

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

The Need to Talk

It doesn't feel like "us" and "them." It feels like "me" and "everyone else." When you're taking care of a loved one, you may think no one else in the world understands what you're going through.

And to a certain extent, you're right. No one else in the world has the same combination as the two of you. Relationship. Illness or disability. Ages. Locations. Living situation. Family history. Emotional, psychological and spiritual strengths and weaknesses. There are an infinite number of variables.

No matter where you are on that very broad spectrum of "caregiving," there is a basic human need to talk about what is happening to you.

No wonder it's easy to assume that no one else can even come close to comprehending what you're going through. No one else can really help you.

Fortunately, that isn't true.

No matter where you are on that very broad spectrum of "caregiving," there is a basic human need to talk about what is happening to you.

To tell someone what your questions are. Your concerns. Your fears.

To say out loud, to give words to, the confusing and overwhelming mix of emotions that are filling your mind and your heart.

The temptation is to remain silent. To try to tough it out. But then that inner turmoil will only get worse.

The excuse can be "our family just doesn't do that." As if going for emotional help is a sign of weakness. An admission of failure. It isn't. It's the same as seeking medical attention for a physical problem. If you had an appendicitis, would you simply "tough it out"?

But where can you go? To whom can you talk?

- For some caregivers the right choice is to meet with a professional counselor in the field of

aging. This person will not supply "the answer." Rather, a counselor is there to help you find the most workable solution. He or she can help you identify and label some of the feelings you're having and explain how typical, and normal, these emotions are for a person going through all the things you are.

- Consider a professionally-run support group. This is a good place to "dump" your feelings without listeners jumping in with solutions or judgments. Sometimes it's easier to "unload" when surrounded by concerned strangers rather than family and friends.

A group like this also offers a feeling of support from the sharing that takes place. And you can learn from other people's experiences. This may *not* be a good choice if you cannot set aside your caregiver role and you begin to pick up on and worry about their problems. That doesn't help them or you.

- Remember the spiritual support available from your parish priest. He can listen to you, pray with you, offer the opportunities for the sacraments, and remind you that God is always available for comfort and support.

- And a fourth possibility is finding a friend who will listen to you. This needs to be someone to whom you can say "I don't want answers, advice or solutions. I just need to talk."

Some individuals, however well-intentioned, can't help offering advice. That doesn't mean they aren't good people or good friends. They just aren't the right ones to meet your needs in this area.

A good way of telling if this is the right person is the way you feel after you've talked to him or her. You shouldn't feel worse. The point is to help you release some of the pent-up emotions churning inside you, not add more to them.

The right friend for this task is one that gives a feeling of taking care of you, of emotionally if not physically putting an arm around you and holding you. □