

# How to handle criticism from mother-in-law



ANITA TAYLOR

**Q.** My husband Joe's mother is coming to our home for an upcoming holiday. She's unpleasant and critical of everything I do. When I complain to my husband, he claims that it's "just how way" and that I'll have to learn how to deal with it. How do I handle this situation?

**A.** Relationships, even within large families, are developed with one person at a time. You

have described two separate problems. The first is the disappointment and anger you feel from the lack of support and empathy you get from your husband. You must tell him in direct terms, "Joe, I need you to be sympathetic when I tell you about your mom. Tell me you're sorry she's a problem for me and acknowledge my hurt feelings." Joe can't change his mother and can't read your mind.

The second problem is your mother-in-law. She needs to know how you feel when she is critical. The courage to stand up for yourself must come from within you. Tell her "I feel angry and inadequate when you criticize me."

Often times, certain members

in our family, because of their age or status, are allowed to get away with a hostile attitude. It is the duty of the people around them to love them enough to be honest and tell them how they really feel.

If this problem has been an ongoing one, perhaps you can call or meet for coffee before the actual holiday. This would give you an opportunity to express your feelings directly. The important thing is the courage to be honest.

Criticism in relationships is used as a coercive way of getting what we need. As an infant, we cry to get our needs met. In adulthood, we use criticism as a way of "crying out." For instance, we say, "You're as cold as ice," instead of saying, "I need a hug."

Your mother-in-law isn't getting what she needs. Recognize

her critical attitude as a symptom of her own unhappiness.

Put love in your heart. Remember, you're all family. Take a deep breath — and talk to her.

**Q.** I've been married to Jim for five wonderful years. We have two sons, ages 1 and 3. Last year, Jennifer, his 13-year-old daughter from his previous marriage, asked if she could come live with us. At first I believed this move would make our life easier and be great for him. Now, six months later, I'm having second thoughts.

Jennifer's biological mother calls me frequently to ask about how Jennifer is doing. I feel anxious when she questions the decisions I tell her Jim and I have made together.

I'm feeling uneasy as a

stepmother and not certain what to do. Jim thinks his ex-wife is controlling and believes she will eventually leave us alone. I don't believe the answer is that simple.

A. New situations require new rules and ways of behaving. Sometimes we neglect to talk about changes openly, hoping that somehow, magically, things will work out. Rarely, if ever, is that true. This new living arrangement must be discussed by all the adults involved.

If the relationship between Jim and his ex-wife is strained and you are unable to do this on your own, I suggest you seek the guidance of a therapist who can help all the adults clarify the new boundaries and set limits. Over time, it is important to develop a "parenting coalition" of parents and stepparents in Jennifer's two households. This is



## It's Here!

**A Quality Degree Completion Program for Mature Adults!**

- QUALITY FACULTY & HIGHLY MOTIVATED STUDENTS!
- PRACTICAL/MARKETABLE COURSES
- ATTEND ONCE A WEEK
- SMALL, ACTIVE, SPIRITED CLASS DISCUSSIONS
- EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CREDITS
- COMPLETE YOUR MAJOR IN 18 MONTHS
- CONTRIBUTE LIFE AND WORK EXPERIENCE IN A UNIQUE CLASSROOM SETTING

### ST. MARY'S COLLEGE

at ORCHARD LAKE

Orchard Lake and Commerce Roads

For Immediate Information  
**CALL (248) 683-0406**

## Teach your kids about decision-making

Alice McCarthy has asked Janet Armil, school psychologist for Birmingham Public Schools and advisory member of the Birmingham Community Coalition, to answer this week's question.

**Q.** My husband and I have set rules for our kids against using drugs and alcohol, and we know they get drug-prevention information in school, but with summer

coming, I'm starting to worry. Every year at this time I read about teenagers dying in drinking-and-driving accidents and I wonder if my kids are equipped to make smart decisions in those come-on-it'll-be-fun situations. L.N., Beverly Hills

**A.** Setting rules/consequences and warning of the dangers of alcohol and other drugs is crucial to substance abuse prevention,

but it's not enough. In those critical moments like you have described, kids also need the ability to make hard decisions. They're under a lot of pressure and they need to think fast. If they have had experience all along in making their own decisions (and dealing with the results), then they will be able to make tough, safe choices in those pressing situations.

Clear rules and consequences, substance abuse education and strong decision-making skills form the tripod that supports healthy behavior. You have got the first two legs of the tripod in place. Now you need to turn your attention to the third leg. You and your husband are in a powerful position to help your kids develop their decision-making skills by providing everyday practice. There's no better way to gain experience in the ups and

downs of making your own decisions than under a parent's watchful eye. Kids who get guided practice in setting goals, making decisions, and handling the outcomes have the best chance to control what happens to them when they are on their own and under pressure. How well they perform on their own depends on the practice they have had with you. Remember, also, most health education instruction includes skill building in problem solving. Ask your child about these lessons. Inquire at your school too.

So, how do you do it? Your relationship with your kids is a powerful thing, and how you respond to their opinions, decisions, and outcomes has tremendous influence on how they view their own effectiveness. Use the great power of your relationship to teach them that they can not only make decisions but also deal with, and learn from, the consequences.

■ When your kids talk with you about problems, do you provide the solutions, or do you help them find their own solutions?

■ Later, can you engage them in follow-up discussions about how effective the solutions were?

■ Do you let your kids make some of their own choices and decisions?

■ Are you available when the time comes to work through, and learn from, the results of those decisions?

■ Can you view your kids' mistakes and failures as opportunities to learn?

■ Can you accept mistakes, setbacks and failures as a necessary part of learning? Or, do you rescue your kids from the consequences of their choices? Do you allow your kids to express an opinion that differs from yours? Are you aware that your kids are always watching you and learning from the decisions you make? Are your own decisions about drugs and alcohol healthy?

Make time and create opportunity for your kids to begin to talk to you.

■ Turn off the television and empty the dishwasher together.

■ Hang up the computer games and ask for help making dinner. Eat dinner as a family. Make inquiries while you're driving home from after-school activities. The car is one of the best places to have conversations, but watch the traffic too.

■ Offer to share chores in exchange for helping you clean the garage.

Every attempt you make is an investment in your kids' abilities to think on their feet and make good decisions. When your kids venture out from under your wing, they will take that rich experience along, and they will be safer for it.

Janet L. Armil holds a master of science degree in clinical psychology and is a specialist in arts in school psychology. Besides being school psychologist for the Birmingham Public Schools, she has a private practice in clinical and school psychology at Dennis & Moye & Associates, P.C., in Bloomfield Hills.

Birmingham resident Alice McCarthy, Ph.D., is a nationally known parent educator, writer and editor. She is the mother of five children and grandmother to eight young children. To leave a message for McCarthy, from a touch-tone phone, call (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1894, or write her at The Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

### Reimastered Computer Sales

#### 486 BLOWOUT SALE

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Compaq or IBM</b><br>486, 66mhz, 12MB 270 MB HD<br>Keyboard & Mouse with Win 3.1<br>and 14" SVGA Monitor | <b>\$125</b><br>Plus Tax<br>\$30 Shipping |
| <b>Compaq or IBM</b><br>486, 66mhz, 12MB 270 MB HD<br>Keyboard & Mouse with Win 3.1<br>and 15" SVGA Monitor | <b>\$150</b><br>Plus Tax<br>\$30 Shipping |

SIX MONTH WARRANTY ON ALL HARDWARE  
VISA, MASTERCARD, DISCOVER, & PERSONAL CHECK  
**Call Power Brokers Today**  
(248) 683-0406

Every Summer thousands of children look forward to camp...

...Give them the opportunity to experience yours with an advertisement in our 1998 Summer Camp Corner.

### ROCHESTER HILLS STABLES

Summer Day Camp  
The English riding camp only  
• Hands-on care of horses  
• Horse show and dressage  
3 Two-Week Sessions  
4 One-Week Sessions  
June-August 8:00-2:00 p.m.  
For more information & brochure  
(810) 752-9520 / (810) 752-6020

### Livonia Family YMCA

Day Camp  
10 Weeks  
June 15 - August 21  
Ages 3 - 14  
(734) 261-2161 FUN! SAFE!

### SUMMER BASKETBALL CAMPS

CAMP HOTLINE  
(248) 377-0104  
Presented by RICK and BILLY COOK/Star Child  
Call now to register for Detroit, Normal and Farmington Camps.

### BASKETBALL AMERICA SUMMER CAMPS

• T-shirts • Basketballs • Prizes • Awards  
257 W. Clarkson Rd., Lake Orion  
1-800-954-5787 or 1-248-693-8568

### Detroit Titans Basketball

Perry Watson Camp  
Times: 9 am - 3 pm  
Dates: June 15 - 19  
Ages 8 - 12  
Boys Grades 5 - 12  
Cost: \$125.00  
Contact Tammy Bryant  
(313) 903-1731  
9 - 5 weekdays

### Dance Et cetera

Performing Arts Camp  
• Professional dance and performing arts instruction combined with traditional camp experiences!  
Plus... music, art, games, and more!  
Ages 8-12  
(248) 788-5717

## '98 Camp Corner Directory

### Summer At Sacred Heart

JUNE 22 - JULY 31  
OFFERING WEEKLY CAMPS  
• FIRE ARTS • COMPUTERS • SPORTS • ACADEMICS  
ACADEMY OF SACRED HEART  
BLOOMFIELD HILLS • 248-648-8800  
Call for brochure

### Camp Linden

• Day and Overnight Camp in Livingston County  
• One & Two week sessions  
• Mini sessions too!  
• Girls grades 1-12  
• Accredited by the American Camping Association  
• Call (800) 49-SCOUT for information and brochure

### GIRL SCOUTS

Computer Camp  
Michigan-MIT-Stanford  
• Coed ages 7-18 • Day & overnight camps  
• Programming in Basic, C++,  
• Beginners to advanced  
• Network games & Sports  
• Web Design-HTML, Java  
• Weekly sessions  
1-800-FUN-4ACE  
www.computer-camp.com

### Grant Hill Basketball Camp

• June 22 Through June 28  
• One Week With TWO Sessions  
• At Detroit Country Day School, Beverly Hills, MI  
• For Rising 3rd through 12th Graders  
• Improve Your Overall Game  
• Team and Individual Competition  
• Free Camp Tee Shirt  
• Give Aways  
• Awards  
• Guest Speakers  
To Receive Your Application Call (248) 975-8838  
**Come and Change Your Game!**

### Camp CAEN

U-M Computer Exploration Camp!  
This summer, the College of Engineering is offering talented students, ages 13-17, and opportunity to explore one of world's most advanced computer networks! Each two-week session provides excellent hands-on instruction for both residential and commuter students. Meet U-M faculty, too!  
• Program in Java  
• Program in C/C++  
• Explore the WWW  
• Create a Virtual Reality World  
• Explore Computer Graphics and Multimedia  
For more information and brochure: call 734-736-8039, visit the home page on World Wide Web at <http://www.engin.umich.edu/campcaen> or send e-mail to [camp-caen@engin.umich.edu](mailto:camp-caen@engin.umich.edu)  
Computer Aided Engineering Network  
College of Engineering  
University of Michigan

downs of making your own decisions than under a parent's watchful eye. Kids who get guided practice in setting goals, making decisions, and handling the outcomes have the best chance to control what happens to them when they are on their own and under pressure. How well they perform on their own depends on the practice they have had with you. Remember, also, most health education instruction includes skill building in problem solving. Ask your child about these lessons. Inquire at your school too.

So, how do you do it? Your relationship with your kids is a powerful thing, and how you respond to their opinions, decisions, and outcomes has tremendous influence on how they view their own effectiveness. Use the great power of your relationship to teach them that they can not only make decisions but also deal with, and learn from, the consequences.

■ When your kids talk with you about problems, do you provide the solutions, or do you help them find their own solutions?

■ Later, can you engage them in follow-up discussions about how effective the solutions were?

■ Do you let your kids make some of their own choices and decisions?

■ Are you available when the time comes to work through, and learn from, the results of those decisions?

■ Can you view your kids' mistakes and failures as opportunities to learn?

■ Can you accept mistakes, setbacks and failures as a necessary part of learning? Or, do you rescue your kids from the consequences of their choices? Do you allow your kids to express an opinion that differs from yours? Are you aware that your kids are always watching you and learning from the decisions you make? Are your own decisions about drugs and alcohol healthy?

Make time and create opportunity for your kids to begin to talk to you.

■ Turn off the television and empty the dishwasher together.

■ Hang up the computer games and ask for help making dinner. Eat dinner as a family. Make inquiries while you're driving home from after-school activities. The car is one of the best places to have conversations, but watch the traffic too.

■ Offer to share chores in exchange for helping you clean the garage.

Every attempt you make is an investment in your kids' abilities to think on their feet and make good decisions. When your kids venture out from under your wing, they will take that rich experience along, and they will be safer for it.

Janet L. Armil holds a master of science degree in clinical psychology and is a specialist in arts in school psychology. Besides being school psychologist for the Birmingham Public Schools, she has a private practice in clinical and school psychology at Dennis & Moye & Associates, P.C., in Bloomfield Hills.

Birmingham resident Alice McCarthy, Ph.D., is a nationally known parent educator, writer and editor. She is the mother of five children and grandmother to eight young children. To leave a message for McCarthy, from a touch-tone phone, call (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1894, or write her at The Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.