



“Your Boyfriend May Be ‘Wonderful,’ but He’s Also Deluding Himself”

A FATHER
IN DENIAL

A FAMILY
SECRET
REVEALED

A BETTER
WAY TO FIGHT

Q I am in a fairly serious relationship with a wonderful man. He has a 12-year-old son who has Asperger’s syndrome and severe ADHD. My boyfriend has had to wrestle the child to the ground to take a knife and other sharp objects away from him, and I’ve seen the boy raise scissors to his father’s face. His son also steals. I have urged my boyfriend to get in touch with community support groups for parents of children with Asperger’s and ADHD and to look into ways that medicine or therapy can calm these dangerous outbursts, but he hasn’t followed through. He won’t acknowledge the gravity of the situation, and I’m at a loss for what to do. What’s my next step?

Dr. Phil: To allow this relationship in its current form to proceed any further would be like buying a ticket to a train wreck. The wreck I’m referring to is not the challenge of Asperger’s and ADHD. It’s a parent who is in denial about this challenge and who fails to seek the professional help that his son desperately needs. This is a circumstance fraught with hazards, and you do not want to be part of it.

I recommend that you let your boyfriend read this, because he needs a wake-up call. By sticking his head in the sand, he is cheating his child and endangering others, including you. If the boy had a broken leg or a tumor, ignoring it would be out of the question—so what makes this health crisis any different? Your boyfriend may be “wonderful,” but he’s also deluding himself. If he can’t get real about the situation, then you need to run. Not from a troubled child, but from a father who refuses to keep his loved ones—and your relationship—safe from harm.

Q I’m a 42-year-old woman with three younger siblings. When I was a baby, my father had an extramarital affair that produced a son. My siblings and I found out only a few years ago—our aunt spilled the beans to our cousin—and none of us have talked to Dad about it. (Our mom died a decade ago.) We’d like to broach this subject with our father, not in a spirit of confrontation but because we are curious about our brother and wonder if we can reach out to him. Is this a bad idea? If not, how should we talk to our dad? He’s a thin-skinned guy in the best of times, so it’s likely that he’ll feel ambushed no matter how carefully we approach him.

Dr. Phil: I understand why you want to meet your half brother; that is your right and your choice. But first you must understand that all choices come at a cost. If you choose to reach out to him, you risk awkwardness with your father and a challenging emotional road ahead as you learn more about your (continued on page 62)



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May We Help You?

(continued from page 60) family's past. If you choose not to contact your father's son, then you may live the rest of your life with unanswered questions. Only you can decide what costs you are willing to pay.

If you do approach your father, sit down for a one-on-one discussion, and keep in mind that children can know only what they see, which means that you have little idea about the private dynamics of your parents' marriage. Reserve judgment, tread carefully, stay in the present, and concentrate on your goal, which is to connect with your half brother. You might say something along the following lines.



SCRIPT OF THE MONTH
Full Disclosure

Dad, through no efforts of my own, I've become aware that I have a half brother whom I have never met. What happened in the past is none of my business, and I'm not suggesting that you owe me an explanation. So let me say without judgment that I'd like to reach out to him and invite him to meet my siblings and me. In telling you this, I'm asking neither for your participation nor your permission. I love you and I don't want to create any problems for you, but I feel this decision is mine to make. If our brother isn't interested in meeting us, we won't intrude on his life beyond that first overture. Again, I'm not trying to ambush you, but at the same time, I don't want to sneak around behind your back. So I'm making my intentions clear, and I welcome your input if you want to offer any.

Once you're ready to contact your half brother, manage your expectations: It's possible that you're not welcome in his life; he

may be shocked or unsettled by your sudden appearance. Simply let him know that you exist and would like to meet, offer your contact information, and let him take it from there.

Q My husband and I have been married for ten years, and we have two small children. Lately, whenever we disagree, we end up not talking to each other for days or even weeks. He always initiates the silent treatment, I'm the one to apologize, and he gets his way, no matter how wrong he is. I resent the stress he creates over the small stuff. How can I put an end to this?

Dr. Phil: Your husband gets his way 100 percent of the time because you've taught him that you'll give in 100 percent of the time. You need to stop rewarding him for acting immaturely. Reopen the negotiation so that you can fine-tune your relationship.

When you're not fighting, it's easy to think, *I should let sleeping dogs lie.* But that's precisely when you should ask for your husband's undivided attention. Tell him you value your marriage too much to waste time with these periods of zero communication or affection, and that you don't want to expose your children to so much tension. You aren't demanding that you argue on *your* terms or *your* timeline, but you don't want to be held hostage by his, either; the idea is to find a middle ground. Perhaps you can compromise by giving him a few hours to cool off before discussing a resolution. If he needs more time to cool off, fine—so long as he agrees to tackle the issue when he's ready. But in no uncertain terms, let your husband know that the silent treatment is no longer an option.

The point here isn't to dredge up examples of your husband's bad behavior. If you do, you're guaranteed to be met with defensiveness. Instead, focus calmly and constructively on the future, which will make it hard for him to resort to his old ways. Set yourself up for success, and stick to your word. **Q**

Dr. Phillip C. McGraw's daily TV talk show, Dr. Phil, can be seen around the world. He is the author of six best-selling books; the latest is Real Life (Free Press). Have a question for Dr. Phil? Go to oprah.com/omagazine_talk.