

ELDER WISDOM CIRCLE

Parent unsure how to broach subject

Q. My daughter-in-law and husband believe they have a clean house. They have lived there for nine years and have never washed a window or wall. Often there is garbage on the floor, and plumbing fixtures are held together with tape. They do not have money issues, and could easily pay for repairs, should they choose to do so. How do I approach the subject without hurting anyone?

• Our advice columnists:

Sunday, Thursday: Cheryl Lavin, "Tales From the Front"

Monday, Friday: Judith Martin, "Miss Manners"

Tuesday, Saturday: Harlan Cohen, "Help Me, Harlan!"

Wednesday: "Elder Wisdom Circle"

standards. It won't work. They have their own habits, priorities and problems. Any house can be clean; what is special is a family that is together and loving. If you want to be a member in good standing with them, do what I do: Bite hard on your lips every time you want to give advice! I even do this when they ask for advice (which isn't often). It's a hard thing to do, but it is worth it.

Best regards, Shreya

A. When my son was preparing to marry, my cousin, a very wise woman, gave me this advice: "The only duty of the mother-in-law is to wear beige and to keep her mouth shut." It sounds as if you are judging your family by your

Q. I have a close friend whom I have known since elementary school. We have children about the same age — my daughter is 5 and her child is 3 — and she insists on coming over and parenting my daughter. I don't try to discipline her child at all and, honestly, I find it offensive that she is constantly yelling at my daughter. How can I approach this conversation with my friend without hurting her feelings?

A. I think that, while it is a tricky thing to ask your friend to be aware of what she is doing, it must be done. This is best done when there is a moment where the two of you can speak alone, without the children hearing the conversation. Tell her how much you value her friendship and how much you love having her to spend time with. Mention that her disciplining your daughter is starting to cause you to have some uneasy feelings. Explain how important it is for her to tell you privately if there is something about your daughter's behavior that she finds difficult. Suggest that, while everyone has a different style of parenting, you do not feel that it is her place to step in when the parent is there. And if the parent is not there, then it is appropriate to inform the parent. If she can't deal with that, then I think the friendship may have to be limited; you need to consider what is best for your child.

Best regards, Anita

Q. I am a 37-year-old single mom of two wonderful children. I would like to have a loving relationship with a new man and potentially re-marry, but find it difficult. My ex-husband lives close by and we talk to other every day regarding the children. He wants me back, but I have no passion or romantic love in my heart for him, and haven't for many years. However, I don't want to hurt him or our children. How do I break these chains of guilt and begin living for me?

A. You need to take care of yourself in order to be able to take care of others. The chains of guilt that you speak of are of your own making. Only you can free yourself. While it is important to communicate about your children, having daily contact is like being married but living separately. If you have joint custody, your children probably spend part of the week with their father. That is *your* time to date, see friends, or develop yourself as a single woman. Use this time wisely and you should have no trouble starting a meaningful relationship.

Best regards, Myra