How Do We Tell the Children About Cancer?

Taken with permission from *A Tiny Boat at Sea* by Izetta Smith

A possible script for telling children about your cancer diagnosis:

“The doctors have told me that I have cancer. Cancer is an illness. It is not an illness like a cold because I cannot give it to you or to anyone through my germs. It is an illness that causes some of my cells in my body to grow too much and to grow in the wrong way. The way these cancer cells grow can make me very sick so I have to take medicine to stop the cancer cells from growing.

I don’t know why I got cancer (if this is true) but I do believe that it was not caused by me or you or any person. I feel strong and I believe the medicines are very powerful so I plan on getting better. What is most important is that I love you and that no matter what you will be all right.”

A possible script for talking to children about their fear that you will die:

“Yes, some people die of cancer but mostly they are older. I am young and healthy other than the cancer. The treatment available now is more powerful than ever before. The possibility of my dying really doesn’t occur to me/rarely occurs to me/sometimes occurs to me (whichever is true for you). Is it something that you think about? Remember, you did nothing to cause this cancer. I love you so much. No matter what, you will be all right.”

A possible script if you are dying

“The doctor has told me that the medicine has not worked. That means that the cancer is growing and that at some point it will grow in such a way that I will not be able to live anymore. I will die. I am hoping that something will happen and the cancer will stop growing on its own, but I have heard that most likely this will not happen.

Remember that this cancer has nothing to do with anything you did. I don’t know why I got this cancer. I am really mad and sad about this. Most of all, I want you to know that I love you and want so much to be alive for you as long as I can so I can see you grow. If I do die before you grow up, I feel really good that (the person who will take care of the child) will be there for you. I love him/her very much and know he/she loves you and will take good care of you.”