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Your dad's secret might be better left under wraps



Your dad's secret might be better left under wraps (/ Jupiterimages)

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While sharing a bottle of wine with an old family friend, he lets slip a secret about your father. Bringing up the issue with your dad is out of the question – he's passed away. Your first instinct is to run to your mother and unburden yourself, or at least tell one of your siblings.

But the secret is no small matter, and you're concerned about the emotional fallout.

Now What?

Whether the secret was an affair, financial problems or a crime committed long ago, your first thoughts will probably be about the impact of the secret on you, said Lorie Teagno, a clinical psychologist and co-director of [The Relationship Institute](#) in La Jolla.

The revelation may cause you to re-evaluate childhood memories, stir up powerful emotions or question the true nature of your relationship.

"We all struggle when we learn that we did not know that person as well as we thought," Teagno said.

But before sharing the news, consider three things: your motivation for sharing the secret, the impact it will have on those you tell and the wishes of your deceased father.

"Sometimes people want to talk about the secret to unburden themselves, but sometimes the pain it's going to cause someone else may not be worth it," said Steven Solomon, co-director of The Relationship Institute. "You have to ask yourself: 'If I was my mom or my sister, would I want to know this? Am I telling them to help myself or to help them?'"

Ultimately, children have to accept that their parents are fallable, sometimes in ways that can be painful to discover.

And a father's secret may have little to do with his love, commitment or closeness to you. Instead, the secret may have more to do with his own challenges or shortcomings, Teagno said.

If you need to talk about it, choose your spouse or a trusted friend.

"After working through it with them, you may not feel the same need to tell your other family members," Solomon said.

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