

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

Talking to Your Children about Death

It's difficult, if not impossible, to explain death in words that children will understand when we don't even really understand it ourselves.

Still, it's important to take the time to talk to your children. These are some points to keep in mind:

--It's easier to talk to your children about death before your parent is near death. And it is easier to talk about death in general, or the death of someone who isn't too close to the family, than to talk about the death of a loved one. You might prepare your child by bringing up the subject after an elderly parishioner or neighbor has died.

--You can use books to prepare your child. Local Catholic bookstores will have age-appropriate books for children about death. (For example *Your Grieving Child* by Bill Dodds (Our Sunday Visitor) and *Water Bugs and Dragonflies*, by Doris Stickney (Pilgrim Press).)

--You're upset, too. It isn't just your parent's approaching death that can be upsetting to your child; it's seeing you so upset as well. Don't gloss over or hide your feelings, but be aware that your child is picking up on them.

--Your child may take the death of your parent very personally. "I'm not going to see my grandma ever again."

--A child's sense of security can be rattled. If Grandma can die, that means Dad can die. If Dad can die, that means I can die.

--It's important to choose your words carefully. In some ways, talking to your child about death is like explaining "the birds and the bees." You use words and concepts that someone at his or her age level will more easily understand. At the same time, it helps to remember that different children have different personalities and points of view. One child is more intellectual. Another is more easily

frightened. Another is more sensitive. Use an approach that fits each child best. It's also best to talk to each child individually before bringing up the subject with all your children as a group.

--Talking about death as "falling asleep" or using similar analogies can be confusing for a child. Phrases like those can make it difficult for some children to sleep because they're afraid that if they do, they too will die. Also, if they see Grandma napping, they may become frightened that she has died. "God wanted Grandpa with him in heaven"—another common explanation—can make God seem pretty selfish, if not downright mean.

--This can be a good time to talk about spiritual beliefs. Talk about bodies and souls. Yes, we won't see Grandma again here on earth, but where she's going is a much better place. Where she's going she'll be happy forever, and someday we'll all be there, together again.

If you're taking care of your...

--Spouse.

--Aging parent or family member.

--Child or sibling with special needs.

Here's free caregiver support.

The **Friends of St. John the Caregiver** is an international Catholic organization addressing the growing needs of family caregivers by providing:

—spirituality, information and resources to individual caregivers

www.YourAgingParent.com

—training and educational material to dioceses and parishes

www.CatholicCaregivers.com

—a membership association* offering spiritual support for those who need care, those who give care and those who assist others giving care

www.FSJC.org

(*No membership dues! No meetings! All we ask is that you pray for family caregivers and those receiving care.)

www.FSJC.org

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