

Husband concerned over wife's ambition to save kids' items

Dear Dr. Brothers: My wife is driving me crazy. We are trying to move to a smaller home now that our youngest child is graduating from high school and going off to college. Our two other kids are already on their own. The problem is that the house we bought is much smaller, but my wife refuses to throw away one single scrap of paper from the kids' childhood. We are going to be buried in memorabilia and bags of stuff from every school year. How can I convince her that she doesn't need this — and that the kids don't want it? — B.K.

Dear B.K.: Your wife is clinging to the children through their childhood belongings as she adjusts to the empty nest. She is probably suffering a bit. But there are some things you can do. It would be great if the children themselves would clean out some of their things and take responsibility for throwing away the items they don't care about. You and your wife might like to watch a few of those "cleaning out" shows



Dr. Joyce Brothers

● Ask Dr. Brothers

that are popular on TV now, so she sees that it can be done — and that most people are happier after their lives have been simplified.

But more important, your wife could use some extra TLC of her own right now, since she's feeling like everyone has flown the coop and she is hanging on for dear life. That means helping to make sure that there is frequent good communication going on between the two of you and the kids. If your wife feels more secure, she will find it easier to start letting go. Also, try to adjust to her speed, and don't push too hard. Your special attention at this time will give her something to look for-

ward to.

Dear Dr. Brothers: My boyfriend and I have been having a disagreement, and we want you to settle it. Here's the situation: We bought a nice old secretary at an antiques store. When we got home, we noticed that one of the drawers held a pile of old papers and photos of local landmarks. I felt so guilty for not checking the drawers first that I called the owner of the store and offered him back the contents. He was grateful because he actually had planned to sell the things. My boyfriend said he would have kept the stuff, but he admires me for my honesty. Do you think it still counts if I was really motivated by guilt? — J.J.

Dear J.J.: Don't be so hard on yourself; the bottom line is that you did the right thing and offered to return the items that you suspected were included in the deal accidentally. What you are calling "guilt" someone else might characterize as the little voice inside his or her head, or simply his or her conscience speaking. There is really no need for you to differentiate between the two if you end up doing the right thing.

Some people do not have the strength of character to follow the path of doing what's right. So, I am afraid I have to side with your boyfriend this time. You are the type of customer a shopkeeper would like to deal with, and I expect that you will be getting some kind of reward — if not tangible, at least the banishment of that guilty feeling you would have had every time you opened the secretary. You will find out a bit about your boyfriend's character when you tell him you are returning the

things. He should be proud of you. So take the full credit and run with it!

Dear Dr. Brothers: What do you think of "robot therapy"? I saw an article about people using robot pets for companionship and comfort ... and it was hard to believe! Why can't people use a real dog or cat — or a real person, for that matter — to make themselves feel better? What can they possibly be thinking to let a robot work with old or sick people? Are we ready for some type of "brave new world" where no one needs real people anymore? — H.B.

Dear H.B.: Robot dogs have been around for a while as toys, but you are correct that they are now being tried out as therapy for many people, including the elderly, shut-ins and ill or incapacitated children. Let's consider what use they might serve for this population that is underserved and often ignored or depressed. First of all, there is the safety issue (no bites) and sanitation (no

pooper-scooper). Although you might wonder what robot dogs have to offer in the way of therapy, they seem to elicit a response that a patient doesn't receive from just turning on the TV or listening to music.

The Japanese have been leaders in researching the appeal of robot dogs in these fragile populations, and they've observed that old and young alike respond to their mechanical pets as more than just helpers delivering medicine. Some patients refuse to throw away a robot dog when it breaks, having formed a "bond" with the animal that some find alarming. I think it emphasizes how desperate people are for human contact, even if the "person" is a machine. A robot will never replace a human being, but it can provide one more tool for caregivers looking to help people who are otherwise lonely and dependent.

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