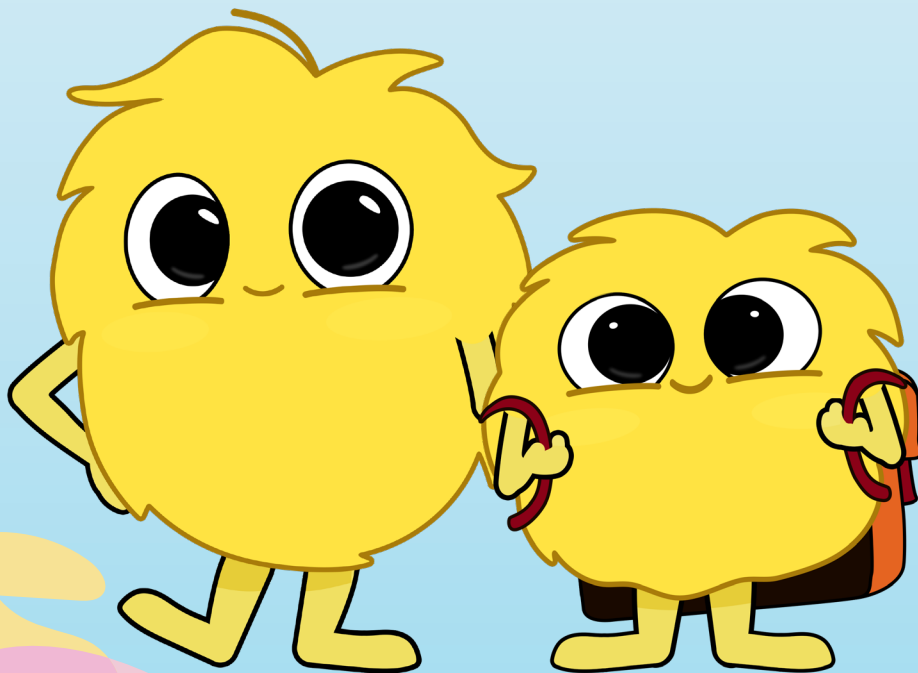


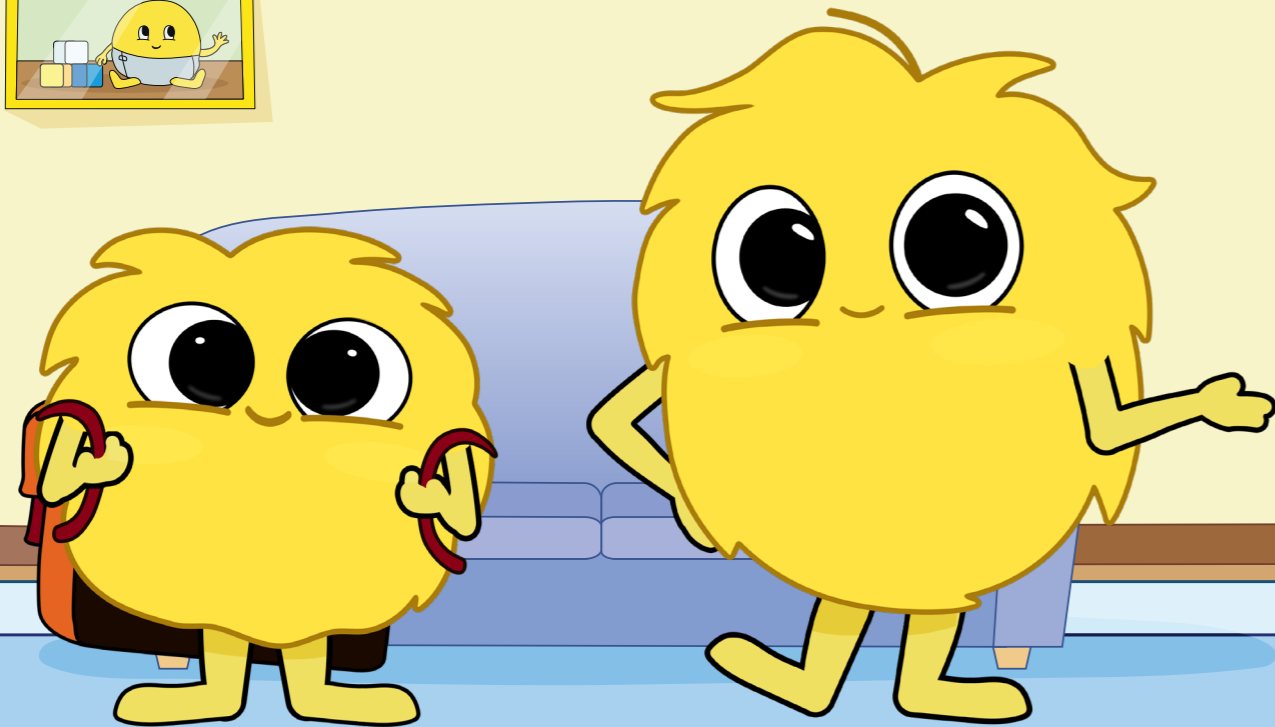
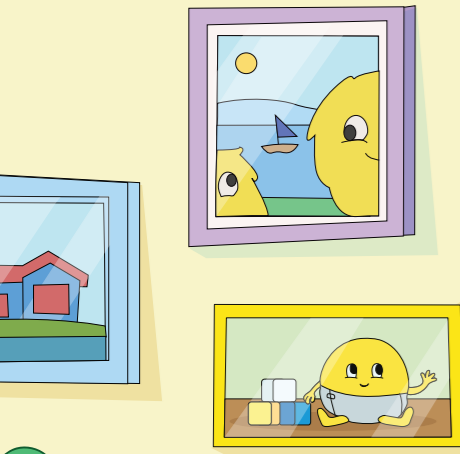
# When Mitzy the Foggie Got Cancer



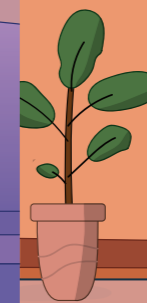
Cancer Council Queensland • Queensland Government

Once upon a time in a place not far from here, there lived two Foggles, Squish and Mitzy.

Foggles are incredible creatures. They're like us with arms and legs and hearts and heads. But with one key difference.



Foggles have a special fur. And when a Fogle feels a feeling like happy or sad, or angry and mad their fur changes color.



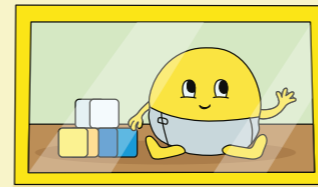
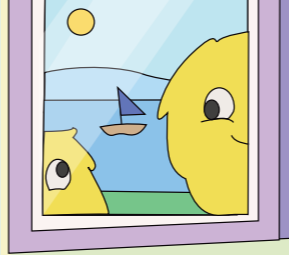
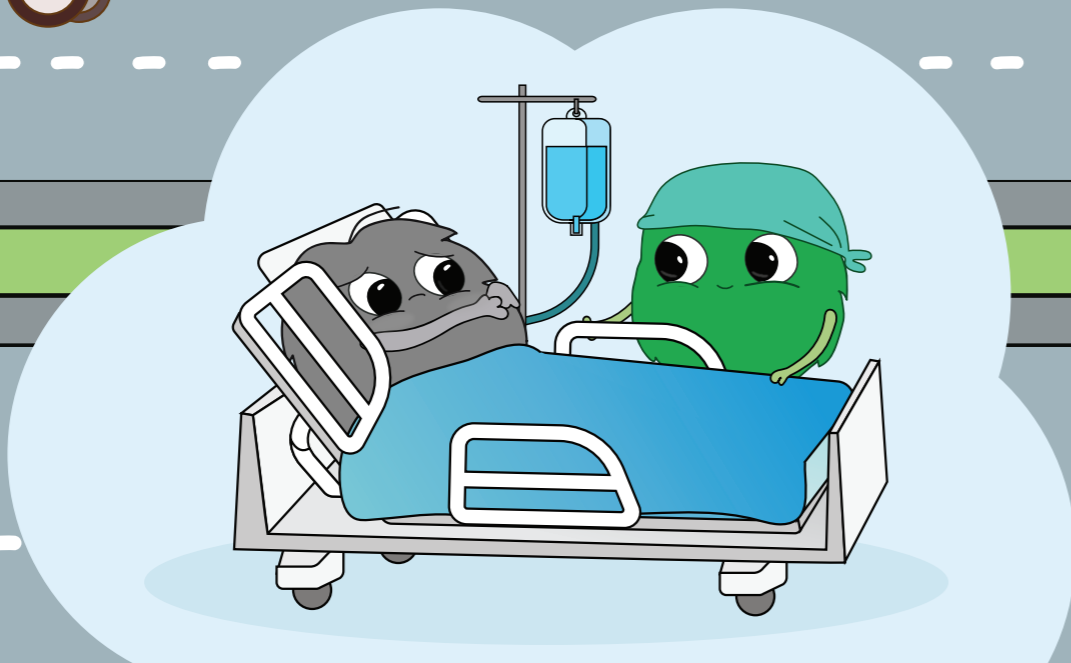
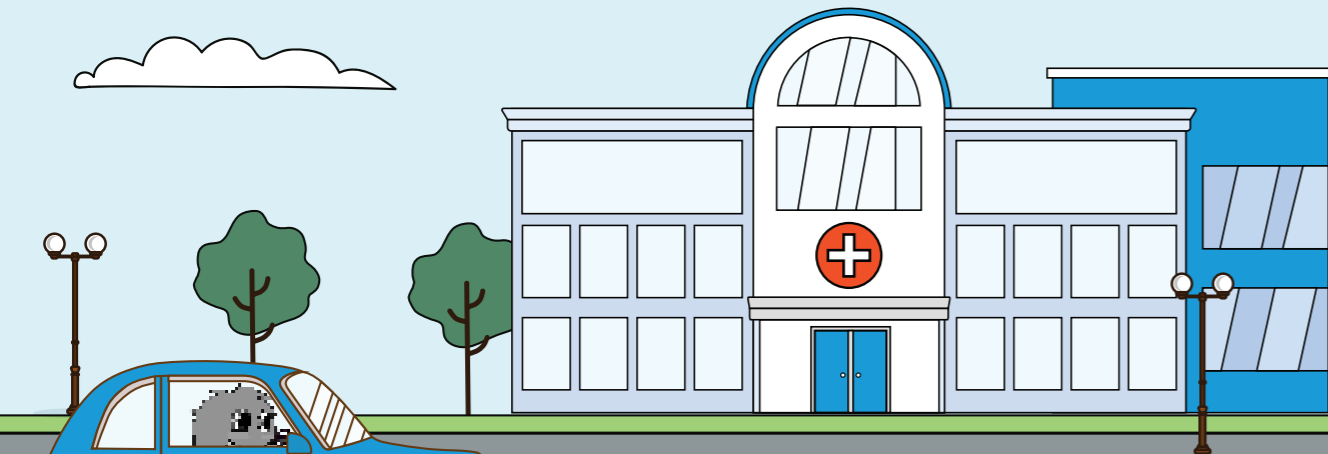


Squish and Mitzy, they're a pretty good team. And when Foggles feel like they're part of a team, their fur turns green.

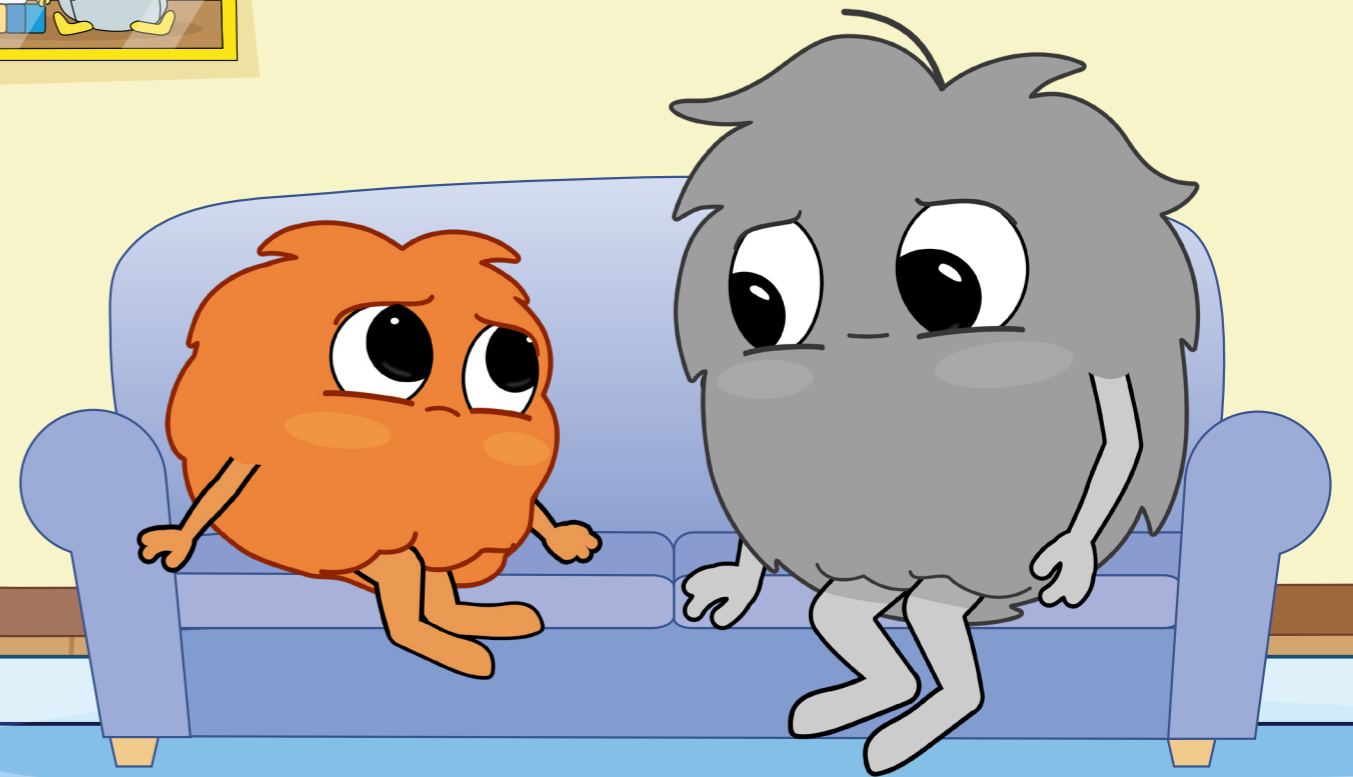


But one day, Mitzy turned grey.  
Foggles turn grey when they feel sick.  
It wasn't a usual sick feeling,  
like aching or sniffles.

So, Mitzy went to the doctor,  
and they did test after test after test.



Squish had so many questions. When Foggles  
have a lot of questions, they turn orange.  
The best thing you can do with  
questions is ask them.



“What did the doctor say?  
Are you okay?  
Will you be better soon?”  
Squish asked

“Oh, Squish. I have something called cancer,” Mitzy replied

“Is that like a cold?” Squish asked, a little confused.

“No Squish. Cancer is something different,” Mitzy said.

“But...” Squish went quiet.

Mitzy explained that cancer isn't like a cold  
or flu or tummy bug or headache.

Instead, cancer is what happens when bad cells grow inside your body.

Every time Mitzy answered a question, Squish had two more.

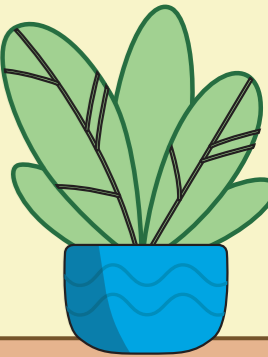
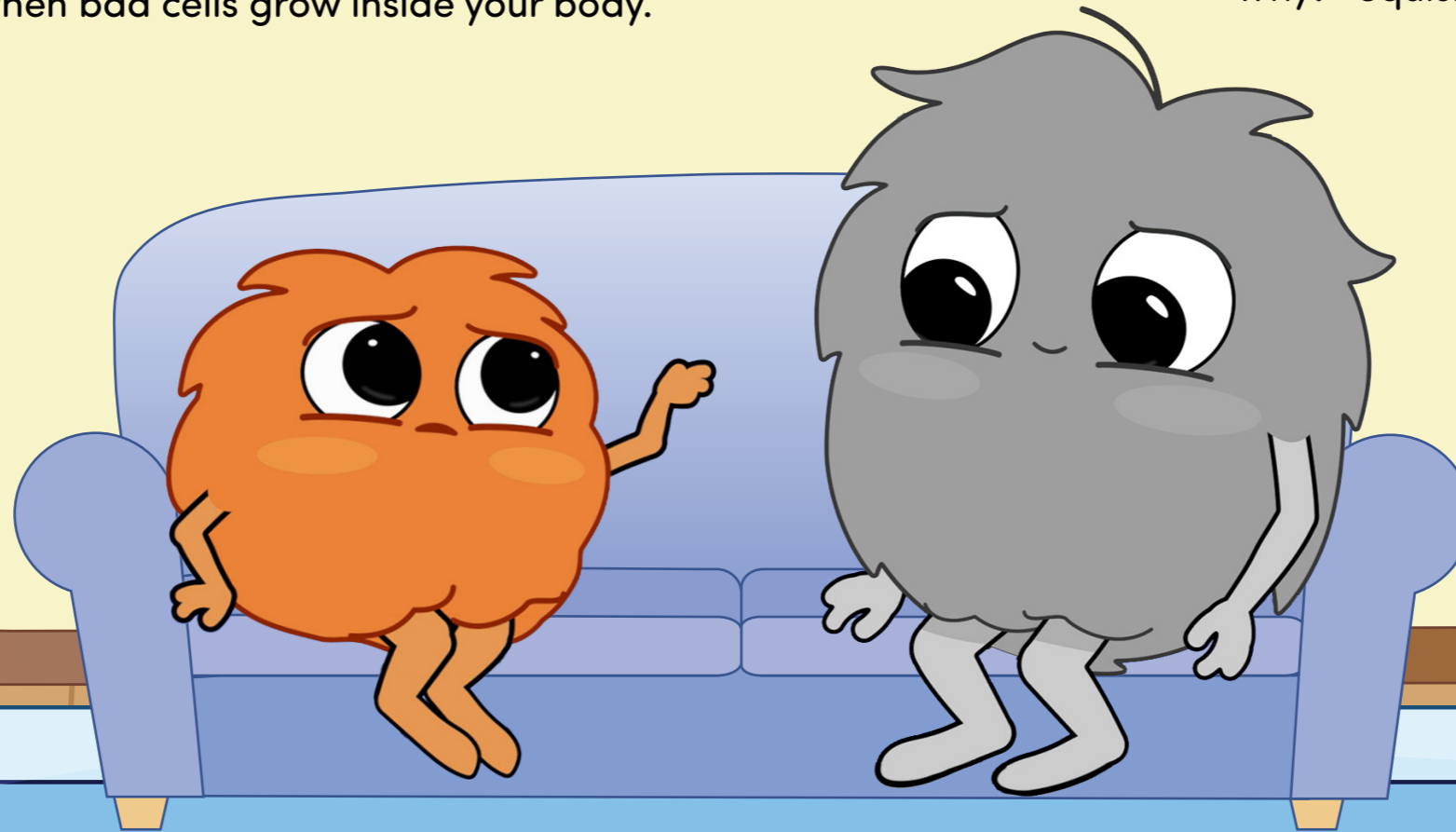
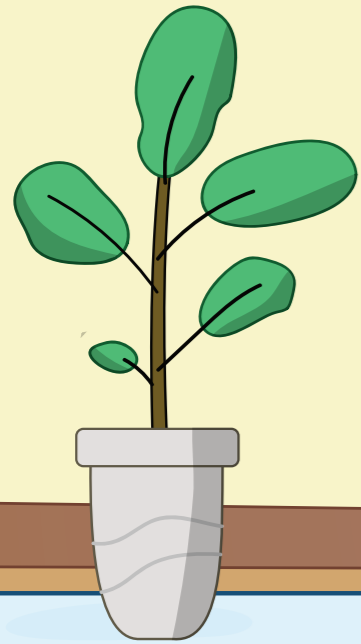
And that's okay, because it's always okay to ask questions.

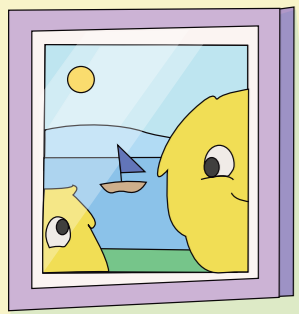
“Did you catch it from someone? Do I have it?

Did I give it to you?” Squish asked.

“Oh, no. No. And no. Cancer's not something you  
catch. It just happens,” Mitzy told Squish.

“Why?” Squish wanted to know.





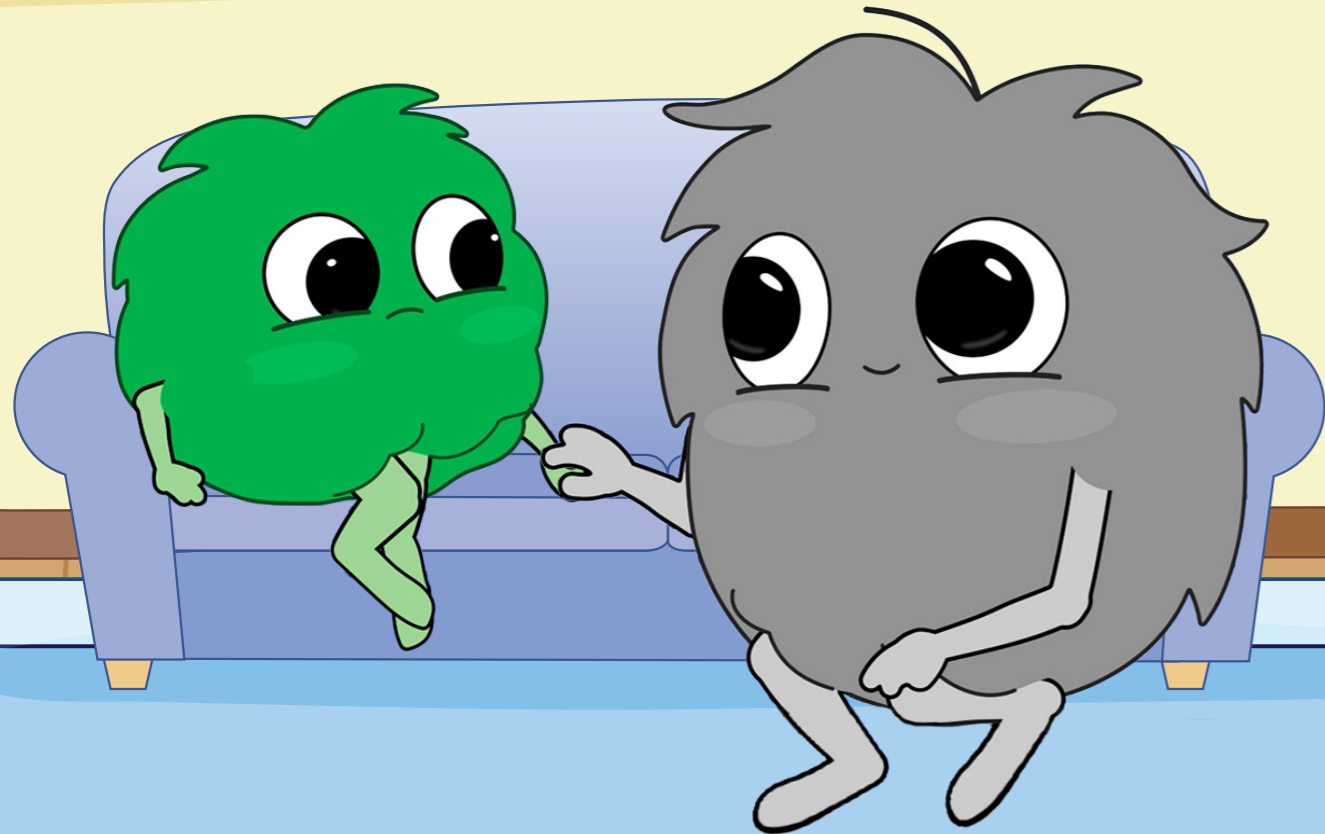
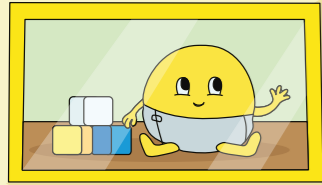
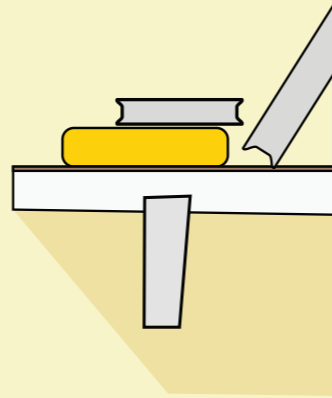
Some questions, Mitzy couldn't answer.

"I don't know," Mitzy said.

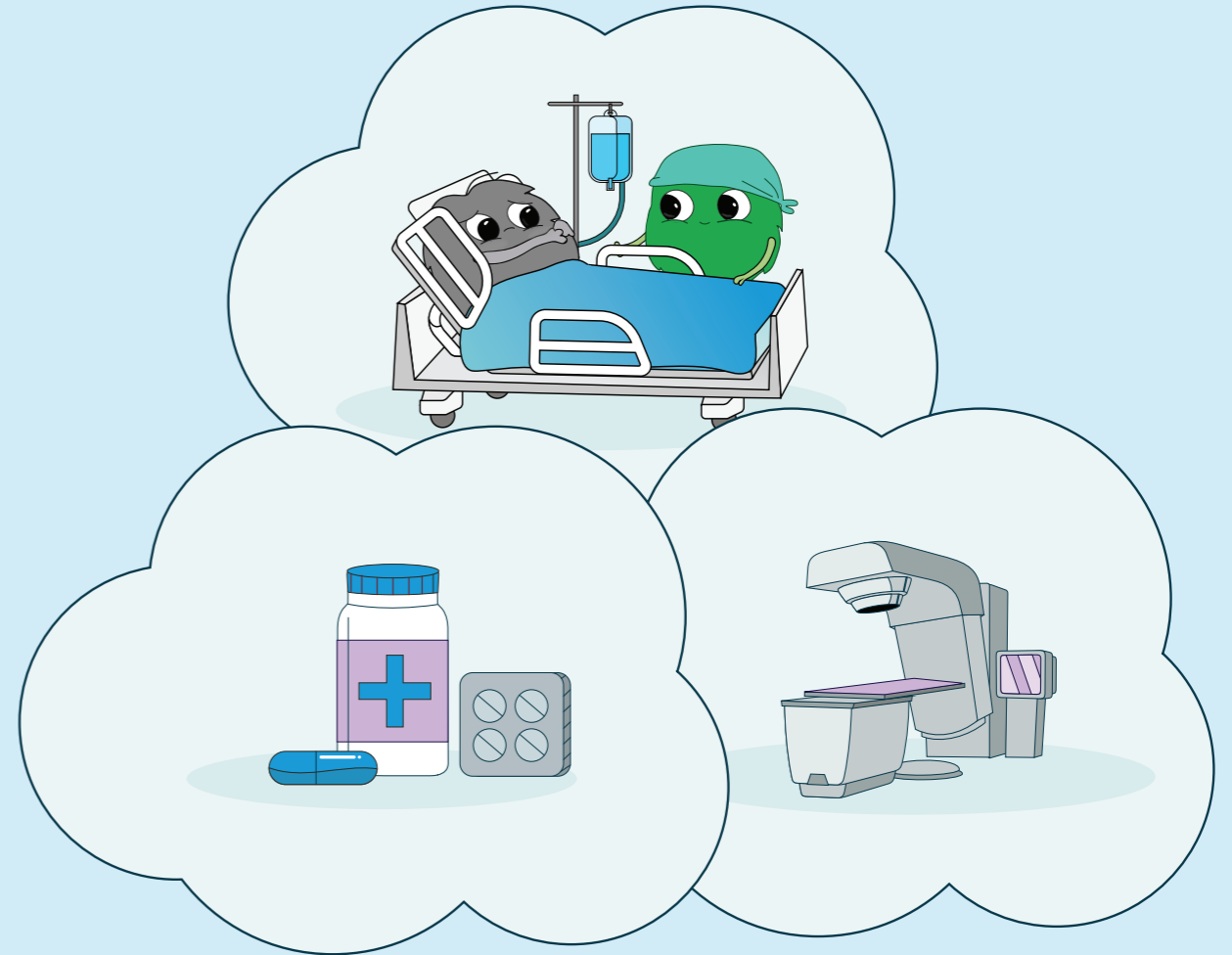
"We're still a team, right?" Squish asked.

"Of course we are," Mitzy replied.

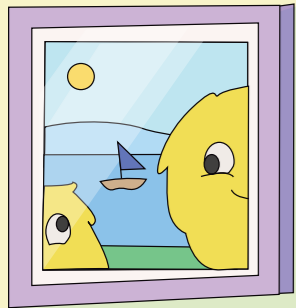
"But what's going to happen?" Squish said.



"Well, the doctor and I are making a plan. There are lots of ways to treat cancer. Sometimes you take medicine, sometimes you have an operation. There's even a special machine that doctors use to melt the cancer inside you," Mitzy smiled.

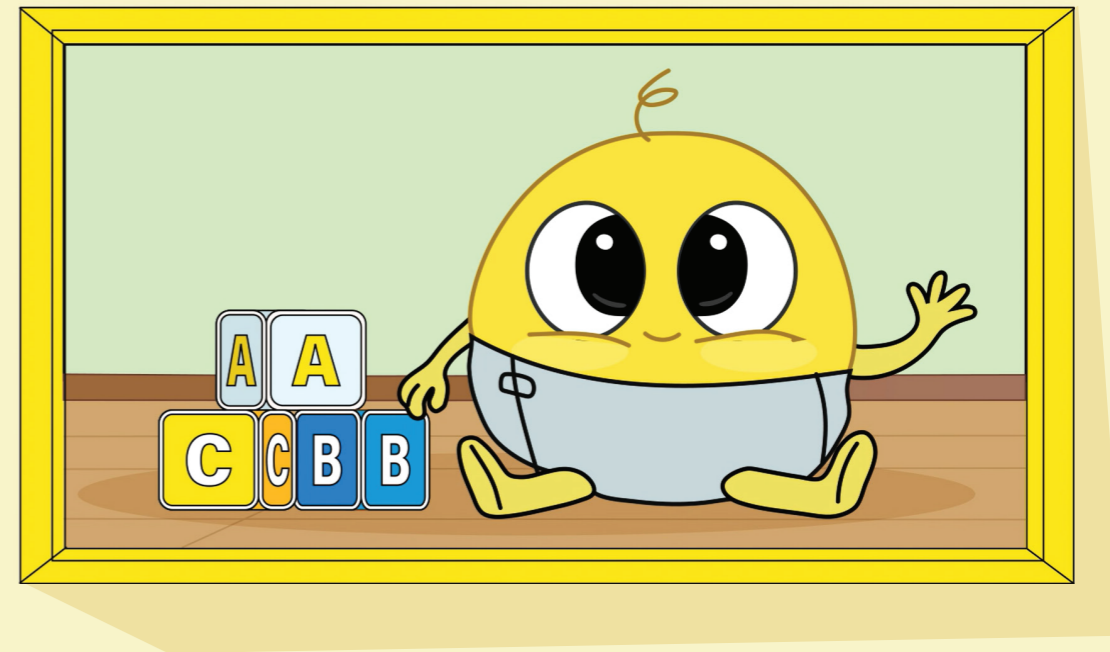
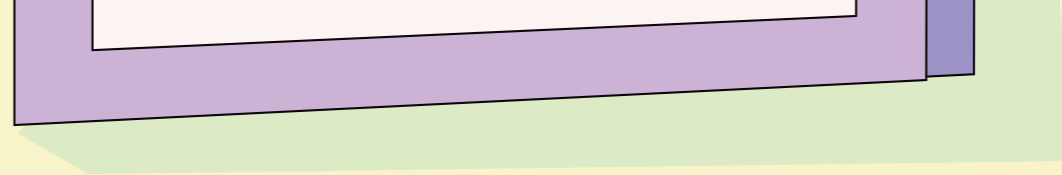
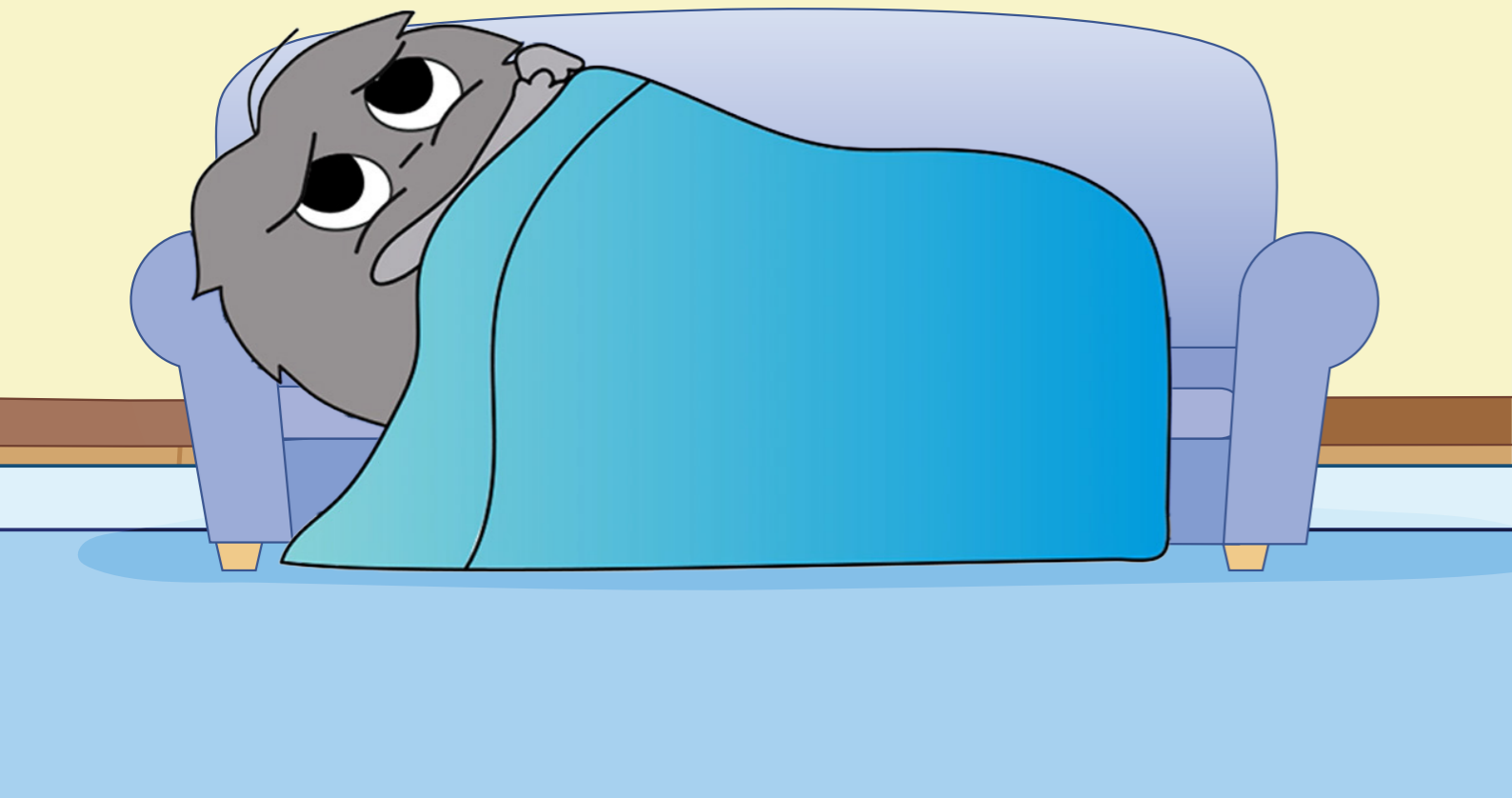
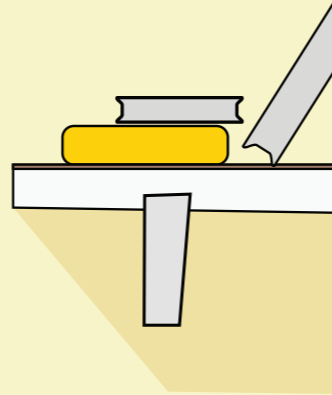
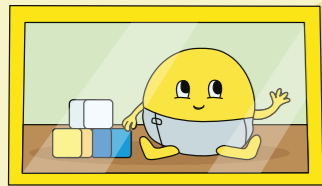






"Wow. Doesn't all this hurt?"  
Squish asked, still a bit orange.

"Well, sometimes. Some days will  
be like any other. Other days I may  
not feel so well. I may not be all that  
hungry. I might get tired. Some days,  
I may even be too tired to play.



"I may even lose my hair!" Mitzy said.

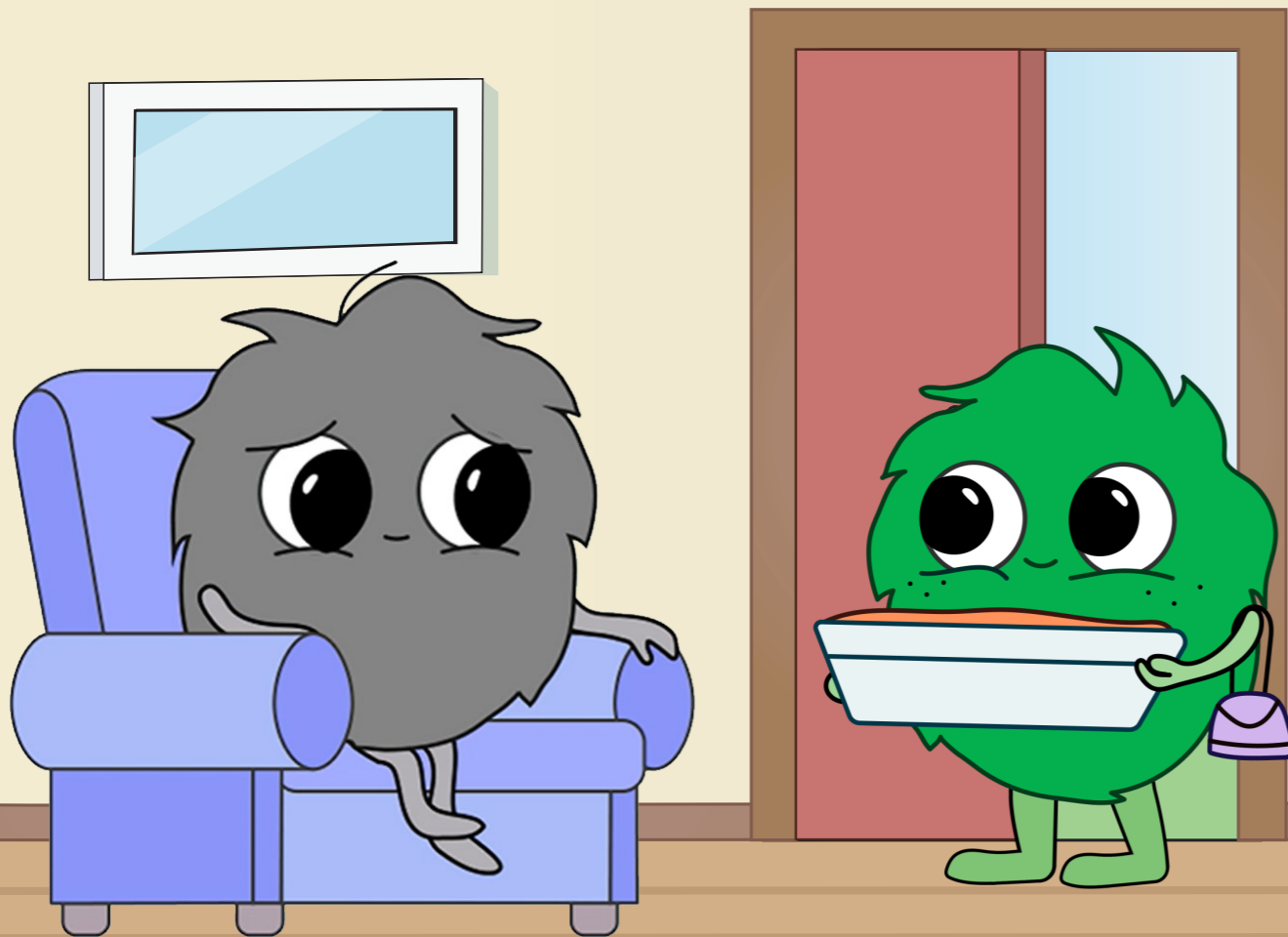
"Oh no!" Squish exclaimed.

"It's okay. I'll look just like you in your baby photo,"  
Mitzy laughed.

"Cute!" said Squish.

"I may need help sometimes. So some of our favourite Foggles will come over to help out," Mitzy said.

"Can I help too? I want to be a part of the plan!" Squish wanted to know.



But then...

"I'm angry. I'm angry at cancer for making you feel bad. I'm angry that things have to change," Squish shouted.

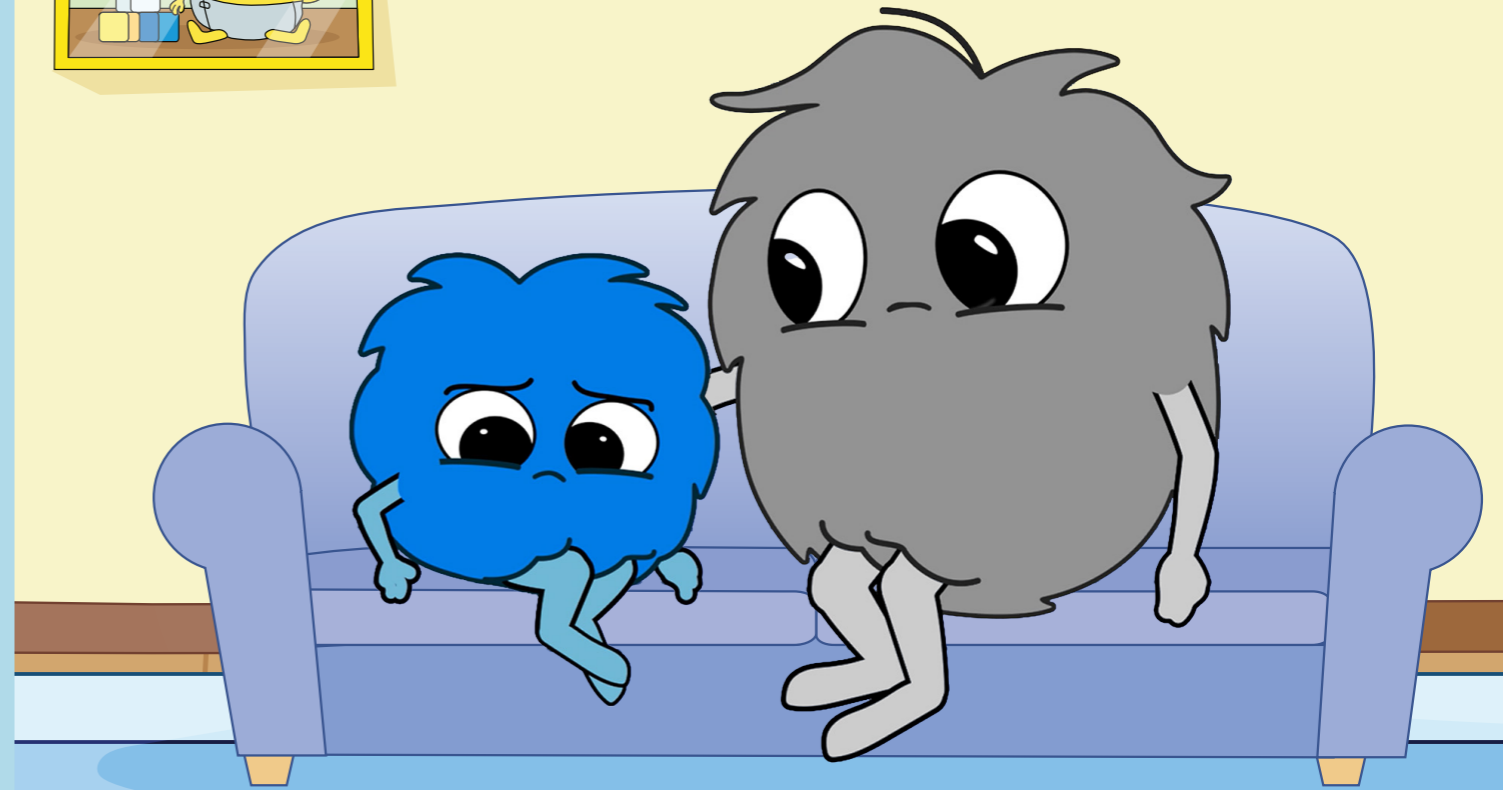
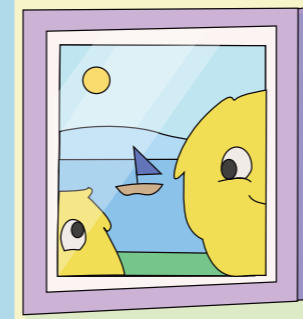
"I know. Me too," Mitzy said.



Mitzy was right. Cancer was a special kind of sickness.  
As time went on Squish had lots of new questions, but  
Squish always remembered it's okay to ask.



From time to time, both Squish and Mitzy  
would feel all kinds of feelings.  
Sometimes strong feelings, and that was okay  
because they were there for each other.





There was always something for Squish to do to help Mitzy when Mitzy wasn't feeling well. Cancer meant that some things had to change.

But not everything.

The important things stayed the same.

Squish and Mitzy still did things together. They still loved each other, and they stayed a team.

No matter what.

*The end.*



## A note for parents

One in two Australians will be diagnosed with cancer during their lifetime. As a result, many children's lives will be touched by a loved one's diagnosis. This may be a parent, grandparent, family member, friend, or teacher.

It is important to talk to children about cancer in a way that is age appropriate, hopeful, and honest. We have aimed to provide a story that can serve as a starting point for this conversation with your children.

### Starting the conversation

The first step is to talk openly with your children about cancer, providing opportunities for them to ask questions.

The following guidelines may help to start these conversations. These suggestions are a summary of information available in the booklet *Talking to Kids about Cancer*.

### Find out what the child already knows

Children pay attention to almost everything, especially when the information relates to important people in their lives. It is helpful to start by finding out what your children have heard, noticed, or started to imagine about the illness. Even if you have not yet spoken to your children about cancer, they may have beliefs about cancer based on things they have observed. Having an open discussion helps you to know what the child understands currently. It also gives you a chance to talk about and correct any worries or misunderstandings.

“Have you noticed any changes lately? What do you think is going on?”

### Use real words

Use the word cancer when you tell your child about the illness. Clear language can prevent all sorts of misunderstandings. For example, if you say, “Grandma is sick”, a child may believe all sickness is the same. This may cause issues if the child becomes unwell and believes they have developed the same illness as Grandma.

“Grandma has a sickness called cancer. It's not a regular sickness like a cold or an ache. You can't catch it because it isn't contagious, but it means she will have to go to the hospital and get special doctors to help her. It may take a while.”

### Be truthful and hopeful

Let your child know the medical team is working very hard to help the person become strong and well again. It is also helpful for the child to know the person may feel a little worse as the medicine (e.g. chemotherapy, radiation, immunotherapy) is working, but that everyone hopes the person feels better when the treatment is over.

“Because cancer is strong, they have to use strong medicine to help Grandma feel better. This means Grandma will probably feel pretty sick until the medication is finished, but everyone hopes Grandma will be feeling better after that.”

### Encourage questions

Children of all ages will have lots of different questions. Often these questions will be based on the child's age and level of understanding. Sometimes the questions will focus on how the child themselves might be involved (e.g. “did I cause the cancer?”) While this book covers some common questions, it is important to encourage children to ask any and all questions. This will prevent children from developing incorrect beliefs about the cancer.

### Reassure your children that they will be cared for

Let them know that even if you can't always provide the care directly, their needs are important and will be taken care of.

### How to use this story book

Read *When Mitzy the Foggie Got Cancer* with your child and use it to start a conversation.

- Invite your child to express his or her thoughts or feelings.
- If someone close to the child (or yourself) has cancer, talk about the ways that your own experiences are similar or different to the story.
- Does the child have any ideas about how they can help someone with cancer?

## Ensure your child knows they can bring all their questions to you, and you will talk about them.

Read *Talking to Kids about Cancer*, in particular pages 41–43, to understand some of the different types of questions each child may have based on their age.

## Check the recommended resources listed on the back page of this story book.

Help your child understand they can't make cancer better or worse, but they can help the person feel better in lots of ways (e.g. hugs, drawing pictures, being helpful, making jokes).

## Group chat

Sometimes after sharing a story a child may have some questions about the story content and how that story relates to them. Below are some questions which may be helpful to start a conversation. Please note it is not essential to ask all of these, they are intended as a selection of questions to suit every family.

- Do you think cancer was anybody's fault?
- How was Squish going to help Mitzy?
- Were there going to be changes?
- What stayed the same?
- Did that story remind you of anyone?
- Can you think of anyone like Mitzy or Squish?
- How can you help out (the person affected by cancer)?
- What do you do if you have questions?

Answer you children's questions as accurately as possible. Consider their age and prior experience with serious illness in the family. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't panic. It's okay to say, "I don't know. I will try to find out the answer and let you know."

The suggestions in this booklet were developed with the help of Cancer Council Queensland's Cancer Counselling Service. For more information, please visit [www.cancerqld.org.au](http://www.cancerqld.org.au) or call **13 11 20**.

## Helpful resources

The purpose of this guide is to help you find information on and support for cancer diagnosis, treatment and survivorship. This guide provides links and references to reliable and current information sources for patients, families, and caregivers.

### Help for parents

Cancer Council Queensland  
*Talking to Kids about Cancer*

Available online: [www.cancerqld.org.au](http://www.cancerqld.org.au)

### CancerCare

*Helping Children Understand Cancer: Talking to Your Kids about Your Diagnosis.*

*Helping Children When a Family Member has Cancer*

Available online: [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)

### Books

LiveStrong. *When someone you know has cancer: An activity book for families.* Available online: [www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)

Glader, Sue. *Nowhere hair: Explains cancer and chemo to your kids.* Marin County, CA. Thousand Word Press 2010 (ages 3–6)

Filgenzi, Courteny. *Let my Colors Out.* Atlanta, GA. American Cancer Society, 2009 (ages 3–6)

Fead, Beverlye Hyman. *Nana, What's Cancer?* Atlanta Ga. American Cancer Society, 2009 (ages 6–9)

Ackerman, Abigail & Adrienne. *Our Mom has Cancer.* Atlanta, GA. American Cancer Society, 2001 (ages 6–9)

Owens, Jim. *The Survivorship Net.* A Parable for the Family, Friends and Caregivers of People with Cancer. Atlanta, GA. The American Cancer Society, 2010. (Ages 8–12)

Clifford, Christine and Lindstrom, Jack. *Our Family Has Cancer, Too!* Duluth, MN. Pfeifer-Hamilton Publishers, 1998 (ages 8–12)

### Websites

Cancer Council Queensland  
[www.cancerqld.org.au](http://www.cancerqld.org.au)

Camp Quality [www.campquality.org.au](http://www.campquality.org.au)

CanTEEN [www.canteen.org.au](http://www.canteen.org.au)

American Cancer Society [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

Cancer Care [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)

## For parents & caregivers

Please review the information at the end of this story explaining more on how you talk about cancer with the children in your care.

Story by Joanna Mangan, former psychologist,  
Cancer Council Queensland

Brought to you by



**Queensland**  
Government