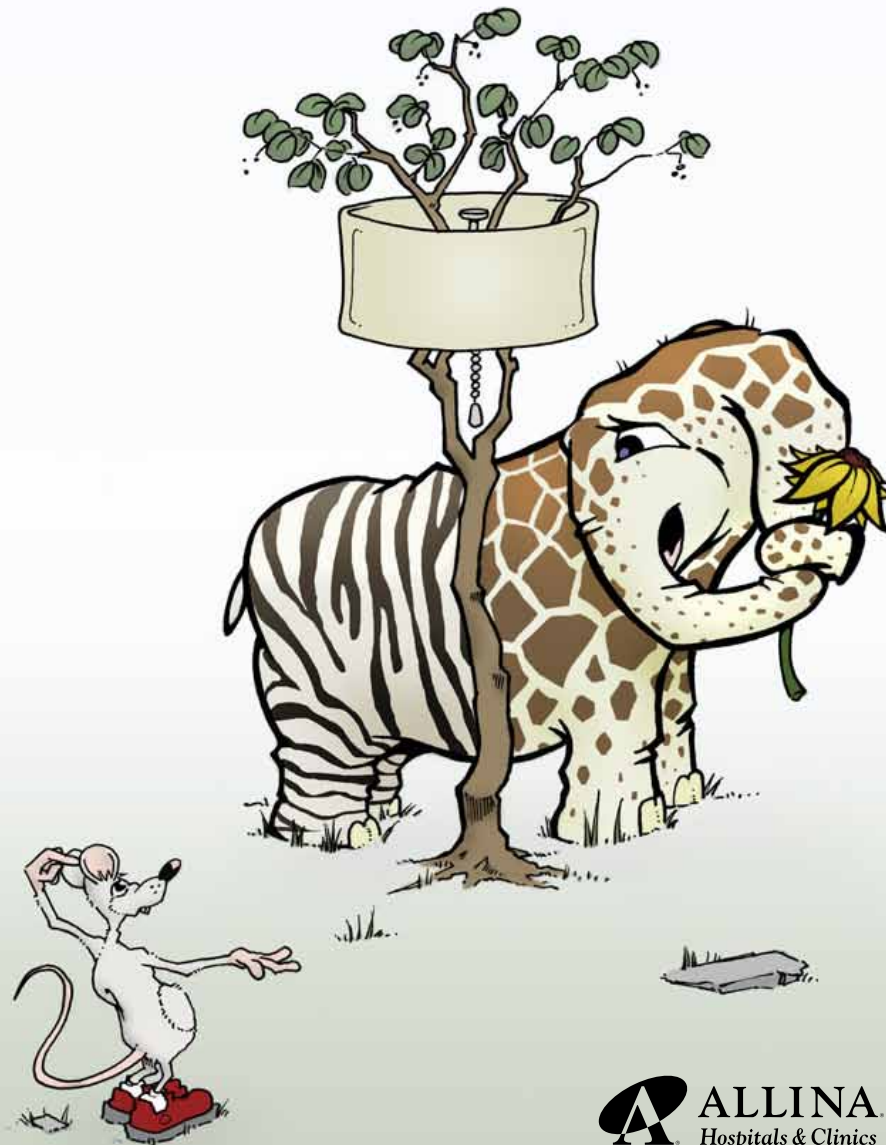


# Facing Uncertainties



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6 – 9 Years

## Developmental Factors Industry and Competence

These are the ages when children become more interested in real things and less engaged in fantasy. Following rules is important, and children will often make up elaborate rules for games. Their attention spans are growing longer, and they tend to stick more with a task and enjoy working at things. Doing things right is important. Working and playing with others is now more common. They like to master things and need to feel competent.

Six- to nine-year-olds are becoming more social and desire to be a part of all that is going on. Yet, they can also feel inadequate, especially if their family or their own lifestyle seems different from others. The neighborhood and school are growing in importance, while the family's authority is somewhat less than it once was.



### What to Say

- Because more detailed explanations are more important at this age and a child's desire for logic is stronger, uncertainty can be even more difficult. Tell your child what you know and what you do not know. Reinforce that you will tell her of any new information as soon as you learn it.
- Be understanding of how frustrating it is to not know.
- Prepare them for the physical and emotional changes that your cancer may bring. Talk about what might happen with your illness, and what the signs and symptoms of change might be.
- Seize the teachable moments whenever they arise. A scene in a TV show or an ambulance racing past your car may present the ideal moment to talk. For a relatively short attention span, these spontaneous flashes of communication are often better than long, planned conversations.
- Encourage your child to express his feelings of frustration and sadness.
- Give large doses of reassurance that your child will be well cared for by those who love her.

- If death is a real possibility, talk about it. Ask your child what he thinks death is all about. Then share your own thoughts. Encourage him to talk and share his feelings. He will likely not only worry about your death, but he will worry about his own death, as well. Take the time to talk about that, too. Reassure him of who and how he will be cared for. The *Ideas and Resources* section offers a variety of sources to help you talk with your child about death.

## What to Do

- Give your child the freedom to be away from you and to be on her own. Tell her it is okay to have fun!
- Encourage your child to play with other children. Let the parents of your child's playmates know about your illness and what to expect, so that visiting children are not surprised or frightened.
- Create some special rituals you share exclusively with your child, such as after-school snack time, a made-up bedtime story, or a special handshake.
- Make some memories with your child by crafting boxes of photos, mementos, poems or drawings of things you have done together.
- Make a recording of yourself reading a book or singing a favorite song with your child.
- Find a special charm that your child can carry with him for comfort, such as a stone, a good luck piece, a ring or even a family keepsake.
- Identify and discuss ways your child can help you.
- Encourage your child to talk about her feelings with a trusted teacher, counselor or social worker at school.
- Find out if there are other children of your child's age whose parents have cancer and connect with them personally, by e-mail or in a chat room.
- Be available, even by phone, if your child needs to talk to you about his fears, whenever he needs to talk.



## 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:

- Thumb-sucking
- Bedwetting
- Sleeplessness
- Withdrawal / isolation
- Acting out
- Irrational fears
- Obsessive-compulsive or ritualistic behaviors
- Psychosomatic complaints
- Clinging / separation anxiety
- Tics
- Destructive behaviors
- Over-eating or not eating
- Acting like the parent (needing to be the Mom or the "man of the house")



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.