



Hi, welcome to Cancer & Me... a group none of us ever imagined joining, but here we are. Please remember — you are not alone.

Let's be real: no parent is ever truly prepared to tell their child that they have cancer. How do you explain to your child that their parent — their safe place, their rock — is unwell, and that life for the family will change? It's one of the hardest conversations you'll ever face.

Children are often excellent at overhearing snippets of adult conversations, but without clear information, they may misinterpret what they hear. They can sense when something is wrong, and if they are left out, they may feel confused, anxious, or even mistrusted. This is why it is strongly recommended to tell them, in an honest and age-appropriate way, that you have cancer and what is being done to help. By hearing the truth directly from you, your child will feel safer, more included, and reassured that there are many different types of cancer, treatments, and outcomes.

Whatever their age, children need honesty, clarity, and reassurance when learning about a cancer diagnosis. Choose a quiet moment when you won't be interrupted, give space for their questions, and let them know you'll keep talking together as things unfold.

Top 10 tips:

1. Use Clear and Simple Language

E.g., *"I need to tell you something important. I have something called cancer, which means some cells in my body aren't working right. The doctors are working on a plan to make me better, which might include things like chemotherapy, radiation or surgery. I might need extra rest during this time, but we have a good team of doctors helping me. It's okay to feel worried or confused, and you can always talk to me about it."*

Check their understanding by asking, *"Does that make sense?"* or *"Do you have any questions?"*

Children may need to hear the explanation multiple times to fully process it. Be patient and consistent with your messaging.

2. Address Common Fears and Misconceptions

Children may think they caused the illness or that it's contagious. Reassure them:

"It's nobody's fault if they have cancer; it just happens."

"Cancer isn't like a cold—you can't catch it."

3. Keep the Conversation Open

Let them know it's okay to ask questions now or later. Say something like:

"You can always talk to me or [another trusted adult] if you think of something you want to ask."

Be prepared for questions you can't answer, and respond with honesty:

"That's a good question. I don't know the answer, but I'll find out and let you know."

4. Acknowledge and Normalise Their Feelings

Children may feel scared, sad, or even angry. Let them know their feelings are valid and important:
"It's okay to feel upset or confused. I feel that way sometimes too."

Encourage them to express their emotions through talking, drawing, or play.

5. Provide Consistency and Reassurance

Children thrive on routine and predictability, so reassure them that they'll continue to be cared for:
"Even though things might feel different for a while, you'll always be loved and cared for."

Explain any changes in routines in advance, such as hospital visits or treatments that may affect your availability. With the help of family and friends, attempt to keep their routine as consistent as possible.

6. Maintain Hope and Positivity

While it's important to acknowledge challenges, emphasise positive aspects, such as:

"The doctors and nurses are doing everything they can to help me feel better."

Highlight progress or positive news when possible.

7. Respect Individual Temperaments

Some children may want all the details, while others may only want to know the basics. Let their reactions guide how much information you share.

8. Offer Ways to Help

Involving children can give them a sense of control and purpose. For example:

Younger kids might draw pictures or help with small chores.

Older kids might appreciate helping with caregiving or household tasks.

9. Reassure Them About the Future

Children may worry about their life changing or losing their parent.

Acknowledge their concerns while providing comfort:

"Even though things might feel different for a while, we'll get through this together."

10. Involve Other Trusted Adults

If your child has questions or feelings they aren't comfortable sharing with you, encourage them to talk with another trusted adult, like a family member, teacher, or psychologist.

Believe me, I know that telling your child you have cancer is one of the hardest things you will ever do as a parent. It takes courage, love, and a deep desire to protect your child while still being honest with them.

By choosing to share openly, you are giving your child something precious: the chance to feel included, to trust you, and to know they can come to you with their worries. You don't need to have every answer — your love, presence, and willingness to listen are what matter most.

Thank you for purchasing my book and allowing me to walk alongside you in this journey.

My hope is that these resources offer you strength, reassurance, and practical guidance as you care for yourself and your family.

With warmth and understanding,

Dr Katherine Schmidhofer

