



When your child may be facing death...

My concern: It will be too frightening for my child to talk about the end of her life.

Response: Your child probably suspects that something is seriously wrong and has many unanswered questions. Since children often naturally try to protect their parents' feelings, your child may have decided that bringing it up will make *you* sadder. What happens then is that both the parent and child are *scared and worried alone*, wanting to talk about it but not able to.

My concern: It will be too hard for me to control my emotions in front of my child.

Response: It's hard to express deep feelings publicly. We want to be in control in front of our child, especially when talking about important things. We may worry that once the feelings start, they won't stop. Our worries are important but listening to them can mean we are putting our needs before our child's needs. Even though it is hard to do, showing your true feelings to your child will strengthen your bond and show your child how deeply you care about them. You also will be showing your child that you will do what you can to meet their needs, no matter what. (And you *will* stop crying.)

My concern: I've tried so many times and just can't get the right words out.

Response: The first sentence is the hardest but once it is out, the others seem to follow. Try, "I've been trying to ask if you want to talk about what's happening to you and don't know how to start." Or, "There are some things we probably need to say to each other that are hard to say. Would you like to talk about what's going on?" Or, "I wonder if you want to talk about what's going to happen to you."

- ◆ Remember to keep it simple and short. Don't over-explain. Share what's in your heart – your sadness, fears, anger – and ask about your child's feelings too.
- ◆ It helps to use symbols to talk about what is happening. You might talk about being on a journey together or you may describe the illness as a battle to fight or a mountain to climb.
- ◆ Try to be honest and real with your child. Children are naturally wise about the important things. Avoiding topics such as sadness or death or not telling the truth may be confusing and frightening for the child but together you can get through these very hard times.

Parent: "I'm glad I finally did it. Being able to really talk to her was the first best thing that happened since she got sick."

