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BRIDES

How to Deal When You're Married to a Mama's Boy

RELATIONSHIPS

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Photo: Getty Images

The good news first: the way a man treats his mother is a pretty solid indicator of how he'll treat you. But what do you do when the relationship is a little too close for comfort? In other words, he's a total mama's boy? He seeks out advice on all things, including your marriage, from her (eek!) and has a tough time telling her no without feeling super guilty. Before you let the resentment continue to build, or worse, take matters into your own hands and confront his mom yourself (a definite no-no), try to inspire some positive changes with these tips.

Set boundaries

And by that we mean, have your husband set some boundaries with her, not you. "The most important thing for wives to do is not go at this head-on, as calling him a mama's boy or accusing her of interference will almost always backfire," warns marriage consultant and coach Lesli Doares, author of *Blueprint for a Lasting Marriage*. Instead, help your husband come to the conclusion himself regarding the appropriate role for his mom. "Getting clear about each one of your expectations for the marriage is a good place to start, including a discussion on boundaries with all family members and friends," points out Doares. "This will keep it from being focused solely on mom."

One such boundary should be that whatever happens in the marriage stays within the marriage or gets shared with a professional. According to clinical psychologist Dr. Paul Murdock, couples should never bring parents into their marital problems. "Crossing of this boundary can lead to significant discord."

Don't make him choose

Because the only person that wins in this scenario is, well, no one! Accept his mother as part of your marriage, and make it work, urges relationship expert and author April Masini. The alternative will result in a slow sizzle of resentment on his end, which is ultimately unhealthy for the two of you.

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Befriend her

If at all possible, try to become friends with her. This doesn't mean you have to hang out or chitchat on the phone daily, but do put forth the effort to form a bond and find some common ground. You may even surprise yourself. "If you invite her to lunch every month, call her once a week and make her the first invitational call for birthdays and holidays, she's going to relax and not bring her anxiety to your marriage," says Masini.

Show some empathy

Understand that how we feel about parents is different and differences are often good, notes Murdoch. This is why he advises exploring what the relationship means to each of them so that you can figure out how to make situations a win-win in the future. "If you criticize his mom, your husband will likely get defensive and take it personally. Even if our parents are far from perfect, we will typically defend them so forget criticism and first seek to understand and show empathy." If changes are needed, find a way to inspire them rather than force them, recommends Murdoch.

KEYWORDS:

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