

Patient Education | Pediatrics

# Supporting Children: Sharing Difficult News

It can be hard and uncomfortable to share difficult news with a child. Still, there are ways you can have a clear conversation while making space for everyone's emotions.

## Making a safe environment

Follow these tips during your conversations:

- › Be honest and clear. Use simple language to help children fully understand the information and avoid misunderstandings.
- › You know your child best. If you believe your child will be overwhelmed with information, you do not need to share all information at once. Having a few conversations can be helpful for children to process at their own pace. If you wonder how much information to share, ask them if they want a little or a lot of information.
- › Gauge how much the child already knows by asking an initial question.
  - Example: “Can you tell me what you know about why your loved one is in the hospital?”
  - Example: “Can you tell me what you know or what has been shared with you?”
- › Allow your child to see your emotions. This helps them learn to express and share their own emotions.
- › Be prepared for many different emotions (or even no emotions) during and after the conversation. Everyone copes differently, including children, and sometimes they do not cope in the way we expect. For example, young children might end the conversation and want to engage in play directly after.

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- › Allow time for questions both during and after conversations. Children might need time to let the information sink in. They might ask questions hours or even days after your conversation.
  - › If you do not have an answer to a question, let them know.
    - Example: “I do not know the answer to that right now, but if I find out, I will let you know. Maybe we can write it down, so we do not forget.”

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If you need support in sharing difficult news with children, you can email a child life specialist at [NMHChildLife@nm.org](mailto:NMHChildLife@nm.org).