

Talking about cancer with your kids is hard. **We get it.**

Bright Reads books are one way to start this difficult conversation.

This guide is intended to be used by parents and guardians, grandparents and loved ones, or any loving member of your community. You'll notice the questions are posed from the perspective of a parent with cancer—please change the language to fit your needs.

We've listed suggested ages for the discussion questions and activity ideas, but you know your child the best. These questions may not work for every child depending on language development, understanding of a parent's cancer, and all of the things that make our kids unique.

Here are some helpful questions and sentence starters to use with your child when you are reading together, when a moment of connection opens up, or anytime you need them.

- What did you think of this story? How did it make you feel?
- What is similar (or different) between this story and our family's story?
- What did you learn from this story?



It is helpful to keep sentences short and to the point when telling young children about your cancer diagnosis. Here are some sentences to consider and edit to your specific situation:

I have cancer.

Cancer is a (sickness, illness or disease depending on your family's preference).

You can't catch it. I didn't catch it or get it from you or anyone else.

I am going to the doctor to get better.

I am getting a medicine called chemotherapy / radiation.

The medicine may make me feel sick and tired.

You can hug and snuggle me all you want and you will never catch cancer.

Nothing you did or said caused me to get cancer.

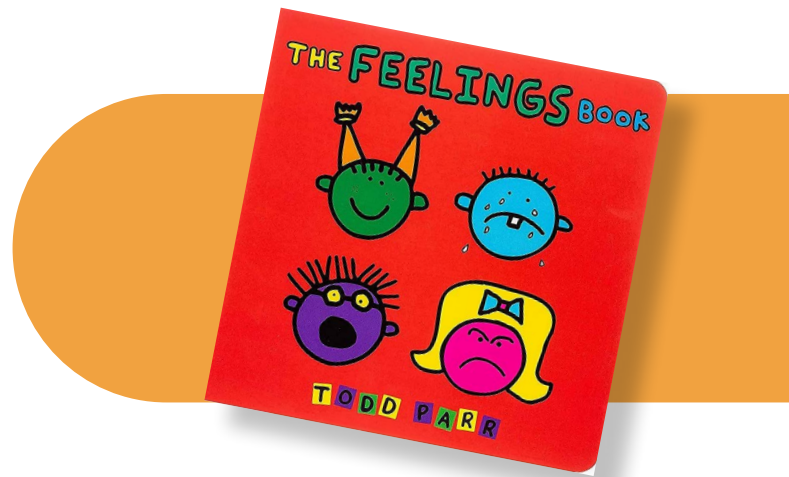
You can always ask me questions about cancer or how I feel.

Please keep in mind that some children will not want to talk about their feelings. Some children will have a million questions. Other children might have huge emotions and big behaviors. It is ALL o.k. Let your children know that you love them no matter what and that they can come to you when they are ready (and over-and-over again).

A big thank-you to the following professionals who contributed to and reviewed these guides:

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The Feelings Book by Todd Parr



Discussion Questions:

Suggested Age: Preschool–School Age

While you read the book, make connections between the different feelings and recent expressions of these feelings your child has had. For example: “Look at him feeling silly and standing on his head! You were silly this morning when you put your socks on your hands!”

Try not to label any feeling as “good” or “bad”—all feelings have a purpose and positive intention. Some parents find the phrase “big feelings” as a helpful way to talk about emotions that are overwhelming in the moment.

As you move throughout your day, narrate how you feel to help your young child name emotions and learn how they are expressed. For example, “Oh no, I lost my favorite earring...I am feeling so sad right now.” or “My heart is beating really fast because I am feeling scared about my scan tomorrow.” When your child is expressing emotion, reflect back how you see them feeling. For example: “I see you stomping your feet and yelling—it looks like you are mad. Do you feel mad?”

Activity Ideas:

Suggested Age: Preschool–School Age

Take turns acting out simple feelings with your child. Perhaps use a favorite song and try singing it differently for different feelings (ex: How might you change Itsy Bitsy Spider for sad? Angry? Scared? Happy? Disgusted?)

Print out coloring pages of characters from the movie *Inside Out*. Joy, Anger, Sadness, Fear, and Disgust are core emotions that represent most of what you and your child feels. You can elaborate on feelings and get more specific as your child ages—while they are young, keep it simple.

Learn about the Handy Brain! “[Dr. Dan Siegel’s Hand Model of the Brain](#)” explains how children “flip their lids” when they are upset. It helps parents to identify and understand when their child is dysregulated, and gives them a framework to assist their child in working through big emotions. It provides parents with a hand gesture and simple language to communicate with their child about what is going on in their minds and bodies.