Show your feelings openly and encourage your children to share theirs with you.
- You can keep hospital visits and discussions brief unless your child desires otherwise. It is good to keep games, toys, and books at the hospital, so your child has something to do during a visit.
- Give your child many opportunities to talk, butbe prepared to also just “be together.”
- It is important to reassure your child that he/she will continue to be cared for.
- Explain that it is normal to feel angry or sad.
- Reinforce that they cannot catch cancer and that they and other members of their family are healthy.
- If a parent is hospitalized, encourage the child to draw pictures or send a card.
- Watch TV or movies together and talk about their school day. Encourage physical and creative activities.
- Giving children simple tasks, such as bringing water or an extra blanket, helps them feel connected and involved.



OLDER SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (8-12 YEARS OLD)

At this stage, children are beginning to think abstractly but continue to think logically. They will ask "how" questions, searching for understanding, answers and how things work. They now understand the concept of a "future." Your child is familiar with what cancer is but does not necessarily understand the reason for the symptoms or the disease process itself. From the ages of 8 to 12, children are starting to move outside family to develop relationships and are shifting their focus from family to friends. The illness now is often centered on how it affects them socially. Rituals and traditions are still important to them.

Reactions/How Children Cope

Emotionally, the child is struggling to be grown-up and wants to show this by being independent. They may:

- Try to cover up feelings and behaviours such as crying to avoid being seen as childish.
- Choose to share or not to share their feelings with others. They will commonly show anger before sadness and may act out against other family members.
- Be afraid that they themselves are not healthy.
- Blame themselves for the illness.
- Focus on how their parent's illness has disrupted their life and may not show concern for the parent.
- Ask for specific information about prognosis and treatment.
- Feel guilty for feeling angry or being healthy or wanting to have fun while parent is sick.

How a Parent Can Help

- Be patient when your child seems self-centered about how the illness is affecting them. They do not know how to look at things. Sometimes, a child's "bad" behaviour may be the way that upsetting feelings come out. Instead of punishing, try to be patient and talk to them. Validate their fears and discuss their concerns.
- You can give your child some added tasks, but don't overload him/her. Focus on chores that apply to them, such as making their lunch or their bed.
- Allow them to participate, if they wish, in the care of the sick parent with tasks that are appropriate such as straightening the blankets or bringing food.
- Children may perceive physical contact as "not cool," so you will usually need to be the one to initiate hugging and cuddling. They may not want you to be overly affectionate, especially in front of their friends.
- Children are very focused on their social lives, so it is important to prepare for difficult encounters. Talk about how the child can react to peers' comments and questions. You can offer to help talk to your child's friends and/or their parents.
- Encourage your child to continue involvement with friends and outside activities. Try to keep as normal a schedule as possible.
- Watch TV or movies together and talk about their school day.



ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS (13-18 YEARS OLD)

Talking to your teenager about a cancer diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis might be one of your biggest challenges. At this stage in your child's life, they are trying to be more independent and may be withdrawing from family. Although they are focused on relationships with friends, they are still dependent on family in many ways. They are struggling to be the same as their friends and want to fit in. They will start to disagree frequently with you over rules and values and want to become self-reliant.

Older children who are attending college or university may be overloaded with exams or coursework. They may not want to be seen as different from their friends and it is important that certain people know and can support them.

At this age, children are probably familiar with cancer and understand that there are different types and varying outcomes, possibly death.

Your child now understands the significance of a serious illness. They have a general understanding of how the body works and therefore will most likely understand your symptoms and the reason behind them.



Reactions/How Children Cope

Behaviours vary from child to child, but they will all struggle to balance being with friends and living their own lives, with staying close to the sick parent. They tend to cope better than young children because their parents are not the only people in their lives now, and friends can be supportive and encouraging. At this age, they may:

- Worry about the sick parent's future.
- Be concerned with the discomfort, pain, and suffering of their sick parent.
- Be afraid to show feelings for fear of completely breaking down.
- Direct their anger toward any family member, or the sick parent.
- Take on more responsibility for younger siblings.
- Take charge of more household duties.
- Try to do everything to help, even giving up their activities or social lives to be helpful at home.
- Pull away and distance themselves or become sullen and withdrawn.
- Act self-centered.
- Study harder at school to get good grades in order to please parents.

How a Parent Can Help

- Acknowledge how hard it must be to feel torn between spending time with the parent and spending time with friends. Encourage them to carry on with some of their normal activities with friends.
- Involve your children in some decision-making and activities, but do not pile too much responsibility on them or make them assume adult roles.
- Define the limits and what you expect from your child as well as what the adult's responsibilities will be.
- Encourage your teen to talk to you and answer their questions openly and honestly.
- Let them know about people and places they can go for more information and support.
- Respect your teen's privacy. They may want to talk only to certain people about their loved one's illness. Make sure there are other people they can go to for support - perhaps a close relative or a family friend - but let your teen decide if they want to or not.
- Let them know it's okay to have fun despite coping with cancer.
- Inform them of any upcoming changes in their routines.
- Watch TV or movies together and talk about their school day and friends.
- Encourage journaling.

PLEASE SCAN QR CODES BELOW TO SEE WEBSITES ESPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR TEENAGERS

RIPRAP.ORG

CANCER.GOV

CANTEEN.ORG

EXPLAINING RADIOTHERAPY AND CHEMOTHERAPY TO CHILDREN

Explaining the different cancer treatments you may experience can be very tricky and unsettling to children. Explaining it to them in an appropriate manner can make all the difference in helping them to accept the changes. Try to answer questions using words that are easy to understand and do not give more information than necessary. You may want to ask your health care professional to assist in this delicate discussion.

General Guidelines

1. Give your child advanced notice. Talk to your child before the treatment starts about what it will be like and how you may change. This will give them time to digest the information.
2. Take your child's age into account. Explaining chemotherapy to a preschooler is very different than explaining it to a teenager. It is important to validate what they already know about cancer and adjust your explanations when necessary.
3. Focus on how treatment will affect them. Reassure them that their regular routines and activities will carry on in as normal a way as possible with the help of other adults.
4. Don't be afraid to explain the side affects you may have and that the treatments will help you get rid of the cancer and make the parent better.
5. Encourage your children to ask any questions they may have.

RADIOTHERAPY (RADIATION)

Radiotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that uses radioactive rays to kill cancer cells. Treatments are painless and usually take only a few minutes.

There are some side effects which can last a little while after the treatment is over such as fatigue or redness of the skin on the treated area. Children are smart and want to understand what is happening so explain the treatment to them in a manner they can understand. It is important to be clear and to try and simplify what is going on.

Child-Friendly Explanation

"*You know the special camera that takes pictures of the inside of your body? It's called an x-ray machine. There's a special kind of radiation x-ray machine that helps the cancer go away. Lines are usually drawn on the body where the radiation beam will be aimed at. These lines aren't permanent and can be washed off. There may be some dots that will remain.*"

"*Grandpa may not be able to play with you as often as he wants, but he loves you very much.*"

"*Your dad is going to have a treatment that might make him very tired. When he gets home, he will need lots of rest.*"



CHEMOTHERAPY

Chemotherapy is a treatment using drugs to kill cancer cells or slow their growth. There are different ways to receive chemotherapy.

1. Through a needle inserted in a vein (IV)
2. Liquid and pill forms taken by mouth
3. Through a needle into a muscle

Side Effects of Chemotherapy

While chemotherapy has a positive effect in killing cancer cells, it usually has several side effects.

On the bright side, many of these side effects don't last long and will gradually go away after treatment is stopped. Remember that once the chemotherapy is over, people usually begin to feel a lot better. Reinforce that everyone reacts differently to chemotherapy. Some of the side effects might include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Sore mouth
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite which can lead to weight loss
- Loss of hair, however, it usually grows back after treatment is over

Child-Friendly Explanations

- "*Chemotherapy is a kind of cancer treatment that uses special kinds of medicine to destroy fast-growing cancer cells. These medications enter the bloodstream to be carried to cancer cells anywhere in the body.*"
- "*Daddy is getting some medicine to help him get better. The medicine is called chemotherapy. It kills cancer little by little.*"
- "*Chemotherapy is usually given many times for several months or years.*"



SELF CARE

Caring for your mind, body, and spirit

Self-care is as varied and unique as each individual. Each person determines which practices best promote their well-being. Some may be just simple actions that can be integrated into one's lifestyle such as cooking, listening to music, or taking a walk.

Here are some tips that might be helpful.

- Slow down and find quiet time for body and mind.
- Make time for things that make you feel fulfilled, such as crafting, reading, taking a bath, going for a walk, or baking.
- Start a journal.
- Eat nourishing foods.
- Prioritize sleep.
- Spend time with loved ones and friends.
- Do some light exercise. Exercise doesn't have to be hard. It can be any activity that gets your body moving.
- Reduce the time you spend with negative people and habits.
- End each day by listing at least three positive things that happened and savor these moments.
- Try to go outdoors when you can.
- Disconnect from technology and social media if it makes you feel negative.
- Try to stay positive by reading an inspirational or funny book, writing positive messages, or practice visualizations.
- Set achievable short and long-term goals for yourself (i.e.: plan to walk for 10 minutes three times a week or take a class to learn something new)



LIFE AFTER TREATMENT: A "NEW NORMAL"

For many people, the end of treatment can be a time of mixed emotions for both patients and their families. Children and teenagers may expect life to return to normal straightaway, but for the person who has had treatment this may not be the case. You and your family might need to find a "new normal" and this can be an ongoing process. The physical effects of cancer can last long after the treatment is over and many changes will now be incorporated into your life, including fatigue, dealing with physical scars, lymphedema, early menopause, nutrition or fertility and sexuality problems.

Children of any age may find it hard to understand why things simply can't go back to the way they were before the cancer. They've had to make adjustments while their parent or other loved one was sick, and now they want to get back to normal. They may have difficulty seeing that this is not the case, and that life cannot return to exactly the way it was before. And of course, there is always the fear that the cancer might return.

What can you do?

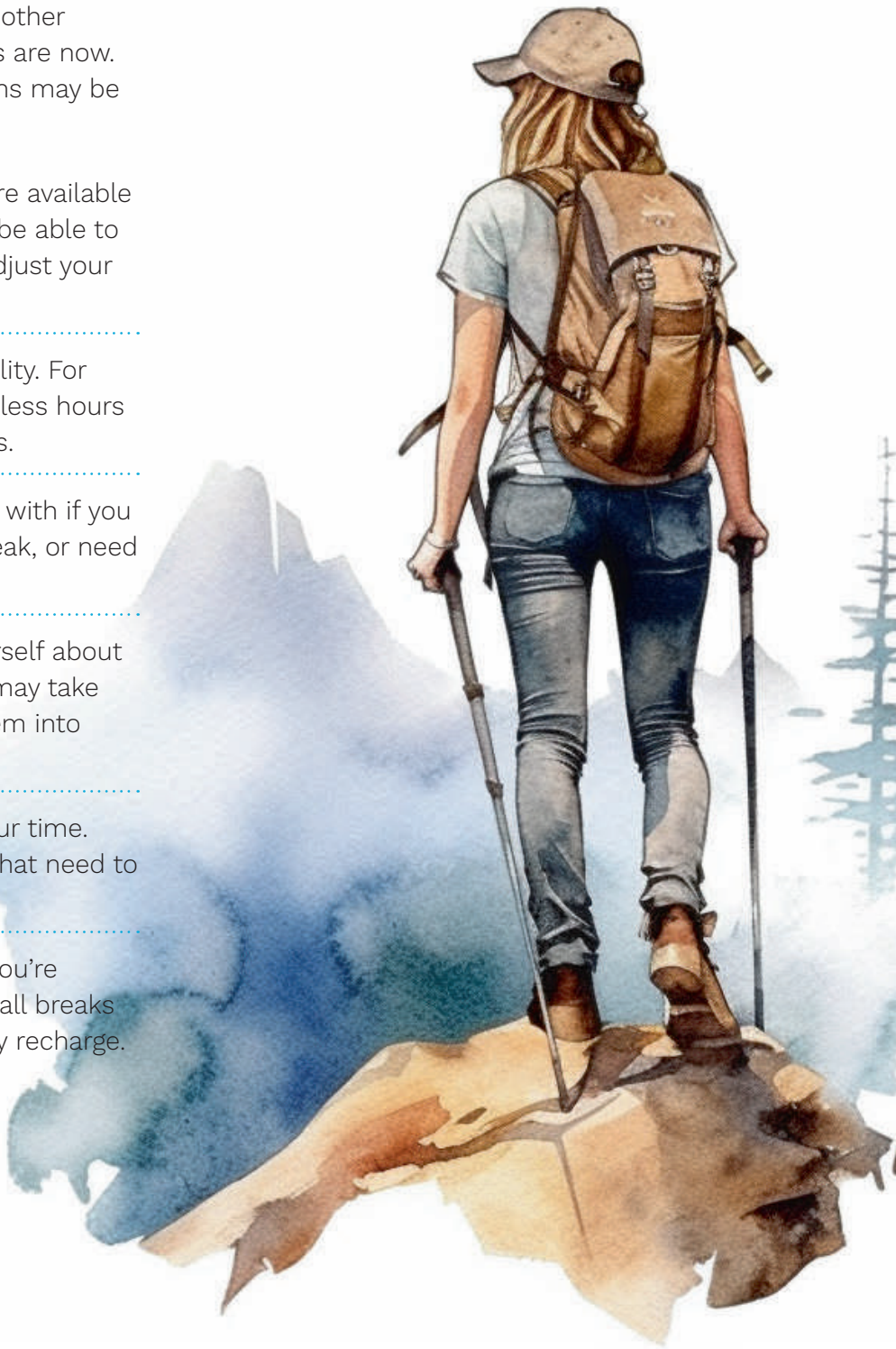
- You may need to reassure your children that regular check-ups will help monitor the cancer.
- Thank your kids for their help, support, and contribution to your recovery.
- Acknowledge the sacrifices your family has had to make. This is particularly important for teenagers.
- Encourage kids to have fun.
- Keep communicating and sharing your feelings.
- Do things at your own pace and avoid pressure to return to 'normal' activities.
- Do things together such as light exercise, playing or cooking.
- Remember to keep looking after your own wellbeing, taking one day at a time. This will be of benefit to both you and your children.



TIPS WHEN RETURNING TO WORK

Don't be discouraged if you are unable to return to work. This gives you time to focus on other things, like what your goals and priorities are now. If you feel ready, the following suggestions may be helpful.

- Ask your employer what resources are available to help you return to work. You may be able to transition to a different position or adjust your workload, schedule, or environment.
- Talk with your employer about flexibility. For example, you could start by working less hours and increase as your health improves.
- Find a trusted co-worker to check in with if you are having a difficult time, need a break, or need to go home.
- Start slowly and be honest with yourself about what you're able to do. Some tasks may take you longer to complete, so break them into smaller tasks.
- Try to pace yourself and prioritize your time. Make a daily or weekly list of things that need to be completed with deadlines.
- Be aware of what it feels like when you're overextending yourself. Schedule small breaks throughout the day to help your body recharge.



CHILD-FRIENDLY GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Biopsy (by-op-see)	A procedure that removes a piece of tissue from a person's body and examines it under a microscope. This is done to see if a patient has cancer and if so, what kind.
Cancer	The name for a disease in which cells that are not normal grow and divide quickly. These cells usually develop into a tumor (a lump).
Diagnosis (dy-ag-nosis)	Finding out the exact disease that is causing a person's illness.
Lymph nodes (limp-fff nodes)	Small bean-shaped bumps that are like filters that remove germs from your body.
Malignant (muh-lig-nunt)	Malignancy is another word for cancer.
Mastectomy (mass-tect-o-me)	Surgery to remove a breast, or part of a breast.
Metastasize (met-tass-ta-size)	The breaking away of cancer cells from the original tumor, settling somewhere else in the body, causing a new tumor.
Oncologist (on-call-o-jist)	A doctor who specializes in treating cancer.
Recurrence (re-ker-ince)	When cancer comes back and the person feels sick again.
Remission (re-mish-in)	When cancer goes away after treatment. A complete remission means no sign of cancer is found on tests, scans, and physical exam.
Scan	A picture of a particular part of the body.
Side effects	Problems caused by cancer treatments or other medicines (fatigue, weight loss).
Surgery or Operation	A procedure that usually involves cutting open part of the body. It is done by a doctor who is an expert in doing operations.
Tumor	An abnormal bunch of cells grouped together into a lump. Some tumors are cancerous and some are not.



ANSWERING SOME OF YOUR CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS: FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

WHO WILL LOOK AFTER ME?

"We will try to keep things as normal as possible, but there may be times when I have to ask dad/mum/grandpa to help out."

DOES RADIOTHERAPY MAKE YOU RADIOACTIVE?

"NO. Radiotherapy is like an x-ray. It doesn't hurt. It's safe to touch me."

ARE YOU GOING TO DIE?

"I don't know what will happen in the future, so let's think about what's going on right now. Sometimes people do die of cancer. I am not expecting that to happen because the doctors have told me that my chances of getting better are very good."

EXPLAINING THE DIAGNOSIS

"I have an illness called cancer. The doctor is giving me some medicine to help me get well. The medicine might also make me feel sick or tired some days but other days I will be fine."

"Dad has an illness called cancer. It means something is growing inside his body that shouldn't be there. He is going to have an operation to have the cancer taken out and some more treatment to make sure it doesn't grow back."

DOES CANCER HURT?

"Cancer doesn't always hurt, but if I have pain, the doctors will give me medicine to help make it go away."

WHY DO YOU LOOK SO SICK WHEN THE DOCTORS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE FIXING YOU?

"The doctors are using strong medicine to kill the cancer, but the medicine affects good cells as well as cancer cells. Some days I will feel and look sick, but this doesn't mean the cancer is getting worse. I will start to feel better when treatment finishes."

WHY DO YOU REST SO MUCH?

"The treatment has made me tired, and I need to rest a lot so my body can recover and get better. Let's make a plan for when I have more energy. Perhaps today we can do something quiet together like watch a movie."

WHAT HAPPENS WITH CHEMOTHERAPY?

"The doctor says I may lose my hair because of the chemotherapy. It will come back but probably will look a bit different, especially at first. I can wear wigs, scarves or hats."

SOME OF THE INFORMATION IN THIS BOOKLET HAS BEEN ADAPTED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

- American Cancer Society
- Canadian Cancer Society
- Cancer Council New South Wales
- Cancer Council, Victoria, Australia
- National Cancer Institute: When a parent has Cancer: A Guide for Teens
- Tools for Raising an Extraordinary person: https://hes-extraordinary.com
- U.S Department of Health and Human Services
- What About My Kids: A Guide for Parents Living with Breast Cancer, Linda Cosini, Breast Cancer Foundation, Ontario, 2007
- When a Loved One Has Cancer. Arlen Ganes and Meredith Polsky, Nova Scotia 1999
- When a Parent Has Cancer. Wendy Harpham, Harper Collins Publishers, New York 2004

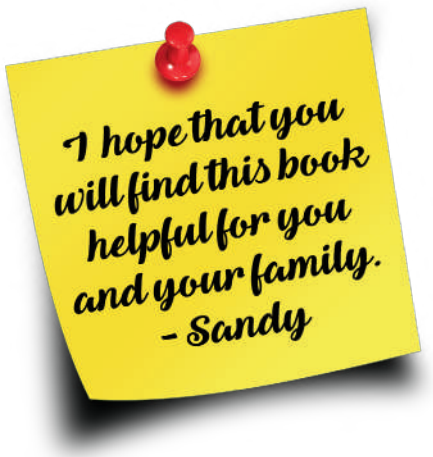
RESOURCES

A comprehensive list of resources can be found on the Hope & Cope website:

http://www.hopeandcope.ca

Scan the QR Code below to watch videos that you might find helpful. Please share them with your children.

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR



This book has been reviewed by health care professionals and patients in order to present the most up to date and comprehensive material for those who need to discuss cancer with their children. The information is meant to compliment but not to replace the advice you may have received from your health care team.



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