



# PARENTING THROUGH A TERMINAL ILLNESS

YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 14-17



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### HOW TO SPEAK TO MY TEENAGER WHEN A LOVED ONE IS DIAGNOSED WITH A TERMINAL ILLNESS

You may wonder what's the right time to talk to your teenager about their loved one's terminal illness. Truthfully, there may not be a perfect time. However, the sooner you communicate, the more time they'll have to process the news and start the important task of mourning.

#### 1. CREATE A SAFE SPACE

Find a quiet place where you can talk without distractions or interruptions. Include another adult if your teen (or you) may be comforted by their presence.

#### 2. BE PROMPT, HONEST, AND SPECIFIC

It's best to inform your teen of that his or her loved one's illness is terminal as early as possible. You want them to find out from you (or the loved one) first and directly, rather than somehow overhearing it or learning it from someone else. Should that happen, it injures the trust between you. It may also communicate that some things are too overwhelming or scary to talk about and, therefore, better left to be shoved down or bottled up.

Be direct as you prepare your teen for the news: "I need to tell you something important that's going to be hard to talk about." Provide accurate, age-appropriate information. Use the right words, such as 'cancer', 'die', 'death', rather than something you think will be easier or sound nicer, like: 'not well', 'go away', or 'pass on'. As young adults, your teen(s) will appreciate you speaking to them directly and not using vague or confusing messages.

#### 3. WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

Your teen may still have many questions and you may not have all the answers, but that's okay. The important thing is to establish and open the lines of communication. Show that you are available to answer questions along the way and be upfront about what you or the loved one are still unsure of at this stage. Being included in this difficult transition can help your teen feel reassured and fully informed. It also communicates that your family will go through this together.



#### 4. COMFORT AND KEEP YOUR TEEN CLOSE

Throughout the conversation, reinforce that they are safe, and you are safe. If the death is related to a non-communicable disease, clarify that you and they are not at any risk of harm. Stay close to your teen and offer hugs or cuddles while you speak with them about this difficult topic. Comfort them by highlighting that they will continue to be cared for and loved no matter what.

#### 5. THEY ARE NOT TO BLAME

While this may be obvious to you, teens may believe they cause things to happen by what they do or say. Reassure them by emphasizing that what's happening to their loved one isn't happening because of anything they did or said.

#### 6. WHAT'S NEXT?

Let your teen know what will happen next. For example, "the treatment is not going to cure the cancer, so we and the doctors are going to make sure he is comfortable".



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