

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam,

We live in a very peaceful neighborhood. That is why what I am about to describe is very obvious. Our next-door neighbors have been there about five years and we are neighborly friendly. I communicate fairly regularly with the wife and in the summertime contact is more frequent as a family.

In the past few months, I have become aware of yelling and loud noises coming from the house. I have casually asked how things are and have only gotten positive responses. I don't think everything is fine, but what should I do and how far do I go with my concern? I don't want to make it uncomfortable being neighbors, but at the same time I am concerned.

Concerned Neighbor

A. Dear Concerned Neighbor,

One of the myths of domestic violence is that it doesn't happen in nice neighborhoods. Awareness of domestic violence has grown over recent years, but the most crucial part is having the person who is being abused willing to come forward for help. There can be a significant risk physically, emotionally and financially to identifying as being abused.

Of course, if you see something directly, call the authorities. Otherwise, continue to offer your concern to your neighbor. Let her know that you are aware that there are problems in the home, but don't demand that she take action because she will likely shut you out. Perhaps you could get some materials on domestic violence and services such as safe houses and have them available when you have your neighbor over for coffee. It takes a domestic violence victim quite a while to seek help. Be consistent in your concern and when she is ready for help, be there.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

We are the parents of three children, one of whom is a preteen girl. Needless to say, we have begun our fun with clothes, make-up, going out, etc. In addition to the normal challenge of all of this, my husband has some of what I consider very old-fashioned ideas. While I feel my daughter wants too much too fast, I am caught in the middle because I also think my husband is too strict. How can we get some balance in all of this because I have two younger children watching everything that happens?

Mom in the Middle

A. Dear Mom in the Middle,

You have identified a couple of problems. Now, back to the basics of parenting. You and your husband must agree on what your rules and standards will be. Instead of trying to convince your husband that your way is correct, find out what concerns him. His concerns may involve much more than just clothes and make up.

After you talk with him, you both, hopefully, can agree on reasonable limits and expectations. At that point, you should be out of the middle, and both of you equally ready to deal with your daughter. Be aware though that you face challenges and will have to have enough flexibility to negotiate solutions with your daughter. You can have a bottom line for what you will accept, but everything above the line is open for discussion and joint-problem solving.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail madler@jfsneny.org or call 518-482-8856.