

men's advice



On the COUCH

I am a 38-year-old man, divorced for the past six years; we have a 10-year-old daughter. I left my wife after she could not remain faithful, despite my not wanting to divorce her. She has had a series of boyfriends but with no serious commitments and is reliant on me for financial assistance.

I find it difficult to commit to another relationship. I keep my interactions casual and I do not allow my girlfriends to interact with my daughter. To be honest, I haven't found a woman for whom I'm prepared to compromise my relationship with my daughter.

My ex is extremely sensitive to the interference of another woman in the life of our child. I know that if I did try to get serious with another woman, she would turn our child against me and I don't think I can live with this. She makes excessive demands on me financially, and if I don't agree, she threatens that my visitation rights will be affected. I have done so much to make both of them happy and it just doesn't seem to be enough. How do I manage my ex-wife better without losing my daughter's love?

DR JOHN DEMARTINI: As long as you remain frightened of “losing” the connection to your ex-wife and the affection of your daughter, your ex-wife will continue to initiate drama, rule the show, cost you financially and have the upper hand.

If you worry about what she will say about you to your daughter, she will maintain control. If you continue to play the “underdog” in this persistently entangled relationship, she will continue to play the “overdog”, run the show and run you ragged. She is calling the shots because you have not stood up to her, made her accountable or had her face reality on financial matters. Such fear of loss and co-dependency from both parties is very disempowering.

In this disempowered state, you tend to sacrifice your highest values and your most inspiring objectives for your ex-wife, until you become frustrated enough to break the bonds and finally stand strong in your own truth and power. This is a lesson in how to be true to you, but you are not recognising it.

To bargain what you want in any relationship, you have to be able to walk away from the negotiation table as an equal. Resentment is what generally results on both sides when integrity is not brought to the table.

And she will continue to use the guilt trips to get what she wants unless you grow and stand firm as a co-leader of the family.

As a man and father, it's time to relinquish concern about their temporary emotional feelings, and do what's sound and wise for the sake of all family parties.

Financially rescuing your ex-wife, out of any lingering guilt or shame, is going to keep her dependent. Deep down, nobody wants to be dependent on someone else. Tell her that you're considering discontinuing the unbudgeted financial support. This will hopefully force her to quit the financial dependency and get a career of her own. At the very least, tell her you now intend to pay a budgeted amount per month, so she has to be accountable for her expenses and you are not constantly living with monthly uncertainties.

It might be beneficial to call her bluff and try to level the playing field by telling her you are considering going for full custody of your daughter, since she is not being responsible for your daughter's full welfare. Tell her she can have visitation rights on a scheduled basis. This might wake her up to a new reverse reality, and make her realise where the true power is.

Know that your daughter's love for you will never go away, even if a few challenges appear temporarily along the family journey. Your ex-wife's antics will eventually backfire. Children eventually always figure this game out.

It may be time to let go of the fantasy surrounding your previous wife and family life, and realise that your accumulated frustrations are there to break your attachment to these fantasies and set you free. It also may be time to open the door to another potential relationship with someone who will love you for who you truly are. ■

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