

# Senior Minutes

In Search of Excellence for Clinical and Management Issues

## For the Family - Dealing with Conflict and Final Arrangements

### Discouraging Family Conflict and Encouraging Family Compatibility



If your loved one/parent is still with you and there are issues that have caused friction between the two of you, by all means make peace and reconcile. If you were the one who was wrong, humbly admit it and ask for forgiveness. If you weren't the one who was wrong, be a really big person and say that you were wrong. Or at least tell your loved one that the fact that he/she is feeling ill towards you tells you that you were wrong in the way you handled things.

**It takes a lot of humility and selflessness to do that**, but it's better to get rid of the rub and enjoy the time you have left together rather than to nurse a grudge and live with alienation that you will one day regret.

An even tougher task, but strongly suggested, is that you do the same with any sibling with whom you are at odds. It will make the family time when Mom/Dad's dies less awkward and more satisfying.

### ***Advanced Directive***

If you're the primary Caregiver, make sure all family members know the specifics of your loved one's advance directive. Too many siblings never again speak to one another after the death of a parent because "You pulled the plug on Dad!," or "You let Mom die without asking me about it!". When all family members know what Mom/Dad has asked to be done if the parent becomes incapacitated, then everyone knows that this is what MOM/DAD wanted, and no individual child or family member is making the decision.

### ***Grief "Triggers"***

The months after the death of a parent can be especially difficult for a family. Plan ahead for grief "triggers" – anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, milestones. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. Lean on each other as a family. Sometime during that period or maybe on the first anniversary of your loved one's death family members might wish to gather and read letters they have written to the departed.

If you are a spiritual person, draw comfort from your faith. This would be a good time to reinvigorate your custom of praying, meditating, reading spiritual materials, or going to public spiritual services. If possible, do this together with siblings. If you are questioning your faith during this difficult time or you just need a sympathetic ear to listen to you, talk to a clergy member or others in your religious community.

Join a support group. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can help. To find a bereavement support group in your area, contact local hospitals, hospices, funeral homes, and counseling centers.

Talk to a professional mental health therapist or grief counselor if you:

- feel as if life isn't worth living anymore
- wish you had died with your loved one
- wish you had died instead of your loved one
- blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
- feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks
- are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
- are unable to perform your normal daily activities

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**For the Family (Cont.)**

**When the End of Life is Near**

Your loved one is actively dying. Be there as much as you can. Even if they aren't able to communicate, chances are they can sense that you're there. Do whatever you can to make this time pleasant.



- Place flowers in the room
- If possible, hire a violinist or harpist to play music.
- Surround your loved one with pictures of the family.
- Place a stuffed animal near the dying person.
- If possible, see to it that the dying person is allowed to eat his/her favorite foods.
- Give family and friends an opportunity to say goodbye.
- See to it that the dying person gets all of the spiritual/religious care that he/she desires.

Make arrangements with a funeral home in advance. Maybe the deceased requested visitation with an open casket. Maybe the decision was cremation. For the sake of closure, it's still important for the family members to see the dead body. They must come to grips with the fact that their loved one is gone. Seeing is believing.

It's also very beneficial to make decisions about a funeral/memorial service in advance, i.e., hymns to be sung, scripture to be read, etc. Maybe your loved one has jotted down some personal wishes. Perhaps Mom tucked it away in her Bible. Help her find it. Decide on everything well in advance. When death occurs, the last thing you will want to be bothered with is the details of a funeral. You will have plenty of other things to wear you out: a mountain of paperwork and a ton of other details to check off of your list. You will simply want to go home and lie down.

So, if you haven't already done so, decide on the following very soon:

- Where will the service be held and who will preside?
- Will the body be present? Will there be pall bearers?
- Will family members address the assembly? If so, which ones?
- Will there be flowers, or will people be encouraged to give memorial money for a more practical use?
- What music will be offered, i.e. instrumental, sung, etc.?
- Will there be a graveside committal?
- Will there be a gathering/meal after the service? Where will it be held? Who will be in charge?

If the service will be religious, seek the input of your clergy. They're the experts and probably have plenty of experience in planning a service. Some clergy are quite determined about what's appropriate and what's not. Talk over all issues ahead of time, so that there will be no surprises at the last minute.

Try to do everything yourself. When people ask if they can do anything for you, they're usually sincere. Give them a chance. Let them help.

**You need the rest.**

This article is one of a series included in a "Resource Manual for Bereavement in Long-Term Care" created, published, and copyrighted by *Senior PsychCare*. To receive the complete manual, call 713-850-0049, ext. 232.