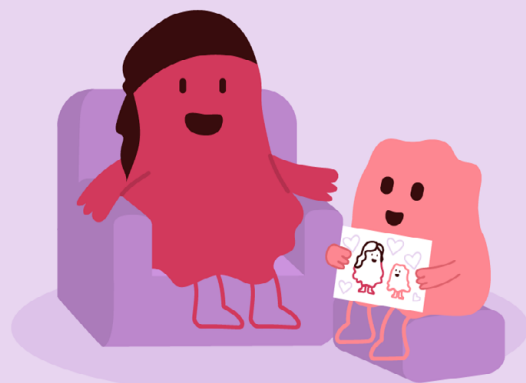


What to Expect When a Parent Has Breast Cancer



This resource was adapted from a blog post about ways a parent facing cancer can help prepare their children for the road ahead. To read the full blog post, visit nbcf.org/what-to-expect

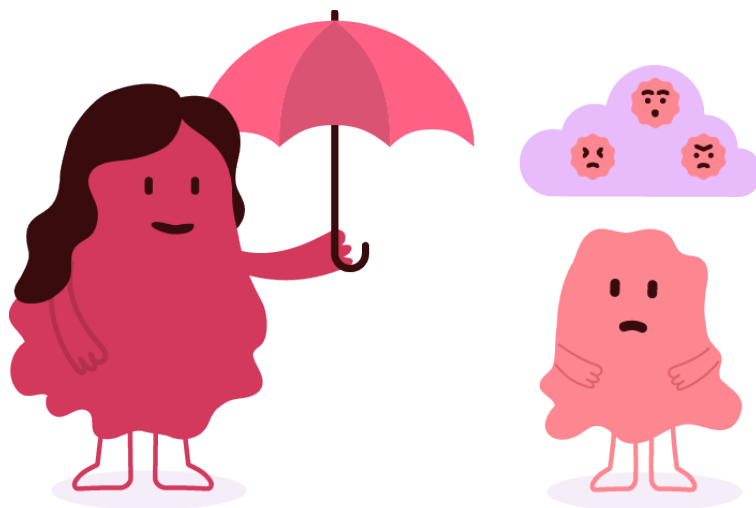
When a parent is diagnosed with breast cancer, the entire family is affected. It's important for these families to have a plan for helping children process and cope with their parent's diagnosis and treatment. Here are 7 ways to help prepare children for these difficult conversations.

1. Lead with honesty and transparency

Being open and honest with children about what's going on, even when it's hard, is the best way to establish and maintain a bond of trust. Try to share relevant details in an age-appropriate way so that they're not left trying to make sense of things on their own.

2. Be prepared for your child's reactions

Every child will react differently. Some may have lots of questions, some might express sadness, anxiety, or anger, or some may seem relatively unfazed. All of these reactions are normal and okay. Regardless of how they react, you can reassure them by saying, "This is really hard for all of us, but we're going to get through this together."

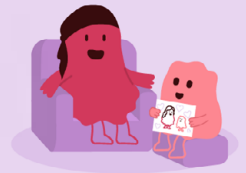


3. Keep language clear and simple

Try to use short, simple phrases your kids will understand as you introduce them to new vocabulary they may hear (chemotherapy, mastectomy, radiation, etc.). Young children tend to be concrete thinkers, so instead of metaphors, try to provide concrete facts and information in an age-appropriate way.

4. Explain what treatment may look like

Talk openly about specific treatments you will receive, such as mastectomy or lumpectomy, chemotherapy, or radiation. Explain how often and when you will receive treatment and what side effects they may see. This will help your kids know what day-to-day changes in their routine to expect, and will prepare them for side effects (e.g. fatigue, appearance changes) so it's less scary.



5. Talk about physical and emotional side effects

Since your kids will likely notice any physical or emotional changes in you, it's important to prepare them ahead of time so that they don't become scared or worried. Some common physical side effects of cancer treatment to prepare your kids for include nausea and vomiting, fatigue, hair loss, weight loss, and changes in appetite. Emotional side effects may include anxiety, sadness, or mood swings.

6. Answer commonly asked questions

Common questions kids ask about a parent's cancer diagnosis—and possible answers—include:

Can I catch cancer from you?

Answer: "No. Cancer is not contagious like a cold or flu."

Did I do something to cause you to get cancer?

Answer: "No. This is no one's fault. There is nothing you or anyone else did to cause my cancer."

Is there something I can do to cure your cancer?

Answer: "No. It's not your job to cure my cancer. My doctors are going to work hard to find treatments that can help my cancer."

Who will take care of me while you're sick?

Answer: This answer will depend on your unique situation. You can list family members or friends who will help during this time, or ask your child who they feel most comfortable with helping.

Are you going to die?

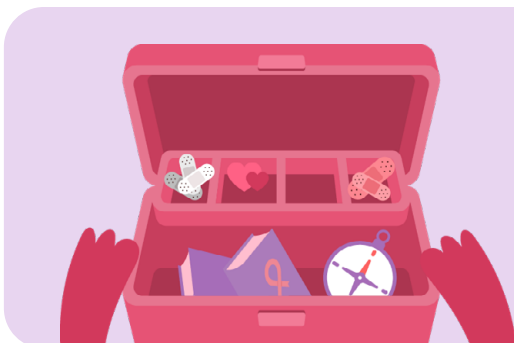
Answer: "Some people die from cancer. I could possibly die from cancer, but I'm not dying now. I'm hoping to get well. I will tell you if anything changes. Today, I'm doing what I need to do to get better and live a long life. So let's do what we can to make today great."

What can I do to help?

Answer: "I want you to focus on being a kid. But there are probably some things you could do to help me and the family. What ideas do you have?"

7. Keep the conversation going

As your diagnosis or treatment changes, keep your children updated on what is happening. Honest, open, and ongoing conversations will help children adjust and cope with this difficult situation in healthy ways.



To access more free
resources for families facing
a cancer diagnosis, visit
nbcf.org/parents