


# Let's talk about...

## Having Difficult Conversations

**S**haring hard news with kids can be tough, and especially challenging when you aren't sure where to start. Being honest and clear is best.

### Here are a few tips:

- **Start early and keep talking:** Use words children will understand and share a little bit at a time. This gives them a chance to process things at their own speed.
  - **Use a “conversation starter”:** Try asking, “Can you tell me what you’ve already heard about this?” Use the response as a starting point and expand on the story by sharing background information (how the medical situation unfolded) and any current details that may be helpful. This may include how long the hospital stay may be, treatment plan, etc.
  - **Be ready for different feelings:** Kids may have many different feelings and that’s okay. Sometimes they might just want to go play instead of talking. It’s helpful to validate their feelings and help them find positive outlets for expression.
  - **Let them ask questions:** It’s okay if you don’t have all the answers. You can tell them, “I don’t know right now, but I will try to find out for you.”
- 
- **Show your own feelings:** When kids see you expressing feelings, it lets them know it is okay for them to feel that way, too. Also helpful to talk about coping strategies for big feelings. For example, you may say, “When I’m feeling worried, I take 5 deep breaths to help me calm down and focus on what I can control right now.”
  - **Ask for help:** You don’t have to do this alone. Lean on family, friends, or hospital staff to support you and your child.

For more information or to connect with a Child Life Specialist, please visit: <http://ucdavis.health/childlife>