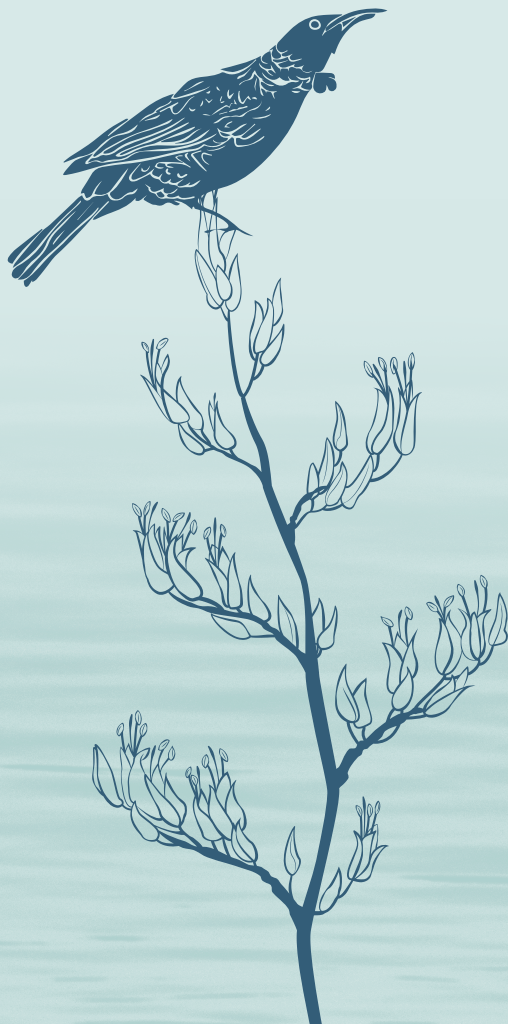


Talking to children - Kōrero ki āu tamariki

‘Every time I thought about telling the kids, I cried. Speaking to a counsellor helped me frame things up, and I eventually made a support plan for them and me.’

Young person



If you are a parent or caregiver or are close to tamariki in your whānau, you may feel a protective instinct to shield them from difficult news. It's important to remember that children are often aware of what's happening around them and can be sensitive to it. Being honest can help them understand the situation better.

Deciding how much information to share and when to share it can be a tricky process and involves considering various factors, such as their age and the extent to which your illness has progressed.

Seeking support to help you make the right decision for your whānau can be a good option. It can also be helpful to involve your partner and other whānau in the process so that you can provide consistent support to the children / tamariki in your life as they learn to cope with the news and what it means for them.

Tip

Telling tamariki isn't a one-off conversation. Instead, you will likely have a number of smaller conversations over time. Younger children need to be told the truth bit by bit to allow them the time to adjust while still dealing with their everyday lives.

What resources are there to help me with what to say?

The charity Kenzie's Gift has a booklet, "Talking to tamariki (children) and mātatāhi (young people) about terminal illness", which you can download from their website. It is a comprehensive guide to discussing illness and death with children of various ages and is a valuable resource to help guide you through the process. There are also tools for teachers and friends.

The Cancer Society and KidsHealth websites also have resources and information to help guide you with conversations with tamariki. They also provide a helpful list of book recommendations for talking to children about a serious illness.



KidsHealth

A great website to go to for medical information in an easy-to-understand, child-friendly format.



Skylight

An organisation supporting people of any age through change, loss, and grief. It provides downloadable information and resources.



Kenzie's Gift

Provides information for friends, whānau, and teachers and free counselling for children and young people with a sibling or parent with a life-limiting illness.



Child Cancer Foundation

Provides support for parents of a young person with cancer aged under 20, and support for their siblings aged 13 and younger.



Canteen

Supports those aged 12-24 years with a cancer diagnosis or who have a parent or sibling with cancer.

What about my siblings?

Whether you live in the same house or not, this news will impact your siblings. It might be helpful to designate a whānau member or friend that they are close to that can help them process this news and check in on them.

There are also organisations that provide free support for young people up to 24 years of age affected by the serious illness of a sibling, such as Kenzie's Gift and Canteen.

If your sibling is distressed or starts acting out, try and have some empathy and patience. If they are old enough, then include them as much as possible.

Hang out, chat, cry, laugh, and answer their questions. Be the brother or sister you usually are with them, so they don't feel isolated when the focus shifts to your health and care.

Tip

It can be helpful to let someone at your child or sibling's school know about your illness so that they can provide an additional layer of support for them and your whānau. By sharing this information, the school will be more understanding of any changes in their behaviour or attendance. Many schools offer resources and counselling services which may be beneficial.

