

Relationships

HI, CAROLYN: A number of months ago my wife went on a ladies' trip to Vegas with four married friends. Friends A, B and C hooked up with men they met.

My wife and I were at dinner recently with friend D and her husband and this all came out. My wife and friend D had been reticent to say anything because they didn't want to ruin the group dynamic. After much discussion, it was decided it wasn't our business and we should forget about it. But it's been nagging at me since and I can't seem to let it go. — **Husband of friend E**



CAROLYN HAX

DEAR HUSBAND: Sometimes information leaves a film, doesn't it? While it's natural to consider telling the truth as the best way to scrub off that film, I'm loath to challenge a decision you apparently made after giving the matter serious thought.

There are good arguments to be made on both sides of the meddle/don't meddle divide (though I'm not convinced that "it will ruin the group dynamic" is one of them).

But your nagging bad feelings do need to be addressed, so if you can do it without accusing/demanding/implying anything, consider revisiting the issue with your wife. Tell her the information still feels heavy, and ask her whether it's still on her mind, too.

Then you can either ask her how she made peace with it so that you can try her method yourself or suggest that you and she try to make peace with it together.

If your wife doesn't want any part of the conversation, just the fact of her discomfort might explain your own — and her dubious taste in friends.

If instead you both contribute willingly to a solution, be it logistical (say, you and she choose to distance yourselves from A, B and C) or philosophical (you affirm each other's dedication to and pleasure with honesty and fidelity), just the act of your coming to it together can go a long way toward getting this off your mind.

What won't work is glibly waving it off. It's not "ladies behaving badly" or a "little midlife crisis," it's betrayal, to which you're now a conscripted party. It's to your credit you're feeling its weight.

■ READ CAROLYN HAX EVERY DAY IN THE FREE PRESS. WRITE TO HER CARE OF THE WASHINGTON POST, STYLE PLUS, 1150 15TH ST., NW, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20071 OR E-MAIL TELLME@WASHPOST.COM.



Cassly Sullen III, a sophomore at Prairie View A&M in Texas, and his mother, Teresa Cowan, 44, of Detroit, celebrating Sullen's 18th birthday last year. The two say they have a great relationship.

From caretaker to coach

For parents, good communication is key when kids leave the nest

By ERIN HILL PERRY
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

As high school seniors choose the colleges they'll attend this fall, many parents are finding that a Relationships 101 course is not only a good idea, it's required.

Teresa Cowan, 44, of Detroit took a crash course.

When her son, Cassly Sullen III, left for Prairie View A&M in Texas a year and a half ago, she was excited to see him grow up, but nervous about him leaving home.

For years, she raised Sullen, now 19, as a single mom. But suddenly, the most important person in her life wasn't there.

She went from talking to her son every day to hearing from him once a month during his freshman year.

Cowan said she had to do something to fill the void.

"I had to find Teresa," said Cowan, a health science professor at Baker College. "She was in there, ready to surface."

Experts say many parents suffer from empty-nest syndrome — a feeling of sadness, loneliness and grief when their kids come of age and leave home. While there are no clear statistics, experts say the problem is especially common among parents whose children are leaving for college.

Cowan has learned to cope by building her own network of friends. These days, she's spending more time at her church, dining

at finer restaurants, dancing with friends and volunteering.

She's even taken on a bolder, more stylish image.

"I was on the hunt for outfits for a mature woman, rather than motherly clothes," Cowan says.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Experts recommend that parents and soon-to-be college students talk early and often about the changes that are coming to prevent a sudden void on either end.

"If families aren't very successful at communication when it's not a high transition time, they usually don't get any better during the transition," says Kay Kimball Gruder, a certified parent coach and founder of www.successfulcollegeparenting.com. "Good communication has a ripple effect on sharing expectations. Have an honest conversation about what the student might want and what the parent expects."

Cowan says that even though her relationship with her son has changed, she still plays a huge role in his life. She has shifted from caregiver to coach, and she talks to her son about faith, family and education.

Sullen, a social work and political science major, says his mother has done that well. He says she isn't overly involved in his day-to-day decisions.

"I'm sure she does trust me at least 80% of the time," he says.

whenever we do have our minor disagreements," Sullen says. "We try to push it aside because we aren't going to see each other for too long."

Sullen comes home twice a year — at Christmas and during the summer. When he's in Detroit, he pitches in at home.

"When I do see that something needs to be done that she's too tired to do, I'll try to carry the weight," he says.

Cowan says her son also makes time for them to attend church together and catch a few good meals at the Original House of Pancakes or Famous Dave's BBQ.

Cowan also had to warn her son about her own new social habits during his first visit home.

"I said to him ... I go out on Fridays. I'm home by 1:30 a.m., and I want my house in order. So whoever has to jump out the window, jump out the window. If you won't be home by 1:30 a.m., let me know. I have not had a problem since."

■ CONTACT ERIN HILL PERRY AT 313-222-6428 OR ELHILL@FREEPRESS.COM.



Today's topic

Do you plan everything or go with the flow? Here's what local moms had to say:

On Detroit.MomsLikeMe.com

"I guess what works for us, is I make plans to my glorious delight, and he just goes along with whatever I choose. But I do ask his input alot, as I don't want this to be all about me."

— Sue1

"I've always said my hubby has the book smarts and I have the common sense. We are actually of like mind on vacations and most things run smoothly for us, but it's temperament where we differ."

— last2know

ALUMINUM

- ANGLES
- CHANNELS
- FLATS • ROUNDS
- SQUARES • SHEET

Cut To Size
No Order Too Small

FEDERAL PIPE
AND SUPPLY COMPANY

6464 E. McNichols
(Corner Of Mt. Elliott)
(313) 366-3000

CITY DOOR

Since 1983 15732 W. 7 Mile Rd.
Detroit, MI, 1 Blk. W. of Greenfield

FREE
INSTALLATION
& LOCKS
30, 32, 36 X 80

WINTER SPECIALS!
Expires 1/31/11

Hours: Mon.-Fri., 9am-5pm
313-493-7020 313-515-6099
Store Cellular

LAZARE'S

END OF SEASON SALE

UP TO **80% OFF**

SCARVES
HANDBAGS
FINE WOOLS
LEATHERS
SHEARLINGS
FURS

LAZARE'S

Henry Ford Academy
SCHOOL for Creative Studies

College prep that's
different by design!

Apply now

Attend an Information Session for 2011-2012
Grades 6 - 10!

Jan. 8 10am - 12pm
Jan. 15 6PM - 8PM
Jan. 22 11am - 2pm
Jan. 29 3pm - 5pm
Feb. 7 1:30pm - 3pm

Register for a free information session
and receive a complimentary copy of
the 2011-2012 Student Handbook
313-481-4000