The Magic Tree: Help for Families Dealing With Breast Cancer

April 10, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

This post is sponsored by Celgene Corporation to review and share information about a new app to help children understand their mother's breast cancer diagnosis called The Magic Tree. All opinions and thoughts are my own.

When I sat my kids down to tell them I had cancer, it was hard. I didn't have any resources on how to describe what was going on. I didn't know how I would handle it, and forget about how to help them handle it.

Of course, as a mom, I had to be stoic and positive that I would beat it and that all would be OK, but that it would take time to get there without really knowing what that "time" meant

I wished there was a way to communicate with them that they could understand. At 9 and 6, they were not yet able to handle terminology or be told to look things up on their own. I was on my own. I just knew that the treatment hospital had suggested I tell them as soon as possible and not let them hear about it by someone else or by innuendo. I got it and know how smart my kids are (all kids now come out smart) but I had no idea how to address this topic.

Celgene came up with an app called The Magic Tree and it is something that I wish had been around when I was diagnosed. It uses child-like explanations, with a glossary, videos and games to help explain a cancer diagnosis. It is a free app available for iPhones and Androids, and you can download it right now from the App Store or Google Play Store.

It takes the child and parent through the four different levels. The home where the discussion is centered around "Is it my fault?" is so age appropriate, as most kids blame themselves for everything. The app also offers a library for a child to look things up about cancer. It talks about sharing your feelings a lot. We definitely needed that for one of my kids.

The next level is about "Can you catch cancer?" Again, it reiterates about sharing feelings and understanding that others might say, "Oh cancer, people die," and that this is not always true. The third level is "What is cancer?"

While I liked it, I did find it a little jarring because it mentions how fast cancer grows and how it can spread to distant places. On the one hand, the activist in me loves this because ⅓ of patients with early stage cancer become stage 4, but it was a bit scary for my kids because they both

asked, “Wait, that did not happen with you, did it?” It was good though because it did allow me to explain that my cancer did not spread beyond my lymph nodes. I find it hard, still, to explain to a now 7- and 10-year-old what could happen regarding cancer and me.

Fourth level is “How do you treat breast cancer?” This was very informative about how the cells get out of control and what can be done. The order of treatment was a bit off — chemotherapy, I think, would always be done before radiation and sometimes surgery is not done before chemotherapy and some folks do not get chemo, etc. But, all in all, it was informative and helpful to explain how it goes. Each section talks about the love mom still has for the child and how you can still spend time together no matter what.

Each level also has games to break up the heaviness of the topics, which I (and my kids) liked. I would like to see the mom with a little girl, in addition to the boy and maybe moms that looks like other moms, too. Perhaps future iterations will have different moms/kids for each of the 4 sections? Just a thought to make it more diverse.

All in all, this is a great tool to use for families who have a mom diagnosed with breast cancer. It can help explain tough things for both the mom, family and the kids! Thanks, Celgene!

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http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/magic-tree-help-families-dealing-breast-cancer