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# What to tell Baby Jane Doe

## How, when to talk about birth history

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**WORCESTER** — Baby Jane Doe's short life has been marked by trauma and headlines. The woman police believe was her mother was killed. She entered the world with a violent delivery, cut from her mother's womb and then kidnapped by a supposed family friend, police say.

The series of events weighs heavily on those involved in the case. The family of the 23-year-old slain woman, Darlene L. Haynes, has a hard time with the details of their loved one's death.

While the baby and Ms. Haynes' 18-month-old daughter remain in state custody, eventually someone will raise them — either together or separately. Ms. Haynes had two older children, ages 5 and 3, who live with her grandmother.

As Baby Jane Doe grows up, eventually she will want to know about her life, about her first days. Her guardians will face the decision and what to tell her.

Dr. Evan P. Graber, director of outpatient services at YOU Inc. and a clinical psychologist who has a practice with his wife, Dr. Cynthia J. Graber, said there are no handbooks telling parents or guardians when it's a good time to discuss a traumatic family event, such as a murder, suicide or fatal accident in the family. The child also could have been adopted, a situation some families might similarly not discuss right away.

"People get concerned on how you share that information," Dr. Graber said. "Generally speaking I believe that we should be as honest with kids as we can be. I think that when we leave gaps or leave things out, that kids engage in filling those gaps, oftentimes with their own made-up information that is often worse than the truth."

Children could engage in magical thinking — considering children have a vivid imagination — and questions such as "Was it something I caused?" or "Did I do something wrong?" could arise. This could happen especially if a family or guardians of a child are being secretive.

There is no particular age that is right. Children age differently and people need to be cognizant maturation does not come at the same time for all children, Dr. Graber said.

Letting children know the status of a situation in an honest way, leaving room for questions and allowing time to process is what Dr. Graber believes is a good approach.

Dr. Danuta Bukatko, a College of the Holy Cross professor in the department of psychology and education, notes that children who experience trauma or violence are vulnerable, but given the right circumstance can be very resilient.

"The child needs someone or some group of people who are stable in that child's life who provide warmth, love and nurturance and social support."

A child's relationship with adults comes into play on how the information is given; she noted it should come at a developmentally appropriate time.

"A lot of children start to ask questions about their background in the early school-aged years," Dr. Bukatko said. "A lot of times it depends on what the child is ready to hear."

She said having a professional involved in the dissemination of information is key.

Some families can meet with a therapist, psychologist or social worker and plan a way to talk to a child. A family that is resourceful and has a good relationship with open discussion should be able to handle the discussion, Dr Graber said. There also are organizations that help families dealing with adoptions and other issues.

While the Internet can help people obtain information on how to talk to a child about a traumatic event, it also holds information that a child could access about his or her own life.

"With the Internet," he said, "possibly Baby Jane Doe may read this horrific story from many years ago and piece together that it was around the time she was born."

"Nowadays the information accessibility is greater than it ever was."

That could make it harder for families to keep things secret, as might have been done in the past. The intentions of keeping traumatic events secret might be good, but Dr. Graber believes explaining things and keeping the conversation open is the best way to handle difficult situations with children.

"To me that is the best way to handle it with kids," he said.

Yesterday, investigators said there are no significant developments in the case.

Judge David Despotopoulos has impounded the search warrant affidavits for 94 Southgate St., where Darlene Haynes lived, and 3 Henry Terrace, the one-time home of the woman charged with the kidnapping. Both have been returned to Central District Court.