

Family member still upset over name calling incident

DEAR ABBY: My mother says I'm tearing our family apart. On Mother's Day, my 8-year-old daughter teased her 9-year-old cousin, asking who'd like her last bite of dessert. When he said he wanted it, she said, "Just kidding!" My nephew went running into the house wailing like he'd been hit.



Abigail Van Buren

● Dear Abby

I was in the middle of telling my daughter what she did was wrong and she should apologize, when I heard my brother, "Harry," ask my nephew why he was crying. My nephew said my daughter had teased him over the dessert, and Harry said, "Well, she's a little bitch!" I was horrified. My daughter and sister-in-law heard it, too.

When I went inside to talk to Harry, he told me he didn't mean it that way and that he could say anything in his house that he wants. My daughter and I left, and I haven't talked to him since.

He has apologized to my daughter with numerous justifications for what he said, but he hasn't apologized to me for what he called my daughter and the way he talked to me. We have had two family birthdays since then (including another at my brother's), and my daughter and I haven't attended either one. My mother is taking Harry's side, saying I'm too sensitive and the word isn't that bad. Am I wrong to think that calling an 8-year-old a "bitch" is horrible, degrading and uncalled for?

— SISTER OF A TRASH MOUTH

DEAR SISTER: Probably not. But your brother has already apologized to the "injured" party for what he said, and he does not owe you one. I'm voting with your mother. You have already punished yourself and your daughter enough by missing out on the family birthday parties. Enough, already!

DEAR ABBY: Two years ago, I became acquainted with a woman I'll call "Julie." We were neighbors and talked often. One day, she confided that she was in a verbally and emotionally abusive marriage. She said she was a prisoner in her own home and didn't know what to do.

To make a long story short, I let myself get sucked in. I trusted her. I helped Julie financially to retain a lawyer and found her and her children a nice place to live through another friend of mine, "Sue." Sue knew of Julie's situation because I told her. She, too, was very kind to Julie.

Not only was Julie always late with her rent (there was no reason for her to be), she broke her lease and lied about why she had to move. My issue is that I unwittingly sucked Sue in for Julie's "cause." I feel terrible and responsible, even though I have apologized to Sue about it. Julie has made no effort to contact us since then.

I recently learned that Julie has "befriended" a prominent single man from church. (She's not yet divorced.)

I believe he is getting sucked in the way I was. He has connections and has helped Julie find another job.

He has also helped her move. Should I let him know what kind of person Julie really is, or use this as a learning experience, mind my own business and move on?

— CONNED IN THE SOUTH

DEAR CONNED: Would you keep silent if you knew there was a pickpocket loose in the congregation? You should not only tell the man what your and Sue's experience was with this woman, you should also clue your clergyman in on the fact that there is a predator loose in his flock. It may not make you popular, but at least your conscience will be clear.

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DEAR ABBY: I am 11. My sister, "Brittany," is 9. She always tries to make me feel dumb and little. She makes fun of everything I do and cracks rude comments about me. She kisses up to everyone else and makes them think she's an angel.

I am fed up with Brittany's smart-alecky comments and rudeness. She constantly annoys me because we have the same room. She thinks it's a huge joke that I am going through puberty and holds her nose around me all the time.

I have tried talking to her, my parents, my grandparents, and anyone else who will listen. They think we are "just being sisters" and that I complain too much. Help!

— FED UP IN GREENVILLE, S.C.

DEAR FED UP: Your sister is acting like a brat because she is only 9 and she's jealous of you.

Please try to keep that in mind when she makes you feel "dumb" and "little," because you are neither.

When Brittany teases you about going through puberty, remind her that in a few years she will be going through the exact same thing — and how will she like you holding your nose around her?

Puberty is a difficult time under the best circumstances, and sharing a room with a little pest can make it even more so. Perhaps that room could be rearranged so that you both have some degree of privacy? Think about it and discuss it with your mother, because it is doable.

DEAR ABBY: I recently ended a three-year relationship, and afterward I found out my ex had fathered a child while we were together. This is not the reason I ended the relationship because I didn't know about it until after it was over.

When I told our mutual friends that I knew, a few of them told me they had known the whole time, but were "giving him the opportunity to be a man and tell me himself." I feel hurt and betrayed because no one told me the truth. One of these "friends" was my own sister — which has obviously put a strain on our relationship. What should I do?

— BETRAYED IN FORT SMITH, ARK.

DEAR BETRAYED: Although you were told the reason they kept silent was to "give (your ex) the opportunity to be a man and tell you himself," it may also have been that they didn't want to hurt you. In other words, it was a misguided effort to protect you. So please try to forgive them. (That includes your sister.) And be grateful to the Lord above that you didn't waste any more time on that philandering jerk.

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 or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.

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