



How do I talk to my child?

- **Be as honest as you can** with your child, the truth may be hard to hear but they will appreciate it. Children often feel like they aren't "included" or are being "left out" when they know something is happening but not what that something is. They will have picked up little bits of information from conversations they have heard or interpreted situations they may have witnessed. Children often use their imagination to fill in the gaps; the things they don't understand, and this can often be a lot worse than what is really happening. Knowing the truth can feel like a relief and connected to the adults around them.
- Try to use **language and words** that are appropriate to their age and be clear. "Daddy is very ill, and he is not going to get better"
- You could **write a script** in case you go blank or are emotional. This way you have rehearsed the words you want to use and heard them being said before saying them to a child.
- **Decide where to tell them** i.e. Choose somewhere you all feel comfortable that is private enough for the conversation to happen without interruptions or attention being taken away (turn off TV) or being worried about other people overhearing.
- **Decide when to tell them**, it is not a good idea to do it before bedtime or before they leave for school as they may need time to process the information.
- **Have something planned for afterwards**, something "normal" a walk, trip to the park, cooking a meal etc so there is time to process it together and give room for questions.
- **Let them know where they can take their questions, worries or fears** about what they have been told – who they have in their lives they can talk to and how they can access them.
- **You can use books** to help you or for them to look at and read afterwards (when they are ready). Please use our book list.
- **It is helpful to have a good relationship with the child's school** and let someone there who can support your child know that you have had this conversation with them and the way in which you have done it so they can use the same language as you if the children talk to them or ask questions. Consistency with information is very important to a child's understanding.
- **You may feel you need someone with you** for support for all of you during this conversation.
- **Don't overload your child** with too much information in the first conversation and you may find you need to repeat the conversation a few times over a period of time.
- **You might want to ask the child what they have heard** and how it makes them feel. To check that they have understood what you have told them and how they have responded to it. They might not want to talk anymore about or have any questions to ask and this doesn't mean they don't care.

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- You could give your (younger) child a **work book** to do with you or on their own about the person's illness and this gives them a place to take their thoughts, feelings and questions.
- **You could offer a worry bag or book** for them to put their thoughts, feelings and questions in so that they can share them with you, when they are ready and even without having to say them – you can read them.
- **Give them permission to continue with the conversation once it is over** – knowing they can come back to it.
- **Remember to give yourself some space and support after this conversation** as you too may be feeling emotional and need time to process it.

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