



The Wellness Pod

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Breaking The News

I knew that something was wrong. I kept pacing to and fro in the waiting room hoping that I was wrong. Finally I was called in by the doctor. The results were as I expected. I was diagnosed with cancer. To my surprise I remained intact and followed everything that the doctor was telling me. I broke the news to my husband and tried to act as if nothing happened in front of my two children. I knew that I would have to break the news to them as well one day, but it was definitely not going to be that day. My life, our life, was not going to be the same anymore. Soon enough I would be starting treatment. Hair loss was unavoidable. My children were 6 and 8. Days and weeks passed.

They knew that something was not right. I was not the same person anymore. Sometimes they heard me crying and at other times pensive. Visits and long stays at their grandparents were being held quite often. Shall I tell them or not? What shall I say and what shall I leave out? How shall I do it? Do I need to tell both children or would it be enough just to tell the elder one? How would they take it? Wouldn't it be better for the children if I keep this episode a secret? I couldn't stop thinking. I couldn't stop questioning. I was unsure. One thing I was definitely sure though. I didn't have the courage to tell them.



Karl Vella
foundation

KVF promotes the wellbeing of children dealing with a loss or a serious illness of a family member. It helps children, aged between five to sixteen, maintain a sense of continuity in their lives by offering educational and psychological support. KVF Centre is located in the President's Kitchen Garden in Attard. All our services are free of charge. Due to Covid we are presently offering our services online.

A Few Thoughts

If you have a serious or long term illness, it can be difficult to know how to talk to your child about it. It's natural to want to shield children from painful experiences and emotions. Even though it might feel like you are protecting your child by not telling them about your illness, giving them the opportunity to discuss difficult feelings with you may be the best comfort. Children often pick up on more than people realize. They are able to perceive when something happens in their family, they are hypersensitive to the emotional changes of their parents, and they reflect their anguish through their behavior, for example, by becoming aggressive or irritable. When they are kept in the dark about what is happening in the family they can imagine things to be worse than they are.

You might also worry that the child is too young and may not have the emotional capacity to understand the situation. Although children must be presented the information in different ways based on their maturity level, research shows that including children in the experience decreases negative emotional and behavioural responses. Another risk that you face if you don't tell your child truthfully about the situation is that they might learn about the illness from somebody else and that can negatively impact the trust and your relationship. By talking with the children honestly and including them in the experience you will provide them the best support and they will gain valuable skills they need to cope with all that life has to offer them.

We hope that the following tips will help you to approach the subject and support your child in understanding.

- Talk when the child feels safe and comfortable
- Ask them what they know about the situation so far
- If the illness is not contagious, reassure them they cannot "catch" it
- Explain that their feelings, no matter what they are, are normal
- Emphasize that the illness is not their fault
- Ask if they are wondering or worrying about anything
- Let them know that it's okay to still play and have fun
- Don't be afraid to say: "I don't know."
- Check with them often

Self-Care Tips

- It's okay to feel scared and angry
- You may wish to focus on your life instead of your illness
- Connect with friends to build your sense of belonging
- Seek support from a mental health professional

Get in Touch!

Let us know of any questions you might have on this topic!



Telephone
+356 21237928

General inquiries
info@karlvellafoundation.org

Mail
Karl Vella Foundation, The President's
Kitchen Garden, St Anthony Street, Attard.

Website
www.karlvellafoundation.org

Facebook
www.facebook.com/karlvellafoundation