

Students ask dumb questions

Dear Harlan,
I often want to talk to professors about intellectual ideas, but I find myself clamming up and feeling extremely vulnerable when I go to talk to that person.

I'm OK in class and in a lot of social situations, but then I go to talk to a professor, and it seems like I'm hypervigilant and looking for any sign that the person doesn't really want to hear my question and discuss it. I wind up leaving professors' offices without asking the questions that are really on my mind. So I retreat to sending e-mails instead. I know e-mails aren't as good as, or as satisfying as, face-to-face conversations, so I try to do the face-to-face thing, but then I clam up.

It feels so stupid — all I'm doing is talking about intellectual things, not personal stuff. Yet it feels like I'm talking about personal stuff in the way that I feel like I'm taking a risk in opening myself up to the other person intellectually. It's really making it hard for me to get the mentoring I need in graduate school. I love what I'm doing in graduate school, but I really could use some mentoring to help keep me moving toward my goals.

— Need Help
Dear Need Help,
Unless you get the dumb things out, the smart stuff won't be able

to get out either. See, it's like your intellectual plumbing gets clogged. If students knew everything, there would be no need for professors. And it's the students who know the least who are the most valuable for professors, so talk to them. If your professor makes you feel like you're stupid, tell your professor that the way he or she responded made you uncomfortable.

Then tell him or her how you get intimidated when approaching but you want to have a good relationship. Once your fear is out in the open, you'll be able to talk freely. If you find that your professor is a totally insensitive SOB, find another student or someone else in the department to help.

Dear Harlan,
My dad's real mother died when he was 2, and my grandfather (dad's dad) remarried another lady who already had two daughters of her own from a previous marriage.

Together, my grandfather and stepgrandmother had another daughter, who is my half aunt. So, one of my stepaunts had a daughter, who would be my first stepcousin. Then she had a son, who would be my second stepcousin.

My stepcousin and I are together and very much in love, but our fami-

lies are up in arms about our relationship, saying that we are wrong for what we are doing because we are "related" by my half aunt, his half great aunt.

Are we really related through her? Does that count, and are we wrong for feeling what we feel? Please help me!

— Dating a Cousin
Dear Dating a Cousin,
The most confusing part of this is going to be deciding which half of the room the family sits in during the wedding ceremony.

It was your stepcousin, not your half aunt, who gave birth to the son that you're in love with, right? So, he's not really your cousin by blood. I think that's right. You're never wrong feeling what you're feeling, but unless your family is royalty or big fans of Albert Einstein (he married his first cousin), don't expect them to get excited about cousins dating.

Write Harlan at [harlan\(at\)helpmeharlan.com](mailto:harlan(at)helpmeharlan.com) or visit www.helpmeharlan.com online: www.helpmeharlan.com. All letters submitted become property of the author. Send paper to Help Me, Harlan! 2506 N. Clark St., Ste. 223, Chicago, IL 60614.

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Person suspects criminal act

DEAR ABBY: I have a good friend who owns a prosperous business. I'll call him "Oscar." Oscar has no clue that one of his employees, "Shirley," is stealing big chunks of money from him.

I feel bad for the friend who is being taken, and also for the person doing the stealing. I know them both well, and if I were to tell him, Oscar would lose both a friend and an employee. Shirley has worked for him for more than a dozen years. Her son and her brother now work for him, too. If I blow the whistle, Shirley could lose her home and other investments.

This could get very ugly, and I don't want to be in the middle. Please tell me what to do.

— IN THE MIDDLE IN PHOENIX

DEAR IN THE MIDDLE:
You were put in the middle the minute you learned about the thefts. You must tell the employer what is going on. To do otherwise makes you an accessory to the crime.

It will then be up to Oscar to decide if he wants to press charges. And please remember that the friendship be-



Abigail Van Buren

• Dear Abby

tween Oscar and Shirley ended when she started stealing from him. Friends don't steal from their friends. Opportunists do.

DEAR ABBY: Whenever an individual has a face lift, brow lift or eye lift, it is usually said that the person looks 10 — or whatever — years younger. I know the person will continue to age, but will she (or he) always look 10 years younger than she would have without surgery, or does the person eventually look just as she would have if she never had a lift?

I asked a cosmetic surgeon this question, but never got a clear answer. Could you help me (and others) have a more realistic idea of what to expect if we choose this route?

— CONTEMPLATING

DEAR CONTEMPLATING:
I'll try. It is a misconception that plastic surgery guarantees knocking 10 years — or "what-

ever" — off one's countenance. More often what happens is the person looks "rested" or "refreshed" — the sags and stress lines gone or diminished.

How long the results last can vary according to the patient's genetics and how well he or she takes care of his or her skin.

If the person avoids the sun, tobacco, too much alcohol and excessive weight gain, the results of plastic surgery will last longer. But nothing lasts forever — and that includes anything a person has "lifted."

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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