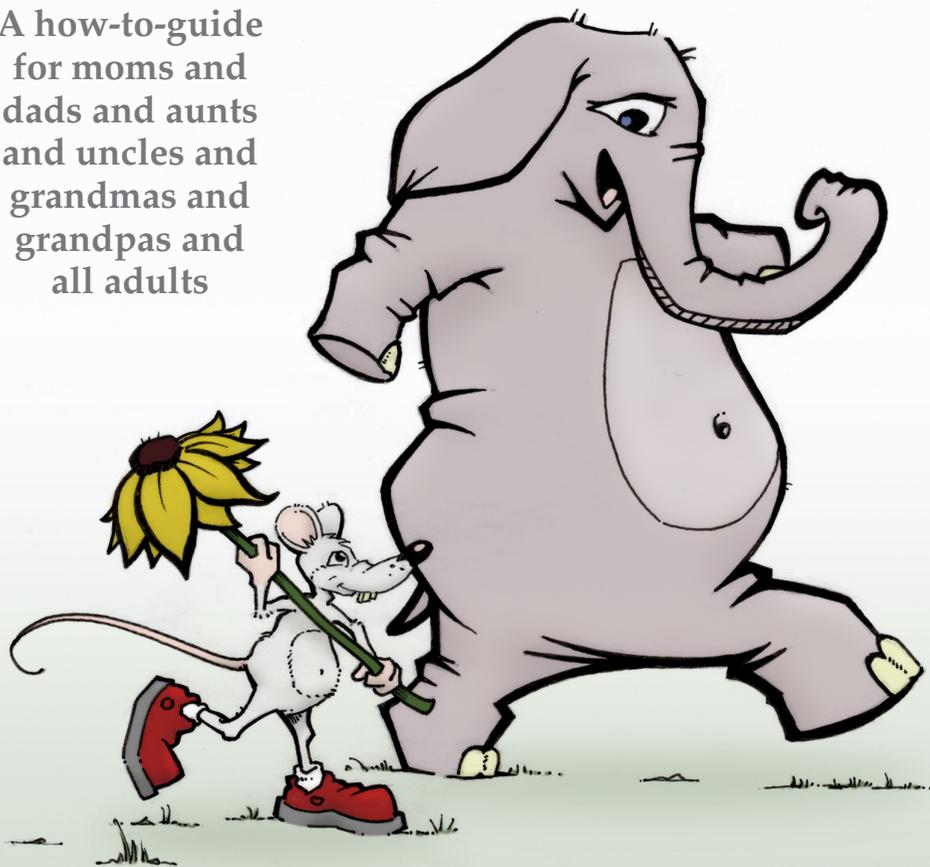


# Simple Talk for Tough Times

## Talking with Children About Cancer

A how-to-guide for moms and dads and aunts and uncles and grandmas and grandpas and all adults



Allina Health



# Simple Talk for Tough Times

## *Talking with Children about Cancer*

Developed by Allina Health

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# Acknowledgements

*Simple Talk for Tough Times* is dedicated to the extraordinary courage, determination and hope of the families we serve.

This material was written by Marcia Carlson, MSW, oncology outreach coordinator at Mercy and Unity hospitals. It was edited by Sandy Herrala and John Dailey, and illustrated by Todd Zerger of BrainstormOverload.com. The book is published by Allina Health.

Allina Health is a not-for-profit system of hospitals, clinics and other health care services, providing care throughout Minnesota and western Wisconsin. Allina Health owns and operates 11 hospitals, more than 90 clinics, and health care services, including cancer care services at:

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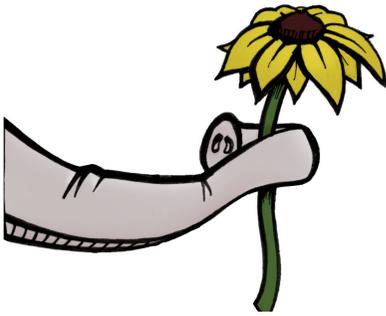
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# Introduction

*“Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple.”  
~ Dr. Seuss*



A cancer diagnosis shakes up your life and the lives of your family in ways you might never expect. Nothing feels quite the same. It is hard enough to accept the news yourself, but how can you possibly tell your child? What should you say? When is the right time to tell your child?

The diagnosis acts like an “elephant in the room.” It is something big that everyone is aware of, but no one wants to talk about. So you try to ignore it, usually because you do not know what to say or how to say it.

## *Simple Talk for Tough Times*

*Simple Talk for Tough Times* is designed to help you talk with your child about the “elephant in the room” and help him or her learn to cope with the changes that often come with a cancer diagnosis. The hope is as you talk with your child and cherish your time together, your relationship will blossom in ways you never thought possible.

In addition to general advice and suggestions, this book looks at each phase of childhood development and offers specific ideas for what to say, do, and watch for when talking with your child.

Understanding your child’s emotions at each phase of development and how he or she may be affected by the changes in your home will help you prepare and manage the challenges that come with a cancer diagnosis.

Children often have concerns about their parent’s health as well the changes that are happening in their homes. It would be of concern if they did not react to a major event in their family.

But, most children doing well with school, friends, and at home before their parent's diagnosis of cancer continue to do well while you go through treatment. Those children who were having a hard time in one or more of these areas before a parent's illness are likely to have trouble dealing with the challenges now as well.

Communication is important in your relationships. It takes on different forms in different families. Communicating can be talking or doing things together. This guide encourages both talking and doing – spending time together to help your family learn ways of communicating through these tough times.

As you read this book, think about how this information fits with your family. Children mature at different speeds. They may be more or less mature than their actual age. To meet your child where he or she is in his or her development, you may want to read the pages of more than one age category for your child. Then choose the age that best corresponds to your child's maturity.

*Simple Talk for Tough Times* is organized into four sections. The first two sections give general information for all ages, as well as talking points for each age group. The third section talks about special situations within some families dealing with a cancer diagnosis. The last section gives ideas and resources for more information and support.

This book can also be a guide for support groups. It allows you to share any worries you may have and learn from others going through the same situation. You can attend a support group to meet other parents, share experiences and talk about the information in this book.

