



Parenting with Cancer:

What Kids Understand and How You Can Help Them

How might my child react during a parent's cancer journey?

Children may express a range of emotions and behaviors in response to a parent's cancer diagnosis or treatment.

They may:

- **Exhibit increased sensory-seeking behaviors.** This could include things like thumb sucking, chewing on a shirt or blanket, or touching things (including people or different textures). Consider setting up a quiet corner in your home as a place your child can go when things are feeling overwhelming.
- **Appear irritable, confused, fearful, sad or insecure.** There are a range of emotions that can come up. Remember that your kid is the same awesome kid that you've been raising, but they not be sure what to do with their emotions.
- **Regress.** Especially with younger kids, they may go back to behaviors you haven't seen in a while.
- **Play out scenes of illness.** Kids process information through play. If what they're acting out is not a totally accurate representation, that's okay. This is how they process their world.
- **Repeat questions.** They're seeking reassurance and testing you to make sure the answers stay the same. Consider asking back "do you remember what we talked about?" so they start to develop the language to use your words to help them reassure themselves.
- **Act as if nothing is different.** This is also a normal response and doesn't mean they don't care or love you less. Kids process in all different ways at all different times.

All of these behaviors are totally normal, but if anything is feeling extreme (like irritability that doesn't go away, not playing with friends anymore, etc.), it may be beneficial to seek professional help for your child.

Remember to utilize your child's support systems. Your child has a whole team of people in their corner—including their teacher, school counselor, and any therapists or other outside supports they receive. Communicate with those team members about the kind of language you're using with your child, what questions they're asking, and how you're answering. Use your village!