



Talking With Your Children

First thought – my children

You just learned you have breast cancer. One of your first thoughts may be about your children. What is going through your mind? Fear...fear of the unknown... so much is unknown. Should you tell them? What should you tell them? What if they ask you if you are going to die? What will you say? What if you are not around to see them grow up? There is nothing wrong with having these thoughts or any others that you may have.

When something threatens your life, your family is also threatened. Your first instinct is to protect your family, especially your children. You want to keep them from being hurt or worried. You want to preserve their innocence. Talking to your family, spouse, doctor, nurse or a social worker can help you decide what to say. In the end, you know your children best. You are the best person to decide how and when to tell your children about your breast cancer.

Your child's perspective

You are the anchor of your child's world. And now the anchor is threatened. However you decide to tell your children, be as open and honest as possible no matter how hard it may seem. You decide how much you want to say. Remember that children, just like adults, will fill in wherever you leave gaps. And because children may not know as much as adults, it is more likely that what they fill the gaps with will be wrong.



Encourage your children to talk to you and to ask questions. Giving honest, realistic answers to their questions will help lessen their fears. If you are going to be gone for a few days, if you are getting sick from the treatment or if you are losing your hair or a breast, let your children know why this is happening. Explain anything that changes their daily routine.

It is a good idea to let your children's teachers know what you are going through — especially for younger children. The teachers may be able to help the children cope if they spend most of the day at school.

Finally, just as your children depend on you, you can depend on them too. They can be, and probably want to be, a source of support for you. They will want to listen to you, hug you, kiss you and spend time with you. Let them.

Have I done anything to my daughter?

A family history of certain types of cancer can increase your risk of breast cancer. This increased risk may be due to genetic factors (known and unknown), shared lifestyle factors or other family traits. Most women with breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease. Having a mother with breast cancer increases a daughter's chance of getting breast cancer. However, just because you have breast cancer does not mean that your daughter will also get the disease.

Talk to your daughter about her concerns. Allow her to ask questions. If you cannot answer them, it is okay to say, "I don't know the answer right now, but I'll find out." Members of your health care team can also help you.

If your daughter is older, talk to her about getting to know the normal look and feel of her breasts. Women under age 40 with either a family history of breast cancer or other concerns about their personal risk should talk with a health care provider about when to start getting screening tests, and how often to have them. Women at higher risk may need to get screened earlier and more often than is recommended for women at average risk. She can also discuss her options for lowering her risk of breast cancer with her doctor.

Resources

Chances are a member of your health care team has told you about support groups that you may join. You can also start by calling any of the following organizations:

Susan G. Komen®
www.komentoolkits.org

Pink Alliance
www.pinkalliance.net