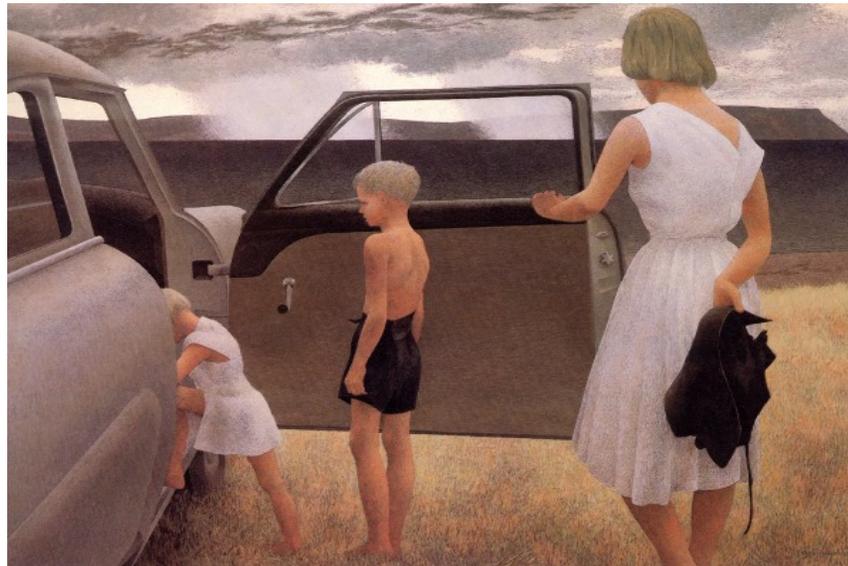


What About My Kids?

Supporting Families When a Parent Has Cancer



Elizabeth Payne
Supportive Care Coordinator
Community Oncology Program

Presenter Disclosure

- **Faculty: Elizabeth Payne**
- **Relationships with commercial interests: None**

Mitigating Potential Bias

- Not applicable

Presenter Disclosure



Norval Morriseau



Clarence Gagnon

Presenter Disclosure



Alex Colville

Key Point # 1

Communicate

Key Point # 2

Communicate

Key Point # 3

Communicate

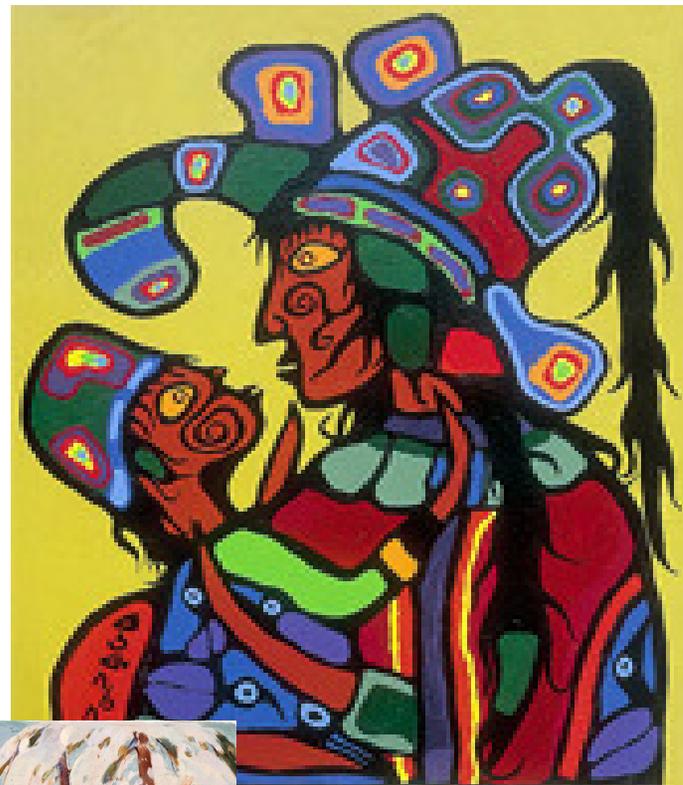
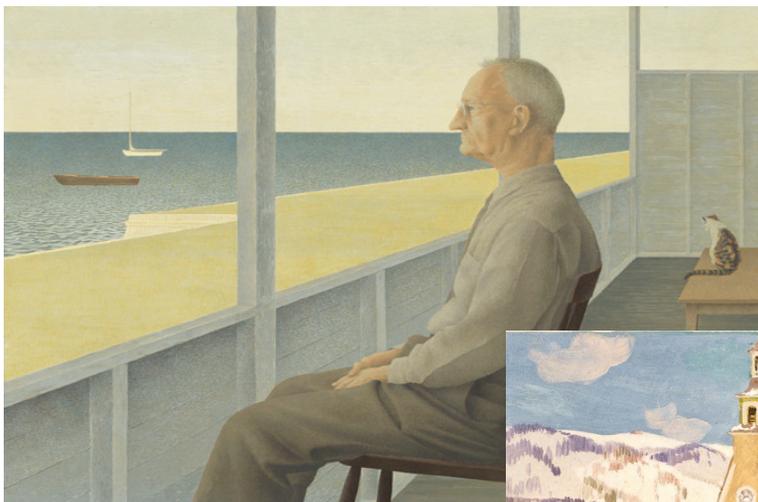
Outline

- Why does this feel so hard?
- Why is it important?
- What does the research say?

Outline (cont.)

- What are some common responses from children?
- How can we help?
- Three key points

Why does this feel so hard?



Why do we need to talk about it?

- Children less anxious when told the truth
- Children the least equipped to manage
- If not handled well, maladjustment may occur

Jeppesen, Bjelland, Fossa, Loge & Dahl, 2013

Huzinga, 2011

What does the research say?

- 1. Communicate:** Keep them informed and tell them what to expect

“Being honest does not mean telling everything....What it does meant is never telling anything but the truth”.

Janes in Slakov, 2007

Cancer (11 & 12 yr olds)

illness
death
torture
Radio therapy
Radiation
sickness
disease
bad cells
miss school
operations
bald head
Chemo.
bad temper
there's hope
get skinny
nervous
I.V.
Help
needles
dad or mom cooks
hardly anyone talks about anything

late meals
miss out on stuff
losing hair
get gifts
people care
the treatments are,
^(helping) curing people.
remission

What does the research say? (cont.)

2. Address the four Cs –

Cancer Cause Catch Care

3. Help identify and manage emotions

- Normalize feelings & concerns, **including fear that parent might die**

Shallcross, 2016

In general

- Illness of a parent is experienced as a threat
- Egocentric
- Typical personality traits and coping styles will persist

- **Emotional** awareness and coping is not naturally accelerated by stress
- **Emotion** often expressed through behavior
- Regression is common

Key Point # 2

Engage with Emotion

Shallcross, 2016



Murray Favro

Age Range

**Developmental
Considerations**

Support

Infants and Toddlers

Developmental Considerations

- Sense change
- Separation from parent main source of distress
- Irritability, disturbances in eating, sleeping, elimination

Support

- Routine, warm, consistent caregiving

Pre-school

Developmental Considerations

- Concrete expectations and short time frames
- Magical thinking
- Unable to tolerate strong emotion for long

Support

- As with infants and toddlers
- Prepare for ++ questions re
- Keep answers brief



Terry Lacosse

School Age (6-12)

Developmental Considerations

- Aware of serious illness / disease
- Mastering norms and rules
- May have little or no reaction

Support

- AS with pre-school
- Careful, non-confrontational communication
- Provide suggestions re how to help, interact

This is How I imagine cancer
might look ...



Age: 7

! What comes to mind + cancer?

That she might die of cancer.
and I'll never see her again.



By [redacted] 12

Adolescents (13-19)

Developmental Considerations

- Able to think abstractly & intellectualize
- Programmed for independence
- Able to seek emotional support from others

Support

- Encourage : to carry on with own routines, maintain connections, make new connections if needed
- Suggestions re meaningful ways to assist or spend time with parent

Are my kids going to be ok?



Jack Chambers

When to seek professional help

- Spike in fear / anxiety that impacts child's life
- Significant behavior change
- Depression, suicidal thoughts

“The world is made of
stories,
not atoms”.

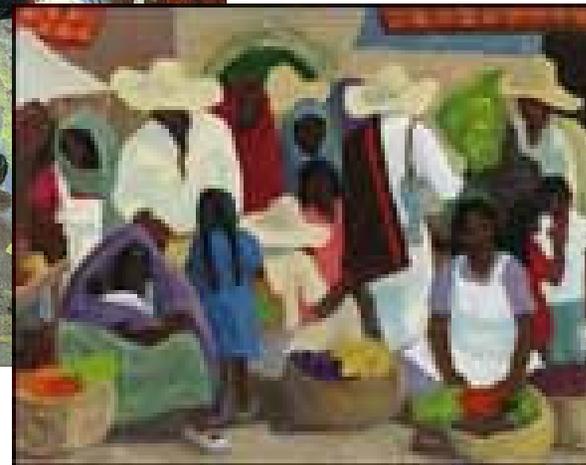
Muriel Rukeyser

How can we help?

Prepare

- Cultivate awareness of own values & norms, as well as those of family you serve
- Amount & type of support able / willing to offer
- Know about resources available for the family

Learn about the family



Bess Larkin Houser Harris

Encourage and assist parents to be open

- Acknowledge reasons why this feels hard
- Explore how you can support them

Resources

- Psychosocial Oncology Clinician
- Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology website
capo.ca/start-the-talk
- Helping Parents Explain Serious Illness to Children by Joan Hamilton

Key Point # 3

Don't Expect Perfection

Key Points

- **Open communication**
- **Engage with emotion**
- **Don't expect perfection**

“The nature of this flower is to bloom.”



Alice Walker, 1973

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