



National Apostolate for
Inclusion Ministry

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FRIENDSHIP, INC.
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Friendship, Inc. provides
residential and vocational
services to children,
teenagers and adults with
developmental disabilities.

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*Promoting the Full Participation of People with Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities
(IDD) in the Life of the Catholic Church*

Sharing the News: A Loved One Has Died

By Helaine C. Arnold

Who Will Share the News?

Decide who will tell the news. Decide who will be present. In school or institutional settings, find out if a family member wishes to tell the news to their relative with IDD. If so, will the family member want a staff person to be present? When no family member is available or willing to tell the news, then an appropriate staff member must let the person with IDD know that a loved one has died. The staff member should know the person well and have a good relationship with the person.

How to Prepare for Sharing the News?

Begin by prayerful reflection on the honor of sharing this important news. Appreciate that there is no single “right way” to tell a person sad news. Resolve to be attentive, reflective and caring.

What Processes are Helpful in Sharing the News?

- Find a comfortable, quiet, private place to share. Begin with a prayer. Look the person in the eye.
- Start out with an introduction or preface such as “I have something sad to share with you.” Or, “I have something to tell you that is very sad news for you.” Then, you might add a fact that is helpful in explanation, such as, “You know that your Mom has been very sick lately. I need to tell you that she died this morning.”
- Do not rush. Use direct, concrete and clear language. Use words like “died” and “dead” rather than “went to sleep” or “is sleeping.” Also to be avoided as indirect is a phrase like “passed away.”
- Give the person time to absorb the news. Do not expect an immediate reaction or response. It may take time, sometimes days for the meaning of the news to sink in.
- Silence for a time is helpful and adds to the solemnity of the occasion. Be willing to sit quietly with the person for as long as necessary. This is perhaps the best thing that can be done and is very appropriate.
- Share what will happen in the days ahead: preparing for the funeral, the visitation, the funeral itself and being with family or friends.
- Tell the person you will let them know when and where these final rites and celebrations will happen.
- Give the person the option of staying home or going to school, work or day program during the days preceding the funeral.
- In provided settings, make sure that that person has transportation and staff supports if the family wants him or her to be a part of the funeral preparations. If you are a staff member let the person and family know that you can be counted on
- Help the person give thanks for their loved one.

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