

Top tips:

For communicating with children

- ▶ Engage in honest, timely and ongoing conversations, allowing children time to ask questions.
- ▶ Encourage and enable children to express their thoughts, feelings and concerns.
- ▶ Follow your children's cues. They may only be able to handle a limited amount of a difficult topic for a short amount of time. They may need to take a break and ask follow up questions later.
- ▶ Inform other adults in your children's lives especially teachers, coaches and heads of school so they will feel cared for and listened to when they are away from home.
- ▶ Draw simple diagrams which can help clarify an explanation.

For day-to-day life

- ▶ Find ways to spend uninterrupted family time together to show they are still your top priority.
- ▶ Try to preserve children's daily routines ensuring a sense of normality in their lives.
- ▶ Involve your children in illness related activities such as accompanying you to the hospital if they feel ready or drawing pictures to take to the hospital. It allows them to feel helpful.

For dealing with teenagers

- ▶ While teenagers may have a better understanding about cancer than younger children, it is still important to provide them with accurate information and ensure they have the right facts.
- ▶ Teenagers are at a stage when they are becoming increasingly independent and want their freedom. Therefore, it may be a particularly challenging time to ask them to take on more responsibilities. Try to make sure they are not overburdened with responsibilities and chores.
- ▶ Teenagers don't always share their feelings with their parents. It is important to encourage them to talk to someone close; for example, their friends, teachers, or grandparents.
- ▶ Encourage them to visit reliable websites specifically designed for teenagers when a parent has cancer such as **riprap.org.uk**

About male cancer

Every year over **50,000** men in the UK will be diagnosed with prostate, testicular and penile cancer. Of these men **48,000** will be diagnosed with prostate cancer, **600** will be diagnosed with penile cancer and over **2,300** will be diagnosed with testicular cancer.

About Orchid

Orchid is the UK's leading charity working in the area of male specific cancers. The charity provides support to people affected by or interested in these cancers through funding a world-class research programme, awareness and education campaigns and a range of vital support services.

These services include Orchid Male Cancer Information Nurse Specialists, a freephone National Male Cancer Helpline, a portfolio of publications, a dedicated website and a testicular cancer microsite "**Your Privates**".

For more information about talking to your children or male specific cancers please visit the Orchid website.

**Orchid National Male Cancer Helpline 0808 802 0010
and helpline@orchid-cancer.org.uk**

ORCHID 
FIGHTING MALE CANCER

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**Talking to your children
about cancer**

For families affected by male cancers

ORCHID 
FIGHTING MALE CANCER



Whenever possible open communication is very important, it allows children to:

- ▶ Ask questions
- ▶ Share feelings
- ▶ Gain knowledge

Why is communication important?

Deciding what and how much to tell children about your cancer is a very personal choice. No parent wants to tell their children they have cancer. Instead every parent wants to protect their children from life's uncertainties. However, a diagnosis of cancer affects the whole family. Children may notice a change in routine or pick up on your tension or anxiety, even if you think you are hiding it. Therefore, it is important to consider your children's age and maturity level. By age-appropriately talking to your children, the entire family will be better placed to cope together.

Providing accurate information can be a powerful way of helping children to feel more in control of the situation. Knowing more about cancer and its treatments can take some of the fear away. Most people feel better when they know what to expect and children are no exception.

Honest communication during childhood establishes a pattern for life. Being open with your children sets an example that you are willing to discuss difficult challenges and situations which can be particularly helpful during teenage years.

What kind of information should be communicated to your children?

The word cancer can be frightening but this can be minimised by explaining simply:

1. What cancer is.
2. What the treatments are.
3. Male cancers are very treatable.

The communication should be age appropriate, open, honest, and timely. It may be necessary to repeat it numerous times. Check your children's understanding to correct any misconceptions they may have.

Along with the facts, it is vital to reassure children that they will continue to be loved and cared for. They also need to be encouraged to ask questions and share their thoughts and feelings.

When should children be told?

Children's cognitive development may vary and each child's capacity for learning and wanting information should be assessed individually, taking into account their unique personalities.

Children are very perceptive to verbal and non-verbal communication and have active imaginations. They may pick up on subtle signs and suspect a secret is being kept from them. Better to be honest early on and prevent them from inventing their own reasons or worse yet blaming themselves for tensions.

How should children be told?

Find a time and place when you will be uninterrupted and the children feel comfortable. Avoid talking too much because of your own anxieties and encourage questions. If you don't know the answer be honest and say so, while still being reassuring.

Simple diagrams can be an extremely effective way of explaining what cancer is. Something as easy as smiley faces for the good cells and grumpy faces for the cancer cells can provide children with an image to help them better understand the nature of the disease.

What are the myths about Cancer? Make sure your children have the right facts.

- ▶ Cancer is contagious and can be spread from someone else.
FALSE – you can't catch cancer.
- ▶ Only bad people get cancer - it is a punishment.
FALSE – you are not to blame. Doctors and scientists are still trying to discover the precise reasons some people get cancer and others do not. But it is not because someone is a bad person.
- ▶ People always die from cancer.
FALSE – nowadays many people recover and live long and healthy lives after being treated for cancer.
- ▶ Cancer makes your hair fall out.
FALSE – radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatments can cause hair loss. Usually when the treatment is finished the hair will grow back.

