



Talking with Your Child / Teen About a Brain Tumour Diagnosis

Helping your child or teen understand a brain tumour diagnosis can help him / her cope better with treatment. It is important to tell your child / teen about a brain tumour diagnosis and answer questions honestly and with straightforward terms. If you do not give your child / teen the facts in words they can understand, he / she 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 talk with your child / teen about a brain tumour diagnosis. We suggest that you use the word “tumour” openly. It will help him / her be more familiar with the word and more at ease when asking questions.

Using words that your child / teen will understand.

Verbal Toddler — Use words your child knows such as “boo-boo” or “owie.” Tell the child where the “booboo” is (point to your child’s head). It is OK to use the word “tumour” in front of your toddler. This will help him / her feel more at ease when people use the word.

Preschooler — Using the word tumour around your preschooler will help your child be more at ease with the word and help him / her to ask questions. Preschoolers should understand if you say, “Inside your head is sick,” and point to where the tumour is.

Early School-Age Child — A school-age child that 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 not supposed to be there.”

School-Age Child — Many children at this age have begun learning about cells. You may want to explain that a brain tumour is made up of “a group of sick cells that are all together inside the brain.”

Teens — At this age your teen may want to sit in on talks with the doctor to hear about the tumour and treatment in-depth. But it is still important to talk about the things that are said during these discussions. As with all ages, use the correct terms for the illness and treatments.

At all age levels, it is important to assure your child / teen that the illness is not contagious; he / she 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 will know the word when others say it around him / her. If your child has cancer, he / she needs to know there are many types of cancer and each person’s cancer 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 / family member has been diagnosed with a brain tumour and you are trying to explain the diagnosis to a child / teen.

Brain Tumour Walk events take place in May and June each year
Learn more and register at www.BrainTumourWalk.ca.