

FACING CANCER

as a family

Reassuring ways to explain a cancer diagnosis to a child

Cancer is difficult for adults to understand, let alone children. So how much do you tell a child when someone they know receives a diagnosis?

Parents want to shield their children from anything that is scary or worrisome, so it is a natural response to want to keep details from children regarding a loved one's cancer diagnosis. However, withholding information about a family member's health can be damaging.

"When information is withheld or kept secret, a child still knows something is wrong," says DeAnn Gallatin, MS, LSW, an oncology social worker at Kettering Health Network. "Secrecy can prompt a child to believe something is their fault, and a lack of information can result in the child developing anxiety."

Child development and child psychology experts agree—talking to children about a loved one's cancer is the healthiest choice and can have lifelong benefits.

Tips for a tough discussion How much information to provide about cancer depends on the level of interest of the child and who in their life has received a diagnosis.

"I recommend using the child's level of interest and their questions as a guide for how much information to provide and then to keep the door to communication open," says DeAnn. "If a parent or grandparent has received a cancer diagnosis, the child will likely see changes in their day-to-day routine and will have more questions. If it is a neighbor, teacher, or coach, the

child's routine is less likely to be disrupted, but it is still important to talk about cancer and the changes the child might see in this person."

Younger children likely won't ask very detailed questions, while older children might want to know specifics, like the location of the cancer and what treatments their loved one is going through. Some talking points and coping strategies remain the same, no matter the child's age:

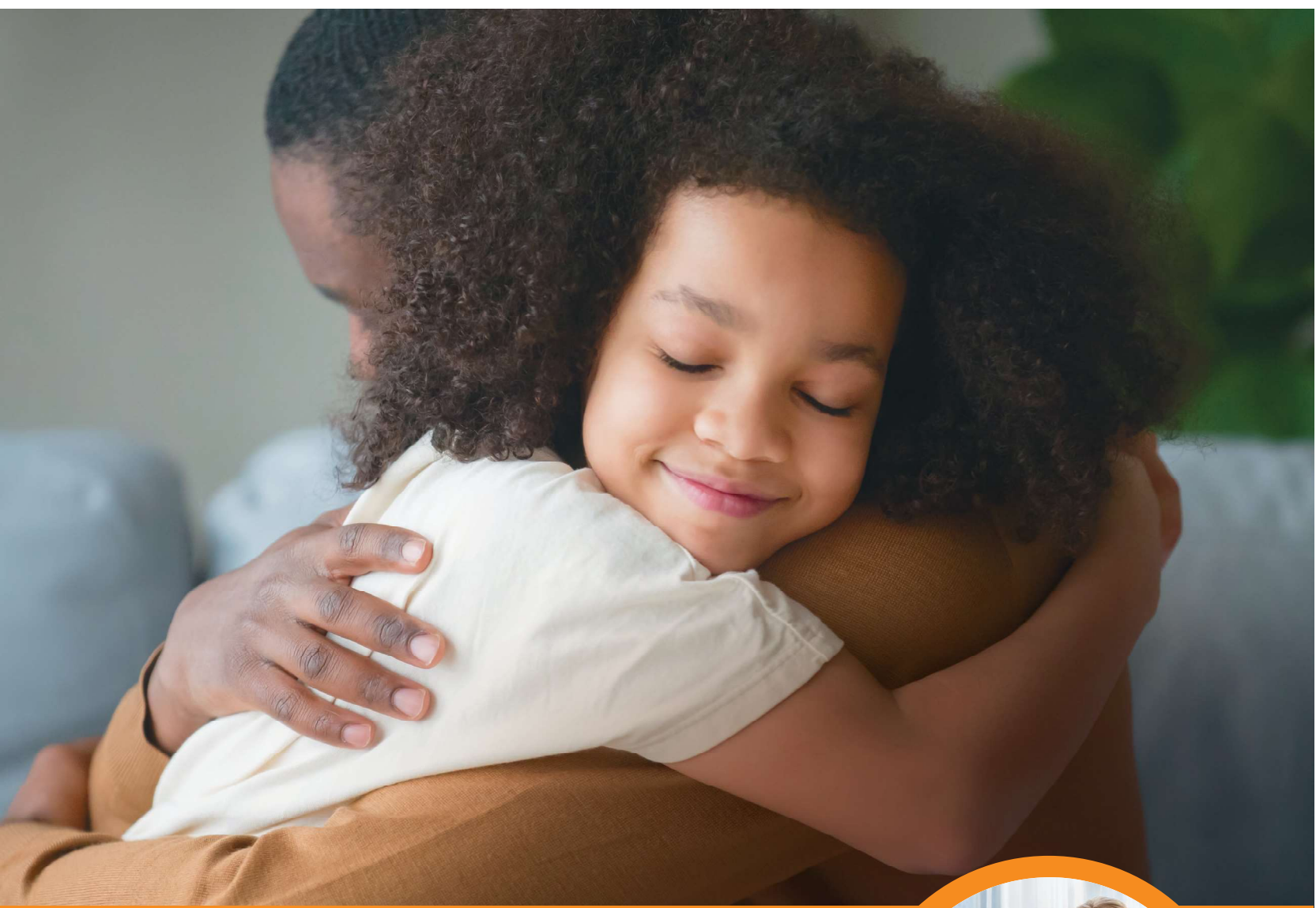
- Let them know their loved one has cancer and that the doctors are helping.
- Try to keep the child's routine as consistent as possible.
- Identify a regular caregiver who can devote time each day to the child.
- Let the child tour the medical facility and meet providers.

Knowledge is power

Talking to a child about the outward effects of cancer and treatment is also significant. Children need to understand that

▼ HERE FOR YOU

Far-reaching cancer care is close to home. Find more resources and learn how Kettering Health Network can help you at ketteringhealth.org/cancercare



Children's Lives Include Moments of Bravery

When a loved one is going through cancer treatment, it is stressful for the entire family, which is why it is important to lean on local support and resources.

Kettering Health Network offers a six-week program for kids who have a loved one going through cancer, called CLIMB® (Children's Lives Include Moments of Bravery). This program gives children, ages five through 12, a safe environment to express how they feel while being supported by trained experts and other children going through a similar experience.

The CLIMB® program focuses on three C's:

- 1 You can't CATCH it.
- 2 You didn't CAUSE it.
- 3 You CAN help.

To learn more about this program, call 1-888-681-5610.

