

# Online help offers lifeline to drinker



**Abigail Van Buren**

● Dear Abby

DEAR ABBY: I am a full-time firefighter, married with two small children, living in a small city. My problem is I have a drinking problem that I hide well from friends and family. Lately, however, it has been getting worse, and I would like to get help.

I know of several AA groups that meet in my area, but because this is a small community, I'm afraid that someone will notice me at one of the meetings, and my problem will be exposed — and I could possibly lose my job.

Is there any professional help I might be able to get online?

— NEEDS HELP IN VIRGINIA

DEAR NEEDS HELP: Where there's a will, there's a way. You can participate in AA meetings via the Internet by going to [www.aa-intergroup.org](http://www.aa-intergroup.org). It's an Internet chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous where you can join in on audio or e-mail meetings. Another site is [www.aaonline.net](http://www.aaonline.net). You can also Google "Alcoholics Anonymous online" and find a variety of resources. Plenty of help is available if you just reach out for it! Good luck!

DEAR ABBY: I am a 12-year-old girl in seventh grade. My parents are divorced, and my father has remarried. My parents have shared custody and make joint decisions about me.

My mother has given me permission to shave my legs, but my father says I am not old enough because that is what my stepmother tells him to say.

My stepmother reads your column, and if you agree that I am old enough to shave my legs, she will tell my father that I should be able to, and then my parents will be in agreement.

— HAIRY AND SELF-CONSCIOUS IN OHIO

DEAR HAIRY: I am glad to help. The time a girl should begin to shave her legs is when she becomes conscious of the fact that she needs to. It's not a matter of "age." It is when she's old enough to do it carefully and not injure herself. And 12 is about average. I hope your stepmother sees this and relents.

DEAR ABBY: My 16-year-old son agreed to download music onto his cousin's iPod in his absence. Unfortunately, our dog got hold of the iPod and chewed the leather case it was in and damaged the screen.

Who should be responsible for the replacement of the iPod (\$450 plus \$40 for the leather case)? I think the responsibility lies with both parties and the cost should be split in half.

Please share your thoughts ASAP. Because this concerns family, it could create real animosity if

it is not handled properly.

— MUSICAL DILEMMA

DEAR MUSICAL DILEMMA: I do not agree with you. The person who should pay to replace the damaged iPod is the person whose carelessness resulted in the dog destroying it. Look at it this way: Often the most expensive lesson is the most effective — and this one is a doozy!

DEAR ABBY: I am being married next year, and our "best man" is female. Can you tell us what we should call her?

— KARLA IN AKRON, OHIO

DEAR KARLA: Congratulations on your forthcoming wedding. Your friend's official title will be "groom's attendant."

DEAR ABBY: My son was an Apache helicopter pilot in the Army. He was active in the initial invasion of Iraq and spent a year serving his country. It was a very difficult time for me. Eventually I suffered a nervous breakdown from the stress.

My son is now honorably discharged and safe at home. My problem is that friends keep sending me war-related e-mails and updates. If I know what they are by the subject line, I delete them.

Recently, I got an e-mail about a soldier whose job it was to inform the families when their loved ones had been killed. I had an emotional meltdown when I saw it. I know firsthand the fear that family members feel.

I was driving my car when I heard an Apache helicopter went down and two soldiers were taken hostage. I nearly crashed the vehicle. It could have been my son. It taught me not to listen to the news while driving.

How do I tell everyone not to send me correspondence about the war and the goings-on in Iraq? They have no idea how this affects me. I haven't seen this issue addressed in your column.

— SALLY IN DEARBORN, MICH.

DEAR SALLY: I'm sure your friends mean well, so tell them in plain English exactly what you have told me. You should also contact the physician who treated you at the time of your nervous breakdown and explain that you are still experiencing problems. Some sessions with a psychiatrist who specializes in post-traumatic stress may be able to help you finally close this chapter of your life.

*Editor's note: Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at [www.DearAbby.com](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.*

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