

## Talking to children about cancer

**When someone you know has cancer it can be quite confusing and scary at times. Listed below are some questions that children and young people often ask us.**

### **What is cancer?**

Our bodies are made up of millions of tiny cells. These cells have different jobs to do. For instance, our stomachs are formed of cells that digest our food, our lung cells take in oxygen so that we can breathe and the cells in our blood help us to fight illness. Because these cells work very hard, they get worn out. When they wear out our bodies usually make new cells to replace them. But sometimes something goes wrong and the new cells grow too quickly. These bad cells start to crowd out the good cells and may spread to other parts of the body and this is what makes the cancer.

### **Are there different types of cancer?**

Cancer isn't just one illness. There are over two hundred types of cancers that can occur anywhere in the body. Some of these are solid cancers. This is when the bad cells form a lump (called a tumour) somewhere in the body. The other kind of cancers do not form lumps but happen when the bad cells are in the blood. These are called leukaemia or lymphomas.

### **Why do people get cancer?**

Doctors don't understand why some people get cancer and others do not. Nothing that you have said or done has caused them to get cancer.

### **Can you catch cancer?**

Although some people are scared about this, you cannot catch cancer!

### **Can children get cancer?**

It is very rare for children to get cancer. For those that do, there is a very high success rate in treating young children.

### **What are the different types of treatment for cancer?**

There are three main treatments for cancer. These are:

- Surgery – an operation to remove the tumour
- Radiotherapy – high energy x-rays to kill off the cancer cells and reduce the size of the tumour
- Chemotherapy – (chemo) powerful medicine to kill cancer cells

### **Why did my dad's hair fall out?**

Some of the treatments for cancer have side effects. This is because the treatments kill healthy cells as well as the cancer cells. Some people's hair falls out, sometimes people feel sick or get very tired.

### **Why can't the doctors make my mum better?**

Many people who get cancer are treated successfully. It depends on what type of cancer someone has, where it is in their body and at what stage it is discovered. If it has been there for a long time then it can be harder for doctors to treat. Unfortunately doctors are not able to cure all cancers although there is lots of research being done to try and find new ways to treat cancer.

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