

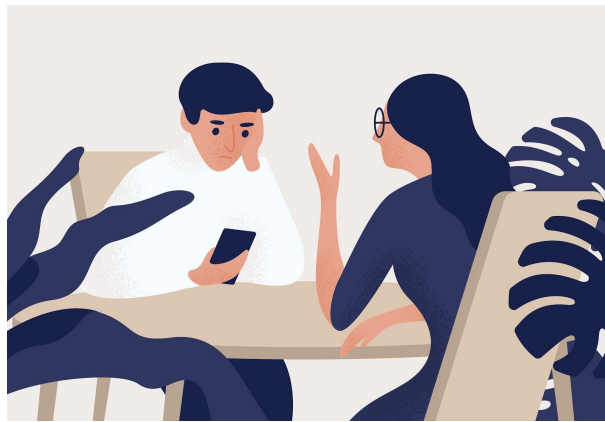


POORTI-06: Talking with children about breast cancer

While the elders in the family are mature enough to understand the gravity of challenges around breast cancer, the children are often left perplexed. Their inquisitive mind goes restless when they develop a feeling that their mother is going through something, which they do not quite understand.

However, it is still suggested that informing children about the situation might keep them less anxious and worried about your health, than not letting them know about the situation at all. Keeping a secret for long might not be a feasible solution either because the children might find it out through other means.

Avoiding to tell your children about the situation might actually make them feel isolated, which can worsen the situation. It is better to make your children aware of your breast cancer. When do you wish to tell them and the extent of detailing completely depends on you.



WONDERING WHO MIGHT TELL THEM? AND WHEN?

The safest way to break this news is to sit together with your partner, grandparents (if possible) and children, and explain the situation calmly with lots of positivity. It would be easier for them to take up the bad news if it is coming from someone they love and trust.

If you are a single parent, or finding it difficult to speak to your children, you may seek help from your close friends and family members or a breast cancer support group who could potentially arrange for a former breast cancer survivor to help you with this.

There is no preset time which can be said as the right time to tell about your breast cancer to your children, but you can choose a familiar setting, where there are no distractions and go stepwise about the problem and treatment, and stop wherever you wish to.

While discussing, you may find yourself overwhelmed with emotions, end up crying or feeling extremely upset. Let it be! It is alright. Your children would also feel free to show their emotions and concern. Although appearing calm and composed while letting your children know about your cancer may help them feel less frightened.

NOT FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS?

Keep things simple, avoid complicated medical terms and summaries. Plan your discussion ahead with your partner and family if you need to. Make sure you let them know the intricacies without frightening them unnecessarily.



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HOW CHILDREN MIGHT REACT TO BREAST CANCER?

Children react differently depending upon their age, sentiments, maturity, character and proximity to you. Give them time and opportunity to speak to you and express their emotions. You might be surprised at their resilience or level of maturity!

Do not push them and let their feelings sink. Your children, specially daughters, may also talk to their friends about it. You might have to answer a library of questions later. Be polite with them if you notice changes in their behavior or sleep pattern, they may lose concentration in class. This can be an after effect of hearing the serious news about their loved one.

Children are more likely to be bothered while your diagnosis starts, the loss of hair or visible changes in your body might make them feel worried; but you can make them realise that this is for your cure, and that you will be normal soon.

Very young children are unlikely to have any knowledge about cancer. When you visit the hospital you can reassure them that you will come back. Take help of stories to let them know that you are ill and under treatment.

Adolescents are more likely to understand the severity of the situation. You can start by telling what has happened to you and how the doctors are going to treat you. The children must have studied the basics of cell structure by this time so you may explain the process with some factual information. Let them talk about their knowledge and feelings at this level.

If your child is a teenager then they are aware of cancer, its causes, treatment and side effects. They would also have more relevant questions that you have to be ready to answer. Teenagers may feel anxious about cancer running in their families. Share as much information as is relevant and that you will be fine even after the treatment.



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INFORMING YOUR CHILDREN'S SCHOOL

TEACHERS:

Children are affected when you are unwell for a prolonged period. This might affect their studies and exams as well. Inform the school authority well in advance so that they can take care of the fact. If your child is preparing for a high school exam, please ensure proper care is taken during the preparation as well as the course of examination.

PRIVATE TUTORS:

There might be tutors who visit your home to teach your children. It is suggested that they should also be informed about your cancer. This might be useful and they would support your children during difficult times.

Let them know about the duration of treatment to be able to understand the best possible support that they would be able to provide.



KEEP TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN DURING AND AFTER YOUR TREATMENT:

Informing your children that you have been diagnosed with breast cancer, answering their preliminary questions and maintaining a normal behavior with them during the treatment will be helpful, as in future you may need to tell them more details and seek their involvement during your treatment. Throughout the treatment period, keep communicating with your children. They might be having anxiety issues that only you can help them with.

After your treatment, you may be asked for regular follow-ups for quite a long time. You may want to take your children along in due course and they might in turn support other children who are undergoing a similar situation.

From time to time, they would be puzzled with new information that comes up to them during your treatment, attend them patiently. If your child is a teenager, you may want to take him/her to your hospital visits as well. It is often seen that such involvements improve relationship and trust, and with proper communication, families can find a great source of emotional support from each other.

The gist is that sharing your pain with your children will not only help them but also relieve you.

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