

My brother or sister has cancer

A children's guide to coping with cancer





If you have a brother or sister who has cancer, this booklet is for you.

It tells the story of a girl and boy whose brother has cancer. If there is anything you are not sure about, ask a grown up to help you.





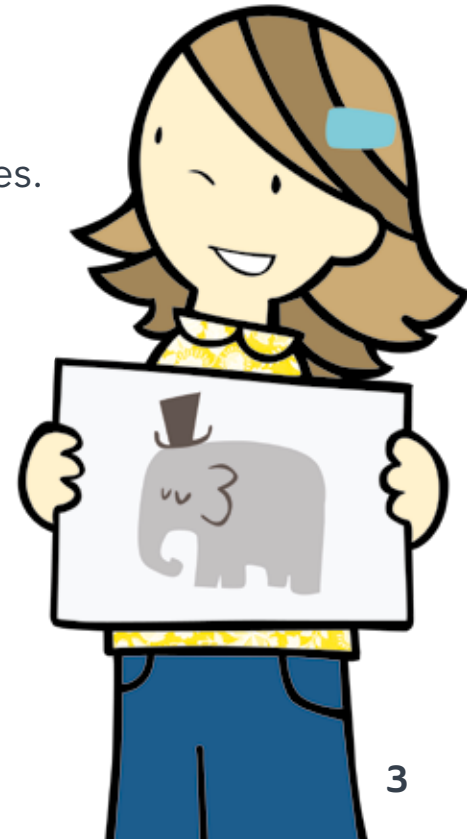
Meet Tom and Jess

They live in a house with their mum, dad and little brother Ben.

Tom is the oldest and loves playing football. He practises bouncing the ball on his knee like the players on TV, but he can really only bounce it once before the ball flies off!

Jess is good at drawing pictures. She would like to be an artist when she grows up.

What would you like to be when you grow up ?



Tom and Jess visit Ben

One day, Tom and Jess came home from school and found that Mum and their little brother Ben weren't there. Dad said Ben was poorly and had gone with Mum to stay at the hospital.

"Can we go and see him?" asked Jess. So they did. The hospital was very big and strange.

Tom and Jess saw lots of people. There were some children asleep in bed, and others were laughing and playing with toys. Some of the children had no hair.

Ben was very quiet and wanted Mum to cuddle him all the time.





On the way home...

Tom and Jess felt strange and worried when they had to go home with Dad and leave Ben and Mum at the hospital.

On the way home, Dad was quiet. Jess felt sad again, but she didn't say anything. Tom didn't keep quiet. He wanted to know why Ben was so ill today. He was cross because he thought the hospital was supposed to make Ben better.



Dad explained Ben has an illness called cancer. The medicines for cancer often make children feel more poorly before they make them better.

How do you
feel when your
brother or sister
is in hospital



Did you know...

- Everyone's body is made up of millions of tiny cells. Sometimes the cells start to divide up to make new cells too quickly and do not do their job properly. Cancer is where lots of damaged cells are made, and this makes someone very poorly
- Children with cancer usually need treatment for a long time, sometimes for more than a year
- Lots of people find it difficult to be with people who are ill
- Lots of brothers and sisters feel their mum and dad don't love them as much as their poorly brother or sister, but this isn't true
- Mums and dads love all their children, but when someone is poorly they need their parents more for a little while

Tom and Jess make new friends

Some days when Tom and Jess visited Ben, he was a bit better and they all played together. But some days Ben was poorly and Jess felt worried and didn't know what to do.

One day some other children were painting and Jess plucked up the courage to join in. Jess painted an elephant with a hat on!

**What do you
do when you are
at the hospital**





Tom started talking to Ismail, who was staying in hospital too. They decided to play a computer game together.

Ben comes home

After a few weeks, Ben and Mum came home from hospital. Tom and Jess thought Ben seemed much better, but Mum and Dad kept checking he was alright and giving him extra treats.

Ben was very excited to be home. He picked up the washing up bowl and ran round the table with it on his head. Everyone laughed. Jess wondered whether Ben's new medicine had made him go a bit mad!

What type
of cancer does
your brother or
sister have



Ben goes to clinic

A couple of days later, Mum had to take Ben back to the hospital to see the doctor. Tom went too. The clinic was hot and very noisy, and they had to wait for a long time. Mum had told Tom to bring his book, but he didn't feel like reading as there was too much to look at.

Some of the children were crying, lots of them seemed to have no hair, and a few had tubes coming out of their noses. Tom began to feel quite ill. He felt hot and panicky and wanted to run away. He got out his book and decided to concentrate on that instead.



Back to school

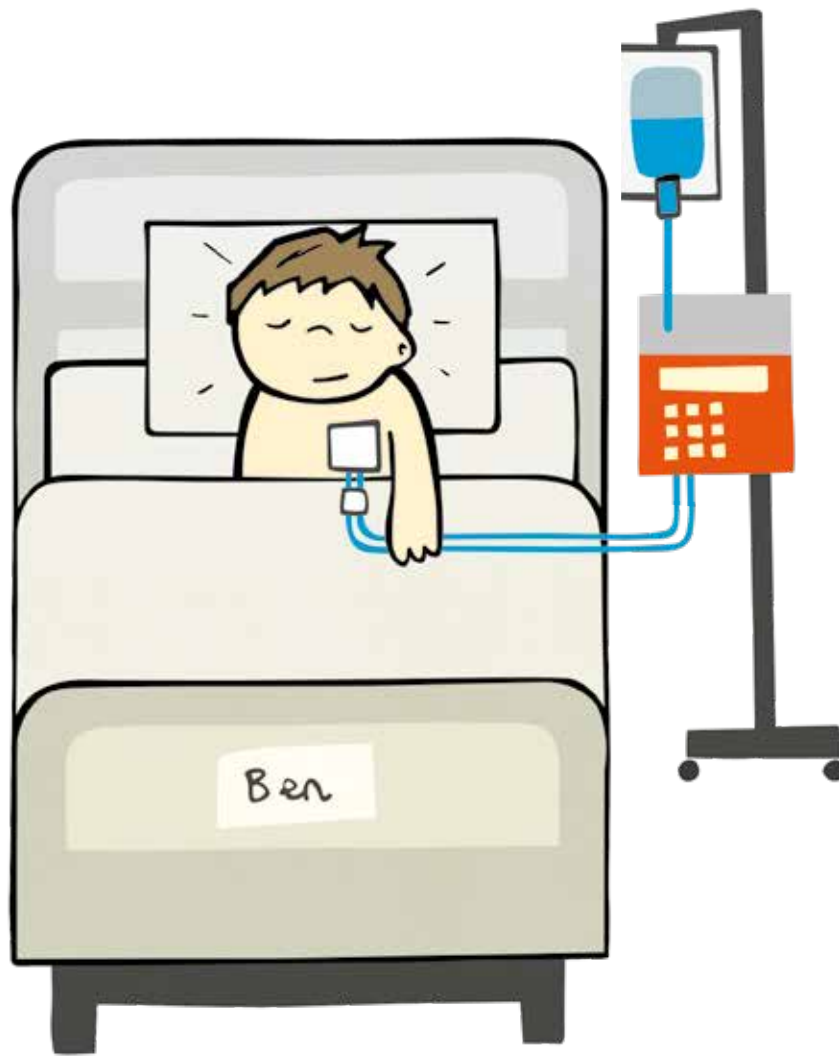
The next day, when Tom and Jess were at school, one of Tom's friends asked why Ben had to keep going to the hospital. Tom explained Ben had cancer.

"Our bodies are all made up of millions of little parts called cells. Cancer is when some of those cells go wrong. Ben has to keep going to the hospital to have medicine to get rid of the cells that have gone wrong."

Did you know...

- There are many different types of cancer
- Very few children get cancer
- Children don't get the same sorts of cancer as adults





Ben goes back to hospital

A few weeks later, Ben had to go and stay in the hospital again. When Tom and Jess saw Ben, the doctors had given him a medicine to make him sleepy and then go to sleep (an anaesthetic), so he could have a small tube put into his skin.

Ben called the tube his 'wiggly'. The wiggly would make it easier for Ben to have medicines and blood tests. Jess wasn't sure about looking at Ben's wiggly, and tried really hard to remember that it would help Ben get better.

Does your brother or sister have a wiggly, or a hidden tube called a port?



Ismail's treatment

Tom saw his friend Ismail again. Ismail told Tom he has had three sorts of treatment for his cancer...

Chemotherapy:

Tablets to swallow,
or medicine put
into his wiggly

Radiotherapy:

Treatment with
invisible beams

Operation:

A lump in his body
caused by cancer
was taken away
by a doctor



*Do you know
what sort of
treatment your
brother or sister
has had*



Ben's hair falls out

A few days later, Ben came back home again. Ben's hair started to fall out. Tom and Jess knew this was because of Ben's chemotherapy. Jess liked to stroke Ben's soft head. That afternoon they all went to the park. Jess could see people were staring at Ben's head. Jess felt cross and embarrassed. She wished Ben had worn a hat.



In the park, Tom practiced bouncing the football on his knee. He thought he was getting better until the ball hit his leg and then hit Ben on the head and made him cry. Dad shouted at Tom for not being careful. Tom was **REALLY** fed up. Mum and Dad were always shouting at him. He wondered if they only loved Ben now.

Tom felt guilty for being cross and hurting Ben, and started to cry. Dad said he was sorry for shouting and wondered whether everyone would like an ice cream. Ice cream was Tom's favourite food, so he chose a really big one!



Did you know...

- Lots of brothers and sisters feel cross. Some feel angry with the doctors and nurses, and some are cross at the poorly brother or sister, or their parents
- It often helps to tell someone why you feel cross

Jess's sports day

The next morning when Tom and Jess woke up, Mum and Ben had gone back to the hospital again.

This time it was because Ben had a high temperature. Jess suddenly remembered today was sports day at school. Now Mum wouldn't be able to come. Jess cried all the way to school.




Did you know...

- Children with cancer should stay away from people with infections, like a cold.
- But everyone with cancer gets some infections, it's not anybody's fault.

When Jess got to school, her teacher Mrs Jakes was really nice and let her help give out the books. Jess thought Mrs Jakes knew how hard it was to have a poorly brother.

That afternoon, Jess tried really hard at sports day. She got third prize in the egg and spoon race. Jess felt very proud and knew Mum and Dad would be when she told them later.



Did you know...

- Sometimes infections mean children have to go back to hospital.



Tom talks to Mum about his worries

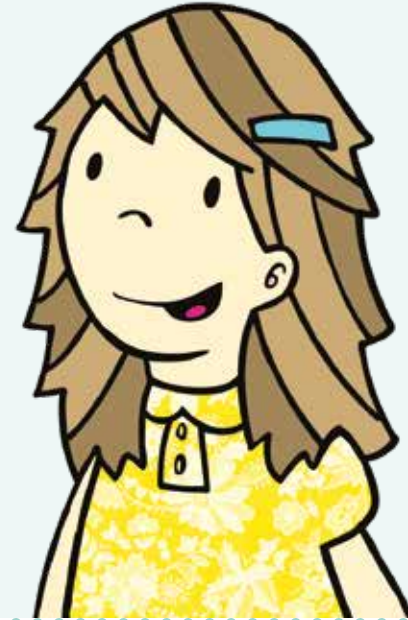
One night when he was in bed,
Tom started to worry that he might
get cancer too.

Tom switched on the light and checked
his body. It looked okay. But Tom still felt
worried and went downstairs. When
Mum realised Tom was worried, she
explained nobody knows why children
get cancer, but you definitely can't
catch it from someone else.

Tom felt a bit better after talking
to Mum. They decided it is much
better to tell someone when you
are worried than to keep your
worries in your head.

Did you know...

- Nothing you or anyone else did made your brother or sister get cancer.
- It's really hard being the brother or sister of someone who is poorly.
- When things are tough, it's helpful to talk to people you trust. You could try someone at school, an aunt, uncle, grandma, grandad, or someone else you trust.



Do you worry like
Tom and Jess?

Jess liked to be with Ben when he was in hospital so that she could watch and make sure he was ok.

Tom liked being with his friends best. Sometimes Tom started thinking about Ben when he was trying to do something else. Tom found playing football made it easier not to worry. Tom knew he was getting much better at football, but still couldn't bounce the ball on his knee.



A nurse visits the school

A nurse came to the school to tell the children about Ben and his illness. Here are some of the questions the children asked.

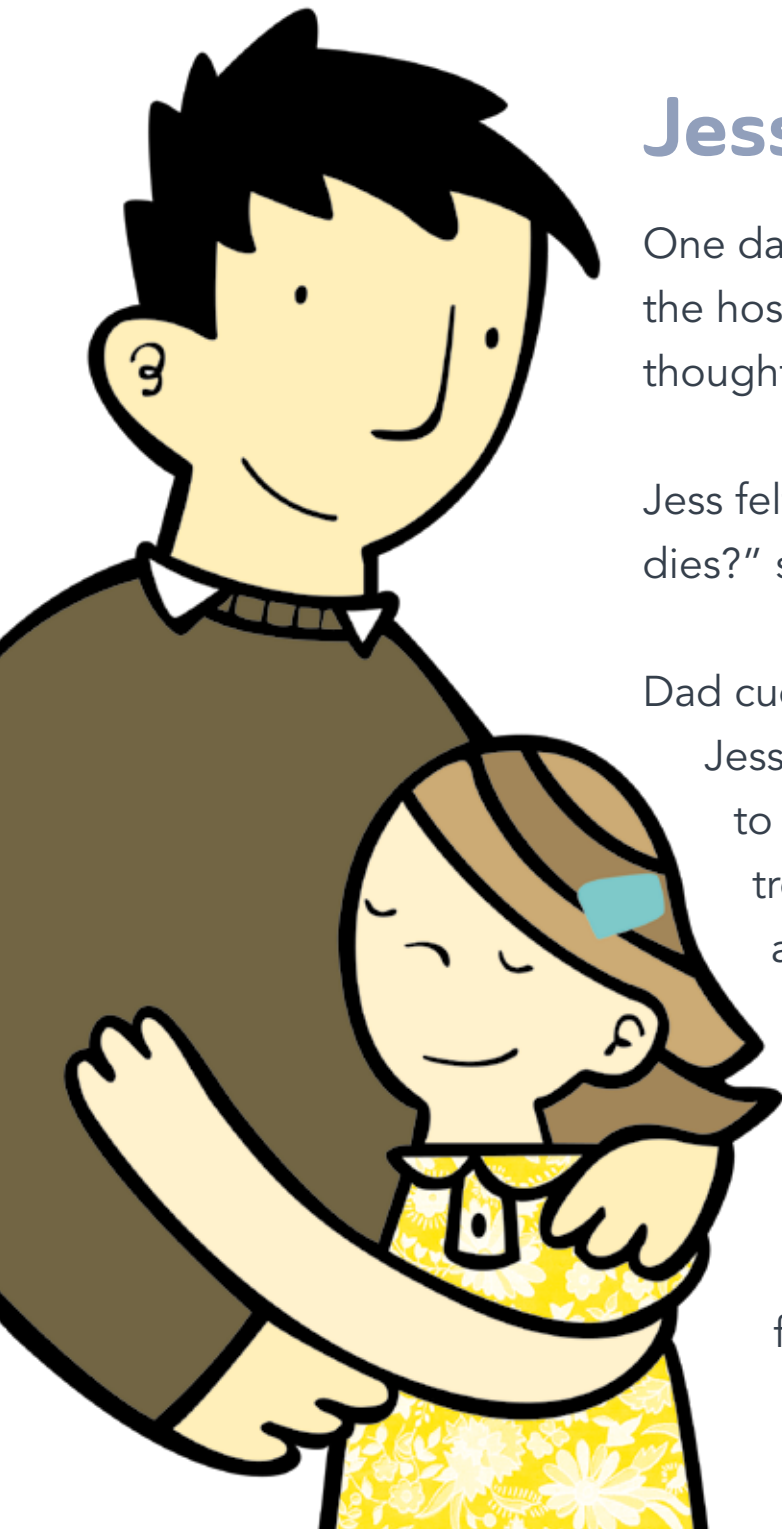
See how many you can answer...

1. Do children get the same sorts of cancer as adults?
2. Does the hair grow back after the end of treatment?
3. Can you catch cancer?
4. Can the treatment make children feel more poorly before they feel better?



Did you know...

- Some questions seem too frightening to ask. Do you have any questions like this?
- It's very hard if you don't know whether someone will get better. Sometimes it helps to think about all the good things that might happen.



Jess felt frightened

One day when Dad came home from the hospital he looked very sad and Jess thought he might have been crying.

Jess felt very frightened. "What if Ben dies?" she cried to Dad.

Dad cuddled Jess for a long time while Jess cried. After a while they started to talk. They remembered that the treatment for cancer gets better all the time, and there is a good chance Ben will be ok.

Dad said that whatever happens, they will always love all their children. Jess felt a bit better.

Jess and Tom keep busy

Over the next few weeks, Jess did lots of drawing and started to make a scrapbook telling the story of what had happened in their family since Ben had been poorly.

Tom practised and practised with his football. One morning whilst practising, Tom bounced the ball on his knee. Not once, not twice, but three times! And then he did it three more times!

Ben finished treatment

After a very long time, the doctors said that Ben's treatment was finished. Jess and Tom helped to make a cake to celebrate. Ben still has to go to the hospital for check-ups.

Jess and Tom know Mum and Dad still worry about Ben. Everyone still worries about Ben sometimes.

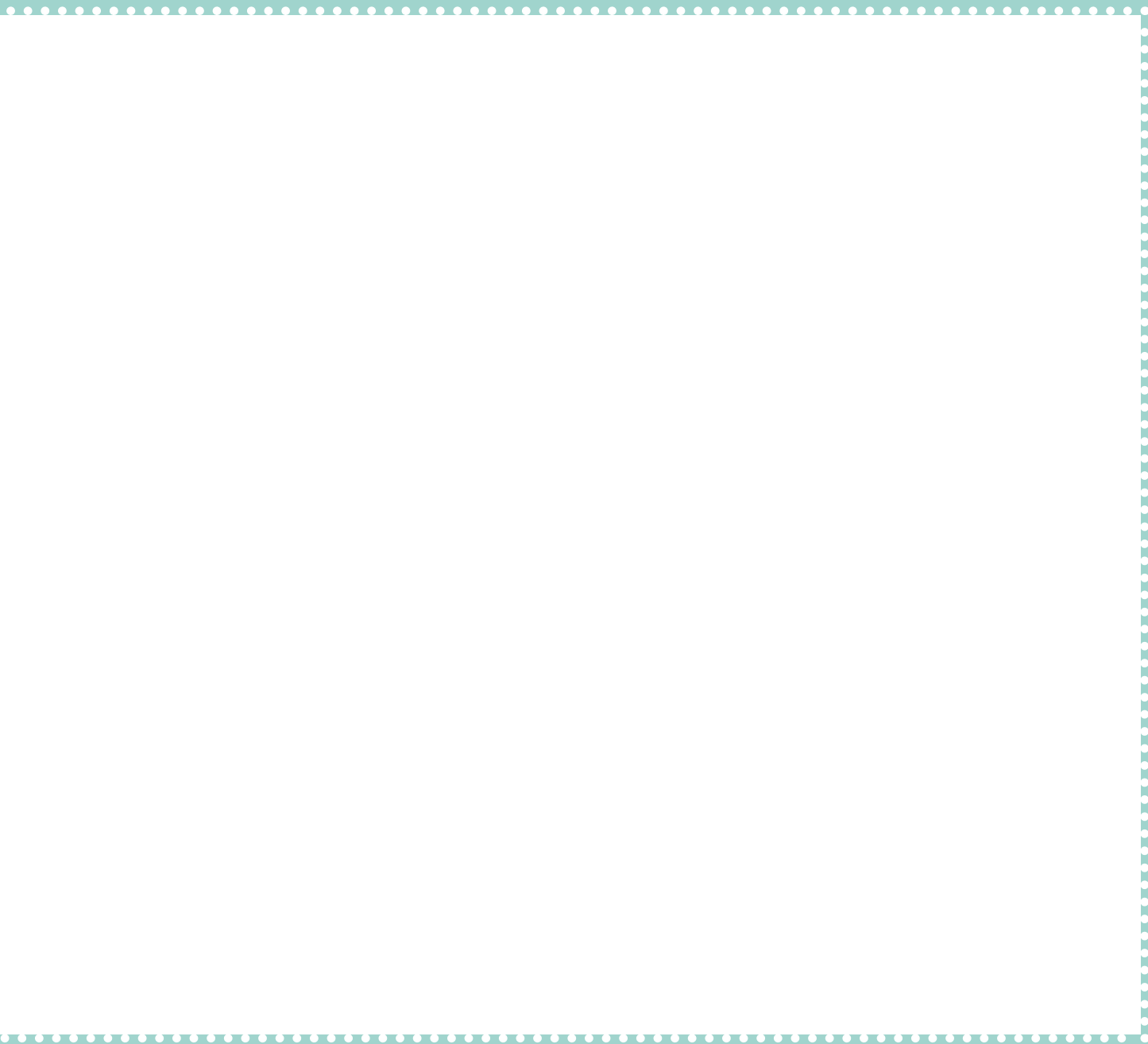
But most of all, Tom, Jess and Ben are looking forward to going on holiday to the seaside.

And Tom thinks a top football coach might go on holiday to the same place! Maybe he'll see how good Tom is, and maybe one day we'll all see Tom on the TV!



Draw a picture or write a story about what has happened in your family since your brother or sister has been poorly.







Children's
Cancer and
Leukaemia
Group



Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group is a leading children's cancer charity and the UK and Ireland's professional association for those involved in the treatment and care of children with cancer. Each week in the UK and Ireland, more than 30 children are diagnosed. Two out of ten children will not survive their disease.

We bring together childhood cancer professionals to ensure all children receive the best possible treatment and care. We fund and support research into childhood cancers, and we help young patients and their families with our expert, high quality and award-winning information resources.

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Original booklet written by Katherine Green in association with the CCLG Publications Committee, comprising multiprofessional experts in the field of children's cancer. Illustrated by Simon Pritchard.

Publication of this booklet was funded by The Emily Bailes Fund, a Special Named Fund at CCLG.

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First published: May 2004
This edition: August 2016
Next review date: August 2019

If you have any comments on this booklet, please contact us.

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