

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a yellow ribbon. The ribbon is looped around the index and middle fingers. In the background, a soft, brown teddy bear is visible, slightly out of focus. A dark green rectangular box is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing white text.

**EVENT REPORT: TEA & CHAT
– SUPPORTING A CHILD
WITH CANCER**

JANUARY 2024

Event Report: Tea & Chat – Supporting a Child with Cancer

Date: 24 January 2024

Facilitator: Mariam Aslam (Age 46, British Pakistani)

Event Type: Community Discussion

Location: Pearls Tearoom

Duration: 6:00pm- 8:30pm

Attendees: 80 women

Ethnicity: 55% Pakistani, 20% Indian, 10% White British, 5% Afro Caribbean, 5% Arab, 5% Eastern European.

Overview

This powerful and heartfelt “Tea & Chat” session brought together women from in and around Bradford for an open and compassionate discussion on *Supporting a Child with Cancer*. With cups of tea in hand and a sense of sisterhood in the room, attendees engaged in a thoughtful exchange about how cancer impacts children emotionally, psychologically and practically.

The practical aspects of supporting children who are either experiencing cancer themselves or witnessing it in a loved one.

The session provided a safe and supportive space to explore how children perceive and experience illness, and how adults, especially mothers, aunties, grandmothers, and carers, can offer strength, comfort, and stability in uncertain times.

With warm tea, shared experiences, and deep empathy in the room, this session allowed for genuine connection, learning, and mutual support. It gave them space to share personal stories, cultural perspectives, and emotional reflections.

Led by Mariam Aslam, Mariam Alsam is a 46-year-old dedicated teacher at a local school, known for her warmth, resilience, and deep sense of

compassion. When her beloved niece was diagnosed with cancer, Mariam became a pillar of strength, not only for her niece but also for her own children. Through long hospital visits, emotional conversations, and everyday moments of care, Mariam supported her family with unwavering love. Her story is one of courage, faith, and the quiet heroism of a woman who held her family together during one of life's most difficult trials.

The day enabled attendees the opportunity to have an open, honest, and emotional facilitated discussions. The key themes discussed were as follows:



Confusion and Curiosity

Children often struggle to understand the complexities of cancer. Their questions, such as “Why do I feel tired all the time?” or “Why does Mommy cry when she thinks I’m not looking?” Highlight their need for clarity and reassurance in a world that suddenly feels unfamiliar. Participants shared stories of how children ask innocent yet deeply poignant questions that reveal their confusion:

“My daughter asked me, ‘Why is your hair going away? Did you do something wrong?’”

“My niece asked me, ‘Why does Mummy wear that sad face?’ She notices everything.”

“We want to protect them from the truth, but sometimes that leaves them even more confused.”

These questions reflect a genuine need for clear, age-appropriate communication that reassures children and helps them make sense of their changing world.

Fear and Uncertainty

Whether as patients or observers, children face fears about pain, change, and loss. Their concerns may include physical changes (“Will I lose my hair?”) or emotional fears (“Will Daddy come back from the hospital?”). Mothers and carers discussed the quiet fears children carry, fear of pain, of changes in appearance, and of losing a parent.

“My son never said anything, but he clung to me at night. I knew he was scared, even if he didn’t have the words.”

“My youngest would hide his toy when the nurse came in. He thought if she didn’t see it, he wouldn’t get more medicine.”

“We forget how scary hospitals are for kids, the beeping machines, the needles, the strange smells.”



Imaginative Coping

Children frequently use metaphor and imagination to process their experiences. They may envision cancer as a villain or medicine as superheroes, which helps them regain a sense of control and hope. A key insight was how children use metaphor and creativity to cope. One mother shared how her child imagined chemotherapy as “tiny soldiers fighting the bad guys.”



“It helped her feel strong. Like her body was doing something brave.”

“We told him the chemo was ‘the magic juice’. It helped understand that my father was getting a power-up.”

“She drew me as a superhero with a scarf instead of hair. That drawing is still on our fridge.”

Resilience and Small Joys

Despite the challenges, children often find joy in small moments, like decorating their IV poles, playing games, or receiving visits from therapy animals. These moments reflect their resilience and capacity for happiness. Despite the challenges, attendees highlighted children's remarkable resilience.



“He’d smile when he would see. That smile meant everything.”

“Even after chemo, my daughter wanted to help make my bed. She said it made her feel like a ‘mini nurse’.”

“We used to have ‘hospital picnics’, just sandwiches on a blanket by her hospital bed. She loved it.”

Desire for Normalcy

Children crave routine and normal activities. Questions like “Can I still play football?” or “When can I go back to school?” show their desire to maintain a sense of identity and continuity. Many participants emphasised the importance of keeping life as normal as possible for the children.



“My son just wanted to play football in the garden again. That was his biggest goal, not getting better but playing again.”

“She just wanted to be picked up from school like before, by her grandma, not an ambulance.”

Love and Connection

Relationships are a vital source of strength. Acts of affection, drawing pictures for nurses, hugging doctors, or listening to bedtime stories, demonstrate how love and connection help children cope. The group repeatedly returned to the importance of emotional connection. From drawings and hugs to bedtime stories and prayers, love provides healing in ways medicine cannot.



“When she used to come and see me, she’d hold my hand. That connection was her strength, and mine.”

“He didn’t want toys. He just wanted his brother to sleep next to him like always.”

“Even though I was in pain, I always smiled for my children.”

Conclusion & Recommendations

The session highlighted the emotional and cultural layers involved in supporting children through cancer. The collective wisdom shared affirmed the importance of community, storytelling, and culturally sensitive mental health support.

The learning from the event was:

- Use honest, gentle language children can understand.
- Acknowledge fears and create open space for questions.
- Continue routines and familiar activities to provide security.
- Encourage imaginative play and creative expression as coping tools.
- Include siblings and extended family in emotional support.
- Maintain connection and presence, even in silence.
- Seek professional psychological support where possible.

Feedback from Participants

The session was widely praised for its warmth, honesty, and relevance. Many expressed gratitude for the culturally sensitive and emotionally open approach.

“It felt so good to talk about this in our own space, without judgement.”

“These stories reminded me we are not alone. Our children are stronger than we think, and so are we.”

“It was good to share and meet others.”

“We need more of this. We don’t always have the right words, especially in our culture. But this helped us find some.”

“It was like therapy, listening, talking, crying a little. And then laughing together.”

“The tips about honest communication and including siblings really helped me. Sometimes we forget the others are hurting too.”

“I didn’t think I had anything to say today. But once others spoke, my heart opened.”

Final Thoughts

In this gathering, the women of Bradford reminded one another that healing isn’t only about medicine, it’s about *presence, honesty, shared strength, and love*. The stories told, tears shed, and laughter shared reflected the quiet courage it takes to walk alongside a child facing the unimaginable.

This Tea & Chat session was more than a discussion; it was a moment of healing.

**Report created by the Tea & Chat participants
supported by the MWC Team**

