

# Mother feels excluded when grandmother takes the children

DEAR ABBY: I have a unique problem. My mother-in-law is too nice. She insists on taking my children once or twice a week so that she can have her own time with them — often taking them on fun outings for entire afternoons or evenings. I am not invited. Although she cannot refuse to let me come, any time I do, she makes me feel that I am intruding. I guess she likes to “play mom,” and my presence interferes.



**Abigail Van Buren**

• Dear Abby

While I appreciate the fact that she goes out of her way to develop a good relationship with my children, it bothers me that she demands to see them so often and at my exclusion. Am I just being selfish for feeling left out? In my family, the attitude was always “the more the merrier.”

— LEFT OUT IN SAN DIEGO  
**DEAR LEFT OUT:** Many people reading this column would fall on their knees and kiss the ground if their parents or in-laws treated their children the way yours does. However, because you feel left out, it's time to have a frank talk with “Granny” and tell her that you would like to be able to join some of those outings without feeling that you are intruding, as you have been made to feel — however inadvertently — in the past. She may not be aware

of the message she has been conveying.

DEAR ABBY: I believe my husband is headed for a nervous breakdown, and I don't know what to do. He is having a mid-life crisis. His hair is thinning very quickly, and he's having a problem sexually. Things have gotten so bad that I'm contemplating filing for a divorce.

Can you please tell him that he is not alone, and that there are many men his age experiencing the same problems?

— DESPERATE

**DEAR DESPERATE:** Of course your husband is not alone. And the proof of it lies as near as your television set, with its endless ads for Viagra, Levitra and other “male enhancements.” Add to that the testimonials for hair replacement surgery, and it adds up to many thousands of men and many millions of dollars for available treatments.

This is not the time to leave

your husband. What you should do is urge him to discuss his concerns with his doctor, because what is “ailing” him can almost certainly be fixed.

DEAR ABBY: I have two active boys who are 8 and 2 1/2. We are going on a 12-hour road trip to a family wedding. I shared with my mother-in-law that I am dreading the long ride and am trying to think of ways to keep the boys occupied. We have a DVD player and are taking books, toys, etc. on the trip.

I was shocked to hear my mother-in-law suggest that I give the boys Benadryl to put them to sleep. This is not the first time I have heard someone say this. Is this common practice? My husband and I would never do such a thing. Isn't that child abuse?

— APPALLED.

**DEAR APPALLED:** I would certainly call it child endangerment. Children should not be given medications without a

doctor's prescription. If I were you, I'd start that trip at night, when the children are normally sleeping. And bring along lots of things to keep them entertained. I would also schedule stops at regular intervals so they don't get cabin fever. But drug them? Never.

DEAR ABBY: My son is 11 and, for the first time, he has a “girlfriend.” I have always discouraged the children from saying they have girlfriends and boyfriends, so he has always referred to her as his “friend.” Well, the other night, I heard him say, “I love you,” and there were text messages on his phone from her saying it, too.

I tried to talk to him about it and explain that this is not appropriate because he's too young to really understand what love is, and he should not say it until he is older and knows what love is. He didn't respond very well and was embarrassed. I don't think I was very effective. Do you have any recommendations on how to handle this?

— SHANNON IN HOUSTON

**DEAR SHANNON:** I certainly do. And the first is to stop minimizing your son's feelings because you know better what he is feeling. His emotions are his own, and the more you insist they are

not valid, the higher the barrier will be that you build between you. How much better it would have been had you listened to what he had to say and simply commented that along with love go responsibilities that he will come to understand as he grows older — and that he can always tell you anything.

DEAR ABBY: I have been married to “Carl” for six years. We have two children together. My parents hate him because, years ago, he served time in prison, and they feel Carl is “beneath” me, and I can “do better.”

Abby, my parents won't even see their own grandchildren unless I leave Carl at home, which isn't fair to him. He has turned his life around, earns good money at his job, and is a devoted husband and father. How can I convince my parents to see him for who he is now?

— CARL'S WIFE

**DEAR CARL'S WIFE:** By taking your children to see your parents and allowing them to exclude your husband, you are helping them to isolate and belittle him. The quickest way to get your parents to recognize that their behavior is unacceptable is to stop aiding and abetting it. Begin by re-

fusing to visit unless your husband — and the father of those grandchildren — is welcomed.

DEAR ABBY: My husband and I enjoy playing golf. I am in sales, so I have the opportunity to invite clients to play golf. When I include my husband in these events, it can become very uncomfortable. If his round is not going well, he becomes upset, curses loudly and slams his club to the ground. It is extremely embarrassing to me, and I'm sure it makes my clients uncomfortable.

I'm hesitant to say anything to my husband about his behavior because I have to imagine that he isn't happy with himself when he acts that way, either. I'm considering not including him in future rounds that involve clients, but don't really like that alternative.

— TEED OFF IN HOUSTON

**DEAR TEED OFF:** May I be frank? Business is business. Your husband's childish, unsportsmanlike behavior could have a negative effect on your ability to make a sale. Tell your husband that when he behaves that way in front of clients, it reflects badly on the both of you, and if it happens again you will have to exclude him from your business-related golf games.

Then “follow through.”

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