

Fear of coming out causes man to withdraw from life



Abigail Van Buren

• Dear Abby

DEAR ABBY: I am a 23-year-old male. Ever since I was in middle school, I have been dealing with the possibility that I might be a homosexual. Today I no longer think it's a "possibility." I know it's a fact.

For years, not a day has gone by that I have not had homosexual thoughts and urges. I have dated a few females to try to "change," but those attempts have been unsuccessful.

I am depressed, confused and angry with myself. I am becoming reclusive. I have withdrawn from most of my classes in college, and I don't want to socialize with people. Sometimes I think my life is over before it ever began.

I come from a religious family in south Georgia who believe that homosexuality is a sin and God will punish gays. In my part of the country, homophobia is everywhere. If I ever told anyone what I am feeling, I could never show my face around here again.

I keep asking myself whether or not my life would be better if I told people that I am a homosexual. I am beginning to believe that if I come out, my life would be better. I'd do it now, but I couldn't stand that my family would be disappointed with me — and I don't want to lose what friends I have left. I also can't bear the thought that my religious community would condemn me. What would you do if you were in my situation?

— CONFUSED IN GEORGIA

DEAR CONFUSED: If I were you, I'd accept that my life wasn't working and I'd probably come out. However, I am NOT you. If you come out to your family and friends, it's important that you understand that you will change. It will be better, but it will also be different. How close can any of these people really be to you if they don't know who you are?

Before making up your mind, I urge you to go online to www.lgbtcenters.org and locate some gay and lesbian centers where you can get counseling. (Atlanta might be a good place to start.) You can't hide forever. With emotional support, taking such a big step will be easier.

P.S. Eventually it might be better if you move to a more diverse community to complete your education and begin your new life.

DEAR ABBY: I have a delicate problem concerning my daughter-in-law, "Sheila," and my 1-year-old grandson, "Cary." I consider Sheila to be an unfit mother. Her house is filthy, including the kitchen. She allows Cary to eat cat food when he crawls around on the dirty floors.

Sheila has been giving Cary various medications since he was only a week old. When he would cry, she would give him drops to relieve "the gas." Next, it was a gel for his teething ailments when he was only 3 months old — she still gives it to him three times a day. She has also been giving him Tylenol every day "to help him sleep."

Abby, our grandson is beginning

to look a bit yellow, and we're afraid he may have some liver damage. We're afraid to speak out because we don't want to cause a rift in the family. I have considered writing a letter to his pediatrician, but I'm not sure it would be taken seriously. What can we do?

— WORRIED SICK IN PENNSYLVANIA

DEAR WORRIED SICK: You are justifiably concerned about your grandson's safety and welfare, so pick up the phone and call Childhelp USA. All calls are confidential, and your anonymity will be preserved. The number to call is (800) 422-4453. It's a 24-hour toll-free helpline, and the people who man those phones can help you report what's happening to the proper authorities in your state. You may also log on to www.childhelpusa.org.

DEAR ABBY: After two years of dating, my boyfriend, "Dan," and I have become engaged. Dan was married before and has two beautiful daughters, ages 5 and 10. I have no children of my own, so it has been a blessed, but sometimes bumpy road, accepting them into my life.

For the most part, the girls and I get along well, but there is one issue that really bothers me. When we have the girls, the 10-year-old, "Kelsey," frequently parades around in her underwear, or attempts to sleep only in her underwear. I feel she's too old to be doing this. I bought her several sets of pajamas to sleep in, thinking it would solve the problem.

Last night I caught her in only her underwear again. I told Dan it bothers me, and his response was, "She's only 10." Abby, Kelsey is old enough to be going through puberty, so to me she is too old to go around without proper clothing. And even though she is an undeveloped 10-year-old, I explained to Dan that I want his daughters to grow up respecting themselves and their bodies. (I have also told this to Kelsey.)

I fear that Kelsey does this at her mother's and other relatives' homes. Their mother isn't the most respectable person and, sad to say, was raised to be "trashy." I am trying to be a positive influence in these children's lives. I would like them to turn into proper young ladies with good morals and values. Am I wrong?

— UNOFFICIAL STEPMOM IN TEXAS

DEAR UNOFFICIAL STEPMOM: Yes, although well-intended, I think you are. Kelsey sleeps in her underwear because that's the way she's used to sleeping and she's comfortable that way. It will have no effect on the degree to which she "respects herself and her body" unless you turn it into a power struggle.

Because you feel she's too old to be walking around in her underwear, you're within your rights to ask her to put on a robe. But if you want to teach the children good morals and values, the way to do it is to stop nagging, set a good example, and refrain from making nasty comments about their "trashy" mother.

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