

What impact can terminal illness within a family have on a child?

When someone in the family has a terminal illness it can affect children in different ways. This will depend on a number of factors including:

- Who is ill e.g. parent, sibling, grandparent and the role that person plays in their life
- Their relationship with the person who is ill
- The nature and stage of the illness
- Their age and level of understanding
- Their support network
- How those around them are affected by the situation
- The level of disruption to their daily life

Questions children may ask:

The sorts of questions children might ask can vary greatly, depending on their age and their understanding about what is happening.

Common questions include:

- Why can't the Doctor make them better?
- Will I get ill too?
- Is Mummy going to die?
- Is it my fault they got ill?
- Why can't Daddy play with me anymore?
- Can I catch cancer?
- Who will look after me?
- Why are they always tired?

Sometimes as adults we have to explain to a child that we don't know the answers to their questions. However, it is important to always acknowledge the feelings that go with them. For example, "I know how unfair it seems that Mummy is so very, very ill and it makes you feel sad".

Your family may have cultural and religious beliefs that can provide answers to some of the questions that your child asks.

If you find it difficult to deal with your children's questions at a particular time, it is okay to acknowledge the question and say that you will come back to them about it at a later time. It can be distressing for children if you simply ignore the question or change the subject. It is also okay to say you do not know the answer.

Taking a child to see someone who is going to die

If you are taking a child to visit someone who they are close to, in a hospital or hospice for example, it is helpful to prepare them for what they will find when they get there. Warn them if the person they are visiting looks different from when they last saw them. Explain that they may be connected to tubes or machines, or be very weak, tired or asleep. Mention that there may be other sick people in nearby beds.

Children often want to be included in visits, but may quickly feel uncomfortable or become bored. It can be helpful for them to take things along to keep themselves occupied.

Some children may not want to visit the hospital or hospice. If this is the case perhaps encourage them to make a card, write a letter, draw a picture, or record a message for the person who is unwell.

Call us: 0118 934 2604

Email us: info@daisysdream.org.uk

www.daisysdream.org.uk

Keeping others informed

It is helpful to inform your children's nursery, school, college, childminder etc. about what is happening and to update them at regular intervals. Tell them what your child knows about what is happening to allow them to give the appropriate support. Ask them to let you know if they notice any changes to your children's behaviour.

Support from Daisy's Dream

There may be times when you would appreciate some reassurance that you are dealing with things in a helpful way, or that your children's reactions are normal in these circumstances, or you might think that the children would benefit from having the opportunity to talk to someone who is not involved with the situation.

Our professionally qualified team can provide:

- Information and advice on ways you can support your child
- Direct support for your child, either at home or at school
- Therapeutic groups for children
- Advice for other professionals who are supporting your child

Other ideas

- Making a memory box or photo book with your child- **please see separate leaflet.**

Call us: 0118 934 2604

Email us: info@daisysdream.org.uk

www.daisysdream.org.uk