

Breaking the News



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Infants – 2 Years

“My name is ‘NO NO’ but Grandma calls me ‘Precious!’”

~ Unknown

Keep in Mind

Every child is unique.

Children sense changes in their environment and know when something is wrong.

A child's known problems may continue and sometimes worsen with change.

Children absorb as they are able.

Honesty is better than secrets.

Providing structure and predictability is important.

Look through the eyes of your child.

Be curious about your child's experience.

Mistakes made with love are easier to correct.

Simplify, simplify, simplify.

Not all children will have questions.

Follow your instincts. You are the expert on your own children.



Developmental Factors

Trust, Mistrust and the Beginning of Autonomy (Independence)

At this age there is little rational understanding of what is happening. But infants and toddlers are exceptionally sensitive to the emotional environment of the home. They sense change and react to the emotions of those around them. They listen to your tone, watch your eyes, and feel the slightest tension in your touch. While most often infants and toddlers cannot tell you in words what they are feeling, they may become more irritable and require more holding, stroking, reassurance and calming.

Cancer can cause the environment to feel less secure and less trusting, so confident and consistent reassurance is critical. One- and two-year-olds are working toward more independence, but when they feel stress and changes in the environment, they may revert to increased dependence, run away or become more stubborn.

Changes in the environment and overlooking your child's basic needs can create a sense of mistrust in your infant or toddler. Healthy and consistent doses of affection will ensure that your child's view of the world is one of trust and security.

What to Say

- Actions speak louder than words with infants and toddlers. Your voice itself will be reassuring. You might even say what is happening. Even though your infant or toddler may not understand the words, they will sense your feelings.
- Sing songs that calm and comfort your child, especially familiar ones. This might even benefit you, too. Nursery rhymes that offer comfort can help. If it has a softness or tone of happiness it will be helpful, especially if it is familiar.



- With toddlers you can use words to describe cancer. Some parents give their cancer a name or use a shape or something familiar to describe the cancer.
- Try using dolls, stuffed animals or puppets to help show where the cancer is and how it will be treated. Let them act out how they might help the doll or animal to get better.
- Let toddlers know who will care for them at times you cannot.

“For infants and toddlers learning and living are the same thing. If they feel secure, treasured, loved, their own energy and curiosity will bring them new understanding and new skills.”

~ Amy Laura Dombro

What to Do

- Keep your child in her own home or in environments that are familiar, if possible.
- Try to keep routines the same as much as possible — meals, naptime, playtime and bedtime.
- Create a safe, blocked-off area where your toddler can play and explore without needing to be chased or restricted from touching things. Then sit with her and enjoy playing.
- Call upon another known family member or friend to comfort your child, if you or your spouse is unable to do it. Remind that person of the words and sounds your child finds comforting.
- Limit the number of caregivers helping with your child as much as possible, and encourage caregivers to maintain your child’s usual routine.
- Use the same friends or relatives to care for your child if overnight stays become necessary, to lessen feelings of insecurity that may arise traveling from place to place.
- Attempt to avoid or reduce introducing new things, such as weaning, toilet training, or giving up a comfort toy or pacifier — especially during the early stages of diagnosis.



- Offer comfort in every way you know your child loves — music, toys, blankets, stuffed animals, familiar books, clothing, voices (even a long-distance call to a beloved relative), food, baths, walks, rides, and other things you know are calming to your child.
- Reassure your child by using all five senses—sight, sound, touch, smell and taste.

What to Observe

Changes in behavior for children, adolescents and adults during stressful times are normal. These changes may include regression or returning to less mature behaviors. Some behaviors which may occur include:

- Not sleeping well
- Wanting to nurse or drink from a bottle more than normal
- Becoming more irritable
- Crawling rather than walking
- Not eating
- Lack of interest in play
- Lack of expression of feelings (listlessness) or eye contact

It is important to pay attention to any behavior that is out of character for your child, especially if the behavior appears more intense or frequent, or if you intuitively sense that something is wrong. This is the time to consult a professional such as your physician or pediatrician, a child development specialist, or counselor.

