

HOW DO WE TELL THE CHILDREN?

A Guide to
Information & Resources for
Adults & Children



A Y R S H I R E
cancer
Support

Visit our website at
www.ayrshirecs.org

Contents

- Page 3. Supporting Children When a Family Member has Cancer.
- Page 5. During Treatment and/or Hospitalisation.
- Page 7. When Might a Child Need Extra Support?
- Page 9. Helpful Websites:
-for Children & Young People
- Page 10. -for Parents or Guardians.
- Page 11. Booklets.
- Page 13. Books for Children.
- Page 18 Books for Adults Talking to Children About Cancer.
- Page 20. Contact Details

Ayrshire Cancer Support

offers counselling and complementary therapies to patients and their families and family members over 16 years of age.

Supporting Children when a Family Member has Cancer

Understandably, as a parent, you may be anxious about how your children may cope with a diagnosis of cancer in the family. You may be unsure about the 'right thing' to say or do at this time or find it difficult to talk to your children about what is happening. However, children often have an amazing capacity to deal with the illness of a family member. With support, understanding and the chance to express how they are feeling, most children will cope well during this difficult time. Below are some tips that you may find helpful:

At first -

With the best of intentions, you may try to protect children by not telling them what is happening. However, even very young children can sense when something is wrong and can feel *more* anxious and isolated when they are not told. So, **try to be honest with your children** as early as possible. Young children need simple information in small amounts, whereas teenagers may require more detail.

Encourage your children to ask questions and try to give open and honest answers. Not all their questions will have answers and it is OK to say, "I don't know."

Encourage your children to talk about their feelings. Young children may not be able to put their feelings into words but may be able to paint or draw about their feelings and worries.

At home, **try to maintain routines**, like mealtimes and bedtimes. The familiarity and regularity of this can be comforting.

Praise children for being helpful and thoughtful but not for being brave as **it is OK for them to be upset** – and for you, too!

Let them **know they are not to blame** for anything that is happening and **assure them they will be looked after**, whatever happens.

Let other adults know what is happening e.g. nursery, school, clubs etc. This will help them to be more sensitive to your child's needs.

During treatment and/or hospitalisation -

Cancer treatment can make a person look very different. It is helpful **to warn children of any changes in appearance** and provide a simple explanation. Children can often accept body changes more readily than adults.

Children usually find it helpful to be **included in hospital visits** but should be prepared for what they will encounter e.g. the ward, the staff, other patients, and the medical equipment.

For younger children, take toys and pens and paper and talk about any drawings or questions they might have after the visit.

A child who is frightened should not be forced to go to the hospital. Instead, they can be encouraged to write a letter or poem, or do a drawing for his/her relative.

Remember –

Keep talking!

Continuing to talk about what is happening and how everyone is feeling will help children.

Don't let the illness take over all home life.

Try to make sure you and the children have enough leisure time together and let them know it is OK to joke and have fun. Laughing is a great stress buster!

Look after yourself.

Ask for extra support when you need it.

Your partner, friends or other family members may be willing to help with running the household or with the children—let them! Complementary therapies and counselling for both patients and relatives are available from Ayrshire Cancer Support. Reducing your own stress is one of the most important things you can do for your children

When might a child need extra support?

In time and with support most children and young people will adjust well to the illness of a family member. However, additional support may be needed where a child is exhibiting any of the following:-

- ◇ Being very sad, often tearful or not being interested in things they would usually enjoy.
- ◇ Regular temper tantrums or hot tempers.
- ◇ Worrying a lot about their own - or other people's - health and/or cancer.
- ◇ More easily distracted or unable to concentrate.
- ◇ Being more clingy or frightened of being left.
- ◇ In the above case, consult your GP for identification of services for children experiencing bereavement difficulties.

When might a child need extra support? (continued)

- ◇ Problems getting to sleep, waking during the night, having nightmares or wetting the bed.
- ◇ Overeating or loss of appetite.
- ◇ Regressing or acting like a much younger child for a long time.
- ◇ Withdrawing from or not getting on with friends.
- ◇ Refusal to attend school or poorer performance in school.
- ◇ Unexplained headaches, stomach-aches or sickness.
- ◇ Talking about or actually harming himself/herself.

Helpful Websites: For Children & Young People

www.whybother.org.uk

A website developed by Macmillan Cancer Support which will help children learn lots of facts about cancer in a fun and interesting way.

www.riprap.org.uk

This site is developed especially for 12-16 year olds who have a parent with cancer. In 'riprap' you can learn more about cancer and its treatment and through individual stories you can see how this might affect you and your family.

www.childline.org.uk

Childline is the free 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK. Children and young people can call the Childline helpline on 0800 1111 about any problem, at any time, day or night.

Helpful Websites: For Parents or Guardians:

www.class-action.org.uk

This website has been created by Macmillan Cancer Support to help teachers and youth workers discuss cancer with young people. It provides information and support for talking about cancer and powerful case studies from people who have been affected by cancer.

www.parentline.co.uk

Parentline Plus is a registered charity which offers support to anyone parenting a child. Offers a freephone helpline and **provides a range of information**

N.B. See your local library for access to the internet or speak to a librarian for advice on further resources. e.g. books and dvds

Booklets

What Do I Tell The Children?

Outlines steps parents/relatives can take to help children understand what is happening to the person with cancer. Also, offers advice about talking to children about cancer as well as information about other useful contacts.

Talking To Children When Someone Close Is Very Ill

Gives guidelines to try to make a very difficult task less overwhelming. Addresses issues such as who should tell the children, what should be said, and what other people close to them should know, e.g. teachers.

Contact: **Marie Curie Cancer Care**
14 Links Place, Edinburgh, EH6 7EB
Telephone: 0131 561 3900
www.mariecurie.org.uk

Talking to children when an adult has cancer

A practical approach to involving children when an adult has cancer, from young children to teenagers. Covers questions children might ask and potential reactions and difficulties.

Contact: **Macmillan Cancer Support**,
8 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ
Freephone: 0808 800 1234/ 0800 500 800.
www.macmillan.org.uk

Talking with children about breast cancer

Explains what children can understand at different ages about a serious illness like cancer and how they might respond to the news of breast cancer in the family. Contains some good ideas about how to tell them and about the experience of other parents.

Contact: **Breast Cancer Care**
5-13 Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0NS
Freephone: 0808 800 6000
www.breastcancercare.org.uk

As Big as it Gets: Supporting a child when someone in the family is seriously ill.

Aims to help families cope with the serious illness of a parent or child. Provides a range of ideas for parents/carers to help explain to children what is happening.

Contact: **Winston's Wish**

Westmoreland House, 80-86 Bath Road, Bath
Cheltenham, GL53 7JT

Tel: 01242 515157

Helpline: 0845 20 30 40 5

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Books for Children

When Someone Has a Very Serious Illness

Marge Heegaard, Fairview Press, 1993

ISBN 0 96205 024 5

This workbook aims to help children understand their feelings when someone in their family is seriously ill. Ages 9-12

Ask Me

Antje Damm,

Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2005

ISBN 978-1-84507-386-2

This book offers an engaging way for children to generate those really special conversations that happen when the defences are down and a child feels more able to open up. Asking "What questions did you ask, or want to ask today?" takes the child's mind to a different, more interesting, thoughtful and curious place. Ages 4-8

Flamingo Dream

Donna Jo Napoli, Greenwillow Books, 2002

ISBN 0-688-17863-4

This bright, colourful book is narrated by a young boy whose dad is seriously ill and dies soon after a trip to Florida. This is a sensitive but honest book, which emphasises the importance of memories. Ages 4-7

The Huge Bag of Worries

Virginia Ironside Hodder Wayland, 1998

ISBN 0-750026391

This book relates the simple story of a girl who finds she is carrying an ever growing 'bag of worries'. Eventually she receives help to share the worries with others. For children under 11 years.

On Eagles' Wings

Sue Mayfield, Lion Hudson, 2004

ISBN 0745948901

Tony's mother is dying and he can't always put a brave face on things. Often he wishes he could just fly away from everything, like an eagle, powerful and free. Through his experiences, Tony realises that death can sometimes bring freedom. A sensitive story about growing up, family relationships and bereavement. Ages 11-14

There's NO Such Thing as a Dragon

Jack Kent, Golden Books, 1975

ISBN 0-375832084

It is a funny, quirky story about a little dragon that gets bigger because no-one is noticing him. It conveys to a child that even tough stuff needs to be talked about to make it more manageable. Ages 4-8 years.

The Secret C: Straight Talking About Cancer

Julie Stokes, Winston's Wish/Macmillan Cancer Relief, 2000, ISBN 0-9539123-0-2

This book answers some common questions about cancer, treatment and common feelings children have when a family member has cancer. Easy to understand language. Ages 4-11 years.

When Your Mum or Dad Has Cancer

Ann Couldrick, Sobell Publications, 1991

ISBN 978-0951753736

Uses simple cartoons to explain cancer, treatment and common feelings children may have. Ages 3-8

No Matter What

Debi Gliori, Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999

ISBN 0-747581347

This book gently and powerfully conveys the idea of unconditional parental love. Ages 3-8 years

Sammy's Mommy Has Cancer

Sherry Kohlenberg, Imagination Press

ISBN 0 94535455X

The author wrote this book to help her son understand what was happening to her during treatment for cancer. Ages 3-7 years

Promises

Elizabeth Winthrop, Clarion books

ISBN 0 395822726

A young girl experiences a range of emotions when her mother undergoes treatment for cancer. (Does not use the term 'cancer' in the text.) Ages 7-11

The Hope Tree: Kids Talk About Breast Cancer

*Numeroff, Harpham & McPhail, Simon & Schuster
ISBN 0-6898452X*

Developed to help children better understand and cope with breast cancer. Ages—early primary.

Cancer

Kirstin Lamb, Hodder Wayland, ISBN 0-7502394X

Developed to help children better understand and cope with breast cancer. (More suitable for adolescents.)

Books For Adults

Talking To Children About Cancer

Can I Still Kiss You?: Answering Your Children's Questions About Cancer

*Neil Russell, Health Communications, ISBN
1558749284*

Taken from conversations with his sons and the experiences of other parents, this book provides answers to some of the difficult questions children ask about cancer.

Helping Your Children Cope with Your Cancer

P.V. Dernoot & M. Case, Hatheleigh Press,

ISBN 1578261058

Over twenty parents explain how cancer has affected their families, and how they have been able to provide the love and support – as well as some of the answers – that their children need.

When a Parent Has Cancer:

A Guide to Caring for your Children/ Becky and the Worry Cup.

Wendy Harpham, Harper Collins, ISBN 0060187093

Based on her own experiences with cancer, the author offers insightful and sound advice to parents. The book goes beyond breaking the news to children to dealing with issues that arise during the long months of treatment.

“Becky and the Worry Cup” is a companion piece that will comfort children of all ages

Produced by

**Ayrshire Cancer Support
22 Wellington Square
Ayr
KA7 1EZ**

Tel 01292 269888

**Head Office
Admin & Fundraising Departments
16 Portland Road
Kilmarnock
KA1 2BS**

01563 538008

Ayrshire Cancer Support provides emotional support and practical help for cancer patients and their families throughout Ayrshire.

Ayrshire Cancer Support is a registered Scottish charity,
No: SC016098.