

Advice From The Trenches: Lost Boy

Dear C and Dr. B.:

I have no idea how to handle this situation.

Last summer, my brother-in-law, Steve, was murdered. He had 2 sons, Jeff and Mark, and a recently divorced wife who is absolutely crazy. She'd been a paid escort when Steve married her and from the start no one liked her. She estranged the rest of the family after their marriage by sending us poison letters criticizing us and making vile slurs against our kids. Until their recent divorce, Steve had been estranged from all of us too.

After the murder, she and the older son, Jeff, were arrested as suspects. She was released - they'd found a gun at her house but it was licensed and they couldn't connect it to the crime. Jeff was initially released too - but later, on a tip, the police found automatic weapons, explosives, and hard street drugs in his apartment. Now he's back in jail, but the murder remains unsolved because there may be a larger crime syndicate and a hit involved.

The younger son, Mark, wasn't implicated in any way, but he ended up basically homeless. He's just a teen, so he couldn't remain alone in the apartment where his dad was killed. My wife and I took him in. At first, it was OK; he seemed like a sweet kid. But now he is making our lives miserable. It is pretty clear he is totally messed up, but he's in denial about what is happening to his family. He just ignores everything we say. I can see that he's lost and I want to help him, but he's just not responding.

He had some court-ordered counseling but he won't go back. I don't want to just throw him out but the stress is taking a toll on my health and my wife is always upset. I asked the rest of my wife's family if we could have a meeting about Mark's future. My messages went unanswered! Is denial in the family genes???

I feel like I took a survivor from a shipwreck into my lifeboat and now he's threatening to sink all of us. What am I supposed to do?

- Survivor Sam

Dr. B says:

A lot depends on Mark's age and his current involvement with his mother and brother.

For younger kids in situations like this, intensive services might make a difference. Families like Mark's may often have bipolar, learning disorders, personality disorders, and PTSD all in the genetic mix, so medications, structured programming and multiple services are needed, and any involvement from the family of origin tends to make these therapies impossible.

Anyone who cares for these younger kids needs to be able, willing or capable of providing/coordinating these resources. If they can't, then turning a child over to DCYF is the best way to go.

In Mark's case, you are looking at a different picture. It is very hard if not impossible to combat genetics and environmental influences past a certain age. It puts your own family at risk. Unless

everyone is 100% committed it won't work; and you need to be realistic about the probable poor outcome anyway no matter what the sacrifice you all make. If this kid is a teen or young adult it is far too late for you to make a difference.

I'd turn Mark over to professional care - a group home, or rehab - whatever is most appropriate and relevant.

C says:

I have to say that although Dr. B's advice is certainly the most sensible thing to do - survival of your own family should be your priority - it paints a very bleak picture.

Mark's father is dead, his mother is nuts, and his brother is in jail. He has no coping skills and is screwing up the people around him so now his brother's own family turns him over to "professionals." It's as if he's been told "you're too messed-up to be around decent people" and then sent to a holding center to live with other messed-up people.

What I'd like to know is how *anyone* could deal with that kind of shit storm, coping skills or not. It's a no-win situation all around.

I don't recommend allowing Mark to stay and destroy your home. He needs professional help. But I think it is super important that you tell him that you still love him and care very deeply what happens to him. He'll act like he doesn't care, but he does. Make sure to tell him that you will always be there for him. But most importantly, tell him that HE has to start fighting back.

I feel for Mark too. He's already lost his home, his family, and whatever innocence he had left. But also, don't ever forget... he was raised by people who had no moral compass of their own, and his awareness was structured long before you took him in. Who knows what is hiding behind his sad, lost eyes? This isn't your battle to fight.

- Cathren Housley

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com