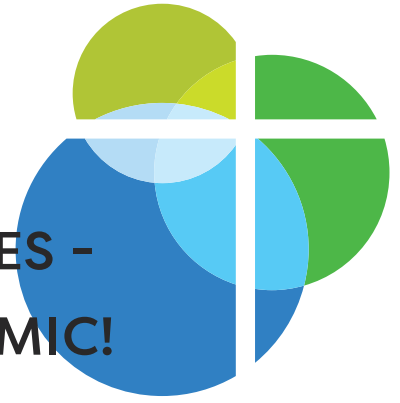


FAMILIES

CHALLENGING AT THE BEST OF TIMES -
NOT TO MENTION A GLOBAL PANDEMIC!



LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

John 13:34

Families can be challenging at the best of times. It doesn't take much, let alone a global pandemic, to upset what can be a delicate balance of relationships. Many families have found problems like isolation, social distancing, job changes, or job loss a difficult burden straining family relationships. Our homes can feel far from the prayer of Christ, "I pray for those who believe in me that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20-21).

When our families are dealing with difficult situations, we need to be extra diligent in the ways we communicate and respond to one another. If we get caught up in a pattern of simply reacting to one another, it is easy for things to escalate. People say things they do not mean and hurt one another. Other families go into "shut-down mode", sweeping problems under the mat, so to speak. This creates resentment and hurt feelings. However, we do need to find helpful ways to talk about difficult things.

There are some suggestions overleaf, however, it's important to remember families are complex systems. It's easy to point the finger at someone and place the

blame on another's shoulders. Unfortunately, it can make them defensive, and rarely helps them come on board with finding a solution. It is much healthier to recognise the problem is in the way that the system interacts. Sometimes just changing a few simple processes is more effective in bringing about change than getting caught up in criticism - and is more likely to bring everyone on-board.

Continued overleaf

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Without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons.

Familiaris Consortio 18

WAYS TO TALK ABOUT DIFFICULT THINGS:

Leading relationship researcher, John Gottman, found that typically the first three minutes of almost any conversation will predict its ending.

- Conversations that start softly, while they may be difficult, almost always end softly too. Conversations that start harshly almost always end harshly. Just starting off on the right foot can make a huge difference.

Often our frustration in difficult conversations is that we feel we're not being heard and understood.

- It can be difficult, but as you listen, try and express from time to time what you're hearing in our own words. It communicates to the other person that, while you might not agree, you're trying to understand.

TAKE ACTION

There are times when reaching out for help is imperative. Such times could be someone experiencing mental health crises, alcoholism, relationship upheaval, or abusive situations (physical, sexual, emotional). Here are some steps you could take:

- **Find support:** reach out to someone external to your situation - a counsellor, psychologist, peer support group, etc.
- **Talk to someone you trust:** whether it's someone in your household experiencing the situation or a close friend outside.
- **Pray**

If you, or someone you care about, is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call emergency services (triple zero - 000), contact your doctor or mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department. To speak to someone immediately contact Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636.

BEATITUDES

The Beatitudes (cf. Matthew 5:1-12) outline the tools we need to face the difficult, but not insurmountable, obstacles we encounter through life. They build in us a spirit of one who believes in Jesus Christ and help us live out the love and humility Jesus calls us to.

Continued

As families are complex systems, they require many resources to function healthily: time, emotional energy, petrol, food, home maintenance, etc. Families work best when there is a reciprocal fulfilment of needs. That is, while we're all constantly drawing on the resources of the family, we are all, also, contributing to those resources. Not just demanding but also contributing - our joys, happiness, and a helping hand. Rather than expecting just one or two members to contribute, we all need to help. Sometimes this means being well mannered, helping when asked and sharing our good experiences. Pope Francis recommends three

powerful phrases families should practice: "please," "thank you," and "sorry." Getting good at these words can go a long way to contributing a peaceful, respectful presence to our homes.

Family life can be a tricky business. However, we can all work on simple strategies that contribute to harmony and understanding. In John's Gospel, Jesus' prayer continues, "may they be one as we are one so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:22-23) As we work out how to be family, we'll change the world with our love.