

# TALKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT BREAST CANCER

This resource is meant to support parents in talking with their children from toddlers to teenagers about breast cancer.

## Your first thought — your children

You've just learned you have breast cancer. One of your first thoughts is likely about your children. You don't want them to worry or be upset. You may be wondering:

- Should I tell them?
- How should I tell them?
- What will I say if they ask me if I'm going to die?
- What if I'm not around to see them grow up?

Your partner, family member or health care team can help you decide what to say. In the end, you know your children best. You decide how and when to tell them about your breast cancer. Though it may be difficult, it's important to be as open and honest as you can.



## Preparing for conversations

It's OK to consider how you're feeling and get the support you need when talking with your children. If you need help coping with your emotions, talk with a loved one, social worker or counselor. If you would like someone to be with you when you talk with your children, plan in advance. Try to balance your needs with your children's needs.

It helps to think about what you're going to say beforehand. You may want to practice with someone. Consider your children's age, maturity level and personality when planning what you'll share with them. For example, young children (under 6) typically understand short and simple information while teenagers may want more details.

Consider telling your children these three things:

1. You're sick
2. You have breast cancer
3. Your understanding of what may happen, including your treatment plan

Sharing this information and using the word cancer helps with their understanding. Children usually know something is going on. By telling them the truth, it can be less scary than what they're imagining. It's also comforting for them to know you have a plan.

## These resources can help you talk with your children

- Your doctor, nurse, social worker or counselor
- Cancer information centers at local hospitals
- School counselor
- Clergy
- A local bookstore or library
- Local support groups for families coping with cancer

This fact sheet is intended to be a brief overview. For more information, visit [komen.org](https://www.komen.org) or call Susan G. Komen's Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET, or email at [helpline@komen.org](mailto:helpline@komen.org). Se habla español.

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## Resources

### Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN  
(1-877-465-6636)  
[komen.org](http://komen.org)

For support and information about talking with your children and helping them cope with your illness, please contact our [Patient Care Center](#) at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636). You can also read our “[What’s Happening to Mom](#)” booklet.

### Komen Facebook Groups

Komen’s [Breast Cancer Facebook Group](#) and [Metastatic Breast Cancer Facebook Group](#) provide places where those with a connection to breast cancer can share their experiences and build strong relationships with each other.

### Cancer Support Community

1-888-793-9355  
[What Do I Tell the Kids?](#)  
[cancersupportcommunity.org](http://cancersupportcommunity.org)

### Camp Kesem

Offers summer camps in many states for children with a parent who has or has had cancer.

[campkesem.org](http://campkesem.org)

## What to do during conversations

- Have a support person with you.
- Share the information you prepared as best as you can.
- Watch how your children react. Give them a chance to express themselves. If they seem very upset or uncomfortable, you may need to stop and talk more later.
- Encourage them to ask questions. It’s OK if you don’t have all the answers. You can tell them you don’t know, and you’ll do your best to find out. You can also let them know you’ll learn about breast cancer together.

## Your child’s perspective

While each child is different, there are common concerns children may have.

They may worry about who will take care of them if you’re not feeling well. Share how you’ll do your best to be there and if you’re not able to, they will have a trusted adult available. They may also worry about their routine, including going to school or spending time with friends. It may help to think about these things ahead of time so you have a plan. Try to keep your normal routine as much as possible.

Younger children may also worry they did something to cause the cancer or that it’s contagious. Reassure them that neither is true.

Teenagers may have their own fears and worry about their risk of breast cancer or other cancers. As they get older, you could consider sharing more information. For example, if you have an older daughter, you could talk to her about getting to know the normal look and feel of her breasts.

## Other tips

It’s a good idea to let their teachers and school counselors know what you’re going through. They may be able to help your children cope. They can also help you understand normal reactions to a breast cancer diagnosis for their age and signs they might be having trouble dealing with it.

Teenagers like their privacy, so you may want to talk with them about what you’ll share with others beforehand. You can also talk about who is a trusted adult or friend if they need someone else to talk with.

## Remember...

It’s normal to be worried about your children and what you’ll say to them after you’ve been diagnosed with breast cancer. You’re not alone. There are resources and support available to help you and your family.

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