

Kids Benefit From Seeing Euthanasia Close Up, Says Canadian Doctor

Bedside gatherings at Canadian euthanasia deaths are normally an adults-only affair. Of course we're not privy to most of them, but occasionally a journalist describes the last moments of an elderly man or woman in a magazine feature. Sometimes there's a party, glasses of champagne, hilarity – until the doctor arrives. The friends and relatives gather around the bed while the doctor administers a lethal injection.

In fact, most of these deaths are of people well over 65. Very few are of an age to be leaving youngsters behind. It is their children or grown grandchildren who are with them in their last moments.

What about people with young children? One experienced MAiD doctor suggests that young children will benefit from becoming involved.

[In a blog entry](#) at a University of British Columbia site, Dr. Susan Woolhouse, who has been involved in some 70 “assisted deaths”, says “instinct told me that involving children in the MAiD process of their loved one was possibly one of the most important and therapeutic experiences for a child. My past experiences during my palliative care rotations reassured me that children could benefit from bearing witness to a loved one's death. Why would MAiD be any different?”

She gives some tips about how to explain the process of dying to young children:

Assuming that children are given honest, compassionate and non-judgmental information about MAiD, there is no reason to think that witnessing a medically assisted death cannot be

integrated as a normal part of the end of life journey for their loved one. If the adults surrounding them normalize MAID, so will the children.

“These conversations can easily be had with children as young as 4,” she says.

Dr. Woolhouse estimates that between 6 and 7 percent of MAiD deaths are of people under 55. As the numbers grow, “this will result in more children being impacted by the assisted death of a loved one.”

This is how she would explain euthanasia to a child:

In Canada, when someone has an illness that will cause their body to die, they can wait for this to happen or they can ask a doctor help. The doctor or nurse uses a medication that stops the body from working and causes the body to die. This is done in a way that isn't painful ...

I am going to give your [loved one] medication over a period of about ten minutes. This medication will make her very look very tired and then she will very quickly go into a coma. This means that she will no longer be able to hear, see or feel any pain. You might hear strange breathing sounds, however these do not cause her any pain. Her skin will get colder and maybe even change colour. She will stop moving her body. Her heart will eventually stop beating and this means that her body has died. When a body dies, it can no longer see, feel pain, or hear. It can't ever be fixed.

I wonder if a child will find this explanation convincing. The doctor will not be around to answer her questions as she becomes a teenager, a young adult, and a parent. [One researcher found that](#), years afterwards, some children still described the death of a pet as “the worst day of their lives.” How much worse will it feel to remember the day that your mother or father was put down?

Dr. Woolhouse's brief essay leaves some questions up in the air. The obvious question is "where is Dad now?" She can't offer the child the comfort of an afterlife. Dad isn't anywhere anymore; he's just dead.

In her description of her hypothetical patient's last hours, it's clear that he is not suffering unbearably, at least at that moment. Why, the child is bound to ask, did Dad want to leave me? Why did he choose to die and leave me an orphan?

But Dr. Woolhouse is right about one thing: if you want to normalize euthanasia, what better marketing device could there be than photos of little kids watching her give a lethal injection?

—

This [article](#) is republished under a creative commons license from MercatorNet.

[Image Credit: Pexels]