

# CONNECTIONS



BJ Mann is a Family Mediator in private practice in Rochester who helps people reduce conflict and improve relationships.

**My aging Mother is going to come to live with me. My siblings are all in town, and I am worried that we will end up fighting about her care and how best to help. My husband and I both work and have two children, 11 and 9. How can I make this work?**

You are wise to recognize the huge transition that your whole family is undergoing. As with all life changes, planning and communication are the cornerstones of success. You are equally wise to want to clarify what "help and cooperation" will look like in this new scenario.

To the extent that your mother is able, begin by discussing her expectations regarding how she wants to be included in the family and how she can still retain her independence. Are there daytime activities that she'll want to attend? How will she see her friends? With this information you'll be able to build a plan that meets her expectations and to clarify what help you'll need.

Next step is to have a family 'business meeting' with your siblings to discuss the range of issues that need to be addressed and blended with your Mother's expecta-

tions. There are two major issues that cause conflict when care-taking: money and time.

Begin by putting together an expense budget of care for your mother. Include things like home improvements to make her comfortable, extra house cleaning, funds for activities, fees for a driver to take her places if needed, food and even some sharing of the general household expenses, or in-home caretakers. Working from the budget, your siblings could evaluate what makes sense and you could all agree upon how to share the expenses. Expenses can be reconciled on a regular basis, or you can create a fund that you manage and be accountable to your siblings.

If some siblings cannot contribute funds, they may give their portion in time. A calendar can be very useful to develop an understanding of which siblings can help run errands, go to doctor's visits, provide respite care and research information.

Making assumptions that everyone is on the same page can lead to resentments. The key to avoiding conflict is really being clear about how to care for Mom. The gift of clarity will become a precious roadmap to making her aging days calm and loving. The added gift is the role modeling you show your children.

**I have been divorced for two years and my daughter is getting married. This will be the first gathering of the families after a pretty rocky end to the marriage. I am worried about how everyone will behave and how this will affect my daughter's special day.**

Preparing for a wedding is an anxious time for most families, because there are so many details to attend to. While your circumstances add to the challenge, I can offer some suggestions to reduce or minimize your fears.

Begin by choosing to take the high road and be a gracious host to everyone who attends. Imagine in advance saying hello and being pleasant to everyone, even the most difficult people. You can do it!

No doubt there has already been some communication between your former husband about wedding details, schedules, guest list and the like. Build on that with a gentle note inviting a truce for a day as a gift to your daughter. Be sure the letter has no shame or blame, just a simple statement of how you have committed yourself to be gracious and pleasant to everyone and that you are looking forward to sharing the day and want to reassure your former spouse that he need not worry about any awkward moments. Speaking of your behavior (and not his) will be the best message.

And finally, reassure your daughter of your plan and your sincere willingness to create a peaceful environment. Discuss how photos may be taken, seating arrangements and other group details, and share those plans with your former husband. Be sure to ask for his input.

In the end, it may be the Academy Award-winning presentation of your life, but it certainly will be worth it. Even the photos will reflect your serenity and graciousness. Congratulations and "stay in the joy;" these are precious and fleeting moments.

**If you have a question on relationships, family or personal, please be sure to send BJ your question to**

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