

How to Talk to Kids about Cancer: A Guide for Teachers



Below are some facts that you can present to your students when talking about cancer. Some kids may not have any questions at first, but invite them to ask you later if they think of any. Older children (in general, ages eight and up) may be able to understand a more complex discussion. They may want to see pictures of cancer cells or read about cancer treatment. Again, encourage them to ask questions that they may think of later.

What is cancer?

- Cancer is a disease that can affect different parts of the body.
- You can't catch cancer; it's not contagious. It's a disease that develops inside a person's body.
- Young children can be told that the body is made up of lots of different parts. When someone has cancer, it means that something has gone wrong with one of these parts. Over time, a tumor or lump has formed, or a bunch of bad cells started to grow (in the case of leukemia and lymphomas). The tumor (or the bad cells) should not be there.
- Cancer can spread and grow into other parts of a person's body, so the person with cancer needs treatment to either take out the tumor or stop the bad cells from spreading to other places.

Important Points to Make

- The American Cancer Society supports scientists who work in labs every day to find cures for cancer and is also here 24/7 to provide free information and support for people facing the disease via 1-800-227-2345 and cancer.org.
- If someone you know has cancer, they need your support.

What can you do to stay healthy?

- Eat healthy and stay active! Physical activity can help you reduce your risk for many types of cancer. It can help you get to and stay at a healthy weight, too. Good eating habits, such as eating fruits and vegetables every day, will help you grow strong and stay healthy. These good habits also help reduce your risk of getting certain types of cancers as you get older.
- Protect your skin from the sun! Whenever you go outside, be sure to slip on a shirt, slop on broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher, slap on a hat, and wrap on sunglasses.
- Don't smoke! Smoking is bad for your body and causes cancer. Smoking hurts your lungs, mouth, throat, and many other parts of your body. Make the right choice and don't smoke or use other types of tobacco – ever!



cancer.org/schools | 1.800.227.2345