

Mother demands center state at her daughter's expense

DEAR ABBY: I own my own home. My mother lives with me. I cannot understand why she makes up the most fantastic, whopping lies. Mother tells people that I live with her and she pays all the bills. Abby, I pay the bills, and I'm left with pocket change at the end of the month because her spending sprees keep me financially strapped.

She also has to be the center of attention. She'll go to any length to keep the spotlight on herself, even if it means making me look like a complete idiot.

If I do anything that earns acknowledgment or recognition, Mother tells these people that she instructed me, or suggested the work, or had a lot to do with the project.

Is her behavior a form of jealousy, rivalry or downright meanness? Is the attention so important to her that she must embarrass me or make me look like I'm living off her when the reverse has been true for the last 20 years? What makes my mother have to do this to me?

— PUZZLED IN NEW MEXICO
DEAR PUZZLED: People lie for various reasons. Some lie because they are ashamed to tell the truth; others lie to make themselves seem more important. Your mother may do it because she's competitive with you, but it's more likely she's a compulsive liar. A therapist might help you pinpoint her rationale, but I cannot without knowing her. You have my sympathy.

DEAR ABBY: I am in my late 20s and the man I date is in his late 30s. He has children by his first wife, from whom he has been divorced nearly six years. Although we have dated casually for a couple of years, our conversations recently have turned to serious topics — like possibly marrying and having children.

I will be meeting his kids soon and would appreciate any suggestions you can offer in relating to them. I'm college-educated, independent, stable, and have a successful career. But his is a situation I have never confronted before. He has mentioned the possibility of introducing me to his children before, but this is the first time I have agreed. This is my first experience with children. He has two sons, 14 and 15, and a daughter who will be 13 in February. Help!

— PANICKED IN PITTSBURGH
DEAR PANICKED: Calm down and discuss your qualms with your boyfriend. Ask what kinds of things his children are interested in, then do a little reading up so you can ask intelligent questions. I have found that when people show a sincere interest in the interests of others, it makes them more attractive to be around. Remember, it's OK not to know everything. In fact, his children may feel they have more to contribute if you don't. And above all, relax and be yourself. (That's the person they're going to have to get to know, anyway.) This isn't an Academy Award performance — so play it cool, don't try too hard, and I'm sure you'll be a hit. Good luck!

DEAR ABBY: I got a big kick out of all the adults who responded to



Abigail Van Buren

Dear Abby

your "truth at the zoo" column. As they say, "out of the mouths of babes" come the most truthful responses.

When my daughter was quite young, I also took her to the zoo. My daughter was very intelligent, but on that occasion she surprised even me. It was mating season, and we were viewing the peacocks. A young mother and her little boy were standing near us when the boy asked his mom why the peacocks were saying, "Now! Now!" (That's what it sounded like!) The mother blushed and gave her son some lame reason. My daughter chimed in, "The birds with the pretty feathers are the boys, and they want to make babies. They want to do it NOW!" — MOM IN TAMPA

DEAR MOM: What a hoot! I can't believe it, but I'm still getting mail about the column. It seems that not only do kids "say the darndest things" — so do their parents. Read on:

DEAR ABBY: At a county fair last year, my husband and I were at the rabbit exhibit, and I overheard a mother explain to her child that what the bunnies were doing (read amorous pastime) was called "getting married." While technically incorrect, I thought that mother had a firm grip on family values. (I also hoped she'd explain things more clearly at the proper time and place.) I think it was a wonderful way to start the teaching and learning process of the birds and the bees. That mother seemed to be on track, and I was proud to have witnessed it. I still smile when I remember the encounter.

— MOTHER IN BUNKER HILL
DEAR ABBY: Can you stand one more story about the zoo? When my granddaughter Gabi was 2 1/2, my daughter took her to the zoo. She was pointing out the animals, and when they got to the cows, my daughter said, "Gabi, look at the one over there, the one with the horns.

That's a boy cow!"

Gabi looked up at her mother and said, "Mama, that's a bull!" Never underestimate children. They may surprise you.

— PROUD GRANDMA, MELBOURNE, FLA.

DEAR ABBY: I served as a zoo docent for 15 years, giving tours and taking zoo animals into class-

rooms for lectures. When asked a tough question, we were taught to say, "I don't know, but I will find out and get back to you with the answer."

We would always take a name, phone number or address, and be sure that the question was answered correctly.

One day, we actually heard a do-

cent tell a class that an ostrich will "hide" by putting his/her head in the sand. (Not true!) After that, we had a standing joke: A male ostrich was chasing a female ostrich, but she was doing a great job of staying just out of his reach. She abruptly turned a corner and stuck her head in the sand.

The male turned the same corner,

hot on her heels, but stopped dead in his tracks, uttering the immortal words, "Where did she go?"

— JOAN IN RIVERTON, UTAH

Editor's note: Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.

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