

Talking with your Child / Teen about a Brain Tumour Diagnosis



Helping your child or teen understand a brain tumour diagnosis can help them cope better with treatment. It is important to tell your child / teen the facts about a brain tumour diagnosis and answer questions honestly and with straightforward terms. If you do not give them the facts in words they can understand, they will be left to imagine what is going to happen; these thoughts can often be scarier than the truth.

The following ideas may help you to talk with your child / teen about a brain tumour diagnosis:

We suggest using the word 'tumour' openly. It will help your child / teen become more familiar with the word, and feel more at ease when asking questions.

Verbal Toddler (1-3) - Use words your child knows, such as 'boo boo' or 'owie' and point to your child's head. It is OK to use the word 'tumour' in front of your toddler. This will help them feel more at ease when other people use the word.

Preschooler (3-5) - Using the word 'tumour' around your preschooler will help them be more at ease with the word. It will also help them to ask questions. They should understand if you say, "Inside your head is sick", and point to where the tumour is.

Early School-Age Child (5-8) - An early school-age child who has not learned about cells may understand if you say, "You have a tumour inside your brain. A tumour means something grew inside your brain that is sick and is not supposed to be there."

School-Age Child (8-12) - Many children at this age have begun to learn about cells. You may want to explain that a brain tumour is made up of sick cells that are all grouped together inside the brain.

Teens (13-19) - At this age, your teen may want to sit in on talks with the doctor to hear about the tumour and treatment in-depth; however, it is still important to talk about the things that are said during these discussions.



At all age levels, it is important to assure your child / teen that the illness is not contagious and that they cannot give it to anyone or get it from anyone else. Also, this illness is not a punishment; nothing your child / teen did or did not do could have made this illness happen.

Some brain tumours are cancerous, and some are not. If your child's tumour is cancerous, use the word 'cancer' along with 'tumour' so they can become familiar with these words. If your child has cancer, they need to know that there are many types of cancer, and each one is different. Each cancer patient takes different kinds of medicines that work best for that person's diagnosis.

The suggestions on this page are also very useful for when a parent or family member has been diagnosed with a brain tumour and you are trying to explain the diagnosis to a child / teen.



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