

# Catholic Caregivers

*'Caregiving is pro-life!'*

## Refereeing Fights between Mom and Dad

If both your parents need your help with caregiving, you may face the added challenge of handling friction in your parents' relationship. An aging couple may not get along for many reasons, and their so-called golden years of marriage may seem to be anything but that. The sad truth is that divorce is not unheard of among couples whose children have grown up and moved away. While a youngster can do little, if anything, to stop a fight between his or her parents, an adult child may feel an obligation to step forward. Here are some points to consider if you find yourself in that position:

--*They are two different people.* Parents are not a single unit. Your mother and father are two individuals who may be at two different points in their lives. Each is dealing with his or her own losses, concerns about what is happening, worries about health, and so on.

--*The dynamics of the relationship are changing.* One parent may be becoming more dependent on the other, a development each finds frustrating and frightening. Maybe Dad was always the strong provider and guardian. Now Mom must assume those roles. Maybe Mom did the cooking, the cleaning, the shopping, the laundry. She balanced the checkbook and sent out the Christmas cards. Now Dad is learning those jobs. This change of roles is hard on any two people of any age.

--*There's a history here.* Maybe Mom and Dad's relationship has always been confrontational. Some couples bicker throughout their married lives.

--*A personality change could be a symptom of a health problem.* Alzheimer's disease, a stroke, or another medical condition may change Mom or Dad from meek and mild to combative and aggressive. Talk to your family doctor about this.

--*A woman's role in society has changed.* In years past, a woman was a housewife who took care of the children, managed the family home, and followed her husband's lead. Times have changed. An old-fashioned husband may have difficulty when his wife begins to change, too.

--*Your parent may be suppressing anger to keep the peace.* Subconsciously, one parent may not want

to disagree in any way with his or her spouse for fear that his or her last words to a spouse will be words of anger. Instead, Mom will swallow her words, and the anger will build up inside her until one day it explodes over something minor.

What can you do if your parents are having more battles?

1. *Consider what the fight is about.* How important is the issue? Is it a question that needs to be resolved, or is it just everyday friction? Is it something they need to handle themselves—for example, which soap opera to watch while they're eating lunch? (Can one program be watched and the other recorded? Would it be easier if they ate that meal separately, with one parent claiming "the big television" for a week, while the other uses the smaller set that's in the bedroom or kitchen?) Or is the issue something big that needs your attention, too? Perhaps Dad wants them to move to an apartment and Mom doesn't want to sell the house.

2. *Try to avoid taking sides.* Talk to each parent separately and alone. Listen to that person's point of view. If you hear both sides, you may be able to better understand each point of view. If the fight seems to be unequal and one parent really needs help, provide it. For example, it's no longer safe for Mom to drive, but Dad can't get her to give up the car keys. Or Mom is in danger of becoming ill herself because taking care of Dad is so taxing and he refuses to allow her to spend money on outside help.

3. *Remember that the arbitrator's role is always a delicate one, especially when all the parties are in the same family.*

### A Prayer for Peace

I hate hearing them fight, Jesus. Please give me the strength and wisdom to be a good diplomat, to ease tensions and calm nerves, to help us remember our love for each other, and to always protect that gift. Amen

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