

Family-Centred Cancer Care Conversations: The Talking, Telling and Sharing Framework: End of Life

Step 1: Starting the conversation

The first part of the framework uses a set of questions as prompts to help open the conversation with parents and assess their attitudes, beliefs and readiness about sharing their poor cancer prognosis with the children.

1 Do you have any children?	'No doesn't mean the end of the conversation. Check if they need help telling grandchildren, nieces, nephews etc.
2 How many? What ages: 0-2/3-5/6-12/13-18?	Children's information needs and reactions to the news vary and are related to their developmental stage.
3 What do the children know?	Establish what the children know and have been told.
4 What are your thoughts about telling?	Ask about parents' core beliefs on telling. Acknowledge it is challenging. Reinforce importance of honesty. Explore worries.
5 Are you ready to tell your children?	NO: Parental resistance is common. If encountered, consider: Acknowledge how difficult these conversations can be 'I understand it is very difficult for you to tell the children you're not going to survive your cancer' Share that children can pick up that something is wrong 'Your children will pick up that something is wrong and can feel scared if they do not know the truth' Explain that children want to be involved and informed 'Telling your children means they can be involved, and you can support them through that process' YES
6 Planning to tell.	Assess parents' emotional readiness to tell their children. Then move on to advice in Step 2.

Step 2: Communicating with the children

The next part of this framework helps health care professionals give guidance to parents on when and how to communicate with their children about their poor cancer prognosis. It uses the 6W grid.

Why Why is it important to the children? Children will already suspect that 'something is wrong.' They will have noticed whispered conversations and changes to their parents' appearance and behaviour. Not knowing the truth is confusing for children, causing additional anxiety. Parents also find it a great relief once they have told the children.	Who Who should tell the children? In principle a trusted adult, ideally a parent. If it's a two-parent family, it is usually best if both parents tell the children together. NB: Generally, the well-parent wants to be involved in sharing this difficult news, as they will have ongoing parenting responsibilities.
When When is the best time to tell the children? The best time to have these difficult conversations is soon after receiving the poor prognosis and when parents are emotionally and physically able.	What What should families do to best prepare for parental death? • Provide honest information about the poor cancer prognosis. • Capture life as it happens to create memories. • Maintain routine when and where possible. • Update key networks such as school teachers. • Draw on support networks when required. • Make forward plans for the future.
Where Where is the best place to start the conversation? Encourage parents to choose a time and place: • When interruptions are unlikely. • Not rushed. • Able to talk and express emotions.	Words What words are appropriate to use? • Use age-appropriate language. • Don't give false hope. • Avoid euphemisms and confusing terminology. • Use clear and factual language - cancer, die.

