

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

Helping Your Loved One Find Forgiveness and Peace

If your care-receiver is facing death, he or she may feel the need to make peace with a friend, with a relative, or with God.

Just as you help your loved one eat right and get to doctors' appointments, you may also be called on to help him or her prepare spiritually for death. The task may seem overwhelming to both you and your care-receiver. Neither of you may feel equipped for this. But helping that person find peace can make such a difference for him or her—the dying loved one—and for you, the one who will be left behind.

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These are suggestions for helping your care-receiver heal old wounds by admitting mistakes, offering apologies, and accepting forgiveness:

--**Offer to pray.** Your loved one may need a little help getting started. Try a traditional prayer of the Church, such as the Act of Contrition. Or allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in an informal prayer. Silence and contemplation may allow her to more intimately speak and listen to an all-forgiving God.

--**Listen.** Your care-receiver may need the opportunity to talk about serious matters that weigh heavily on the mind and burden the soul. It's not uncommon for a person facing death to review his or her life. Some things may need to be said out loud. Saying something out loud often puts it in a different, clearer light. It's easier to see how a mistake could have been made, how a falling out could have happened, how no one was entirely to blame or entirely

without blame. Talking about such matters openly can make it easier to come to the realization that it's time to forgive others and oneself.

--**Facilitate reconciliation.** Your loved one may need to get in touch with someone. Maybe the other party wants to make peace, too. Let your care-receiver know that you can help arrange a conversation between them. If the person with whom your loved one wants to reconcile won't talk or has died, suggest that your care-receiver write a letter to that person, saying all the things he or she would say if they could sit down face-to-face. This letter will never be mailed, but writing it can be a way to say, "Please forgive me; I forgive you."

--**Do what's necessary.** Sometimes a person feels that talking or writing just isn't enough. He or she has to do something more. Maybe it's going to his or her parents' or spouse's grave and praying, crying, yelling, and apologizing there. Maybe it's compiling a list of regrets and then burning it. Your loved one may need to cry a lot and may need to turn more to prayer. Do what's necessary to help him or her ask for and accept forgiveness.

--**Get some help.** If there are issues that you can't help with, your loved one might benefit from talking with a counselor. Hospice social workers have the skills to help a person sort through a life review.

--**Use the sacraments.** Encourage and arrange for your care-receiver to take advantage of the sacraments of reconciliation and the anointing of the sick. No matter how long your parent may have been away from the Church, no matter what he or she may have done, an all-loving God is waiting with open arms to offer forgiveness and peace now, and to share his eternal joy at the time of death.

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