

Certified Child Life Specialist Michelle Brauntuch and Oncology Clinical Nurse Specialist Susan DeGennaro have produced the accompanying video **Talking to Your Children About Your Breast Cancer** to provide information and guidance about the best way to approach and speak to your children about having breast cancer.

Helping Children Cope

A child's greatest fears often come from what they don't know and what they're not prepared for.

It's important to tell your children that you have breast cancer and to keep your children informed and prepared for the changes that lie ahead for you and your family.

- Set aside time to talk to your children about your breast cancer. Use the word cancer. It's important that they hear it from you first.
- As part of a family, your children have a right to know what's happening. They will sense that something is going on.
- Be Open and Honest. They need to know that you'll keep them informed. It helps maintain their trust in you and in those who care for them.
- Tell the Truth. It doesn't mean telling them everything. It means never telling them anything but the truth.

Learning about your illness is a process for your children. Make sure they know it's OK to ask questions and encourage them to ask as many questions as they need. You may also need to repeat the same information several times. Check and make sure that they understand what's been said.

What Do You Say to Your Children ?

Children can be grouped into 3 developmental age groups. Depending on their age, children understand information differently, and respond differently to what you tell them.

Children Ages 2-6 years

- Children in this age group generally have short attention spans.
- Talk in clear, simple and reassuring words
- Using play with puppets or dolls may be a way of helping them understand what you're telling them. You may also gain insight into any fears or concerns they may not be able to verbalize directly.

School age Children 6-12 years

- Children in this age group tend to ask concrete questions.
- Answer questions openly and directly.
- Tell the truth.
- Allow them to speak to the doctors and nurses. Offer to let them see where and how Mom will be treated.

Teenagers

- Teenagers are usually unpredictable. They prefer detailed information and are most sensitive to dishonesty.
- Try to answer every question as fully and truthfully as possible.
- Teenagers need to have someone to talk to. This may be a best friend, family friend, teacher, coach, or counselor. Let them know it's OK to talk to others, and talk about who they can talk to.

Children of Any Age

Your children are strong and have resources that you probably don't even know exist. With openness, honesty, lots of love, and perhaps even a little humor, you can help your children emerge emotionally healthy and ready to go on with life.

- As you go forward, try to remember the following key points:
- Always maintain open and truthful communication.
- Maintain family rules and routines as much as possible. Consistent rules and routines equal comfort, security and a sense that they are being taken care of.
- Keep them informed. Knowing what's to come will help them cope.

Monitor your children for major changes in behavior which could be a sign that something is wrong and seek help right away from a professional. (Your health care provider, pediatrician or a mental health care professional).

- Sleep disturbances: Recurring bad dreams or sleepwalking.
- Eating disturbances: Constant overeating or eating very little.
- Chronic misbehavior or change in school performance.
- New fears or fear of things they weren't afraid of before.
- Withdrawal from friends or family.

Most of all, in order to take care of your children and help them get through this experience, it's important to take care of yourself and reach out when you need help.

Viewing the DVD

Those interested in viewing *Talking to Your Children About Your Breast Cancer* may see it at The Health Information resource Center located at the Health Sciences Library at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center. Copies can also be delivered to your local public library. To make arrangements, call 201-894-3070.

Copies of the DVD are also available for purchase. Please send a check for \$15 per video made out to: **The Breast Cancer DVD Fund**, and addressed to:

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350 Engle Street
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For more information on this subject, or if you are interested in receiving a copy of the video in Spanish or Korean, please call Michelle Brauntuch at 201-894-3635.

More Resources

For more information on breast cancer and how to help your children, you can contact your health care providers, or the following organizations.

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation
1-877-GO-KOMEN or www.komen.org

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation
North Jersey Affiliate
1-908-277-2904 or
www.Cure@Komennorthjersey.org

American Cancer Society
1-800-ACS-2345 or www.cancer.org

The Cancer Information Service of the
National Cancer Institute
1-800-4-Cancer or www.cancer.gov

Cancer Care
1-800-813-4673 or www.cancercare.org

Gilda's Club
1-201-457-1670 or www.gildasclubnj.org

Share
1-866-891-2392 or www.sharecancersupport.org

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