

Relationships

DEAR CAROLYN: I am an older woman, and not very mobile. I moved in with my son's family following an injury. They have been very helpful and supportive.



CAROLYN HAX

There is only one chair that I can get up from unassisted, in the living room. In the evenings, I like to watch TV there. But my daughter-in-law is resentful about my TV use.

When I was raising my son, our custom was to keep the TV on pretty much all of the time. My daughter-in-law has told me many times that she wants to keep the TV off pretty much all of the time.

My son got me a TV for my room, but I don't want to be there by myself. He also got me a recording device so I can watch my shows when my daughter-in-law is at work, but I don't understand how to use it. How can I get her to relax about my TV watching? — J.

DEAR J.: Given how you've dug yourself in against adapting, the daughter-in-law isn't alone in her stubbornness.

I'm sure you'd prefer to be able to hop about the house at will. Independence dies hard.

However, you're quick to dismiss the efforts your family has made to compromise. And you're quick to attribute your daughter-in-law's stance to her character, instead of considering that, just as you have concrete reasons for wanting the TV on, she might have concrete reasons for wanting it off.

For example: Even at a low volume, the TV is aural clutter, which annoys some people. It involves flickering light, also an irritant to some. (Game shows equal noise.)

And, further, when the TV is on, it takes a room that otherwise might be used for many purposes — conversation, hobbies, reading — and co-opts it for a single purpose: watching TV. So, suggestion 1: Lay off her. She opened her home and private life to you, and her preferences matter.

Suggestion 2: Have your son program the device to record your shows, so you'll need only to learn how to access them. I realize you're fighting a lifelong habit. However, watching when you're alone is the perfect, cooperative solution.

Suggestion 3: Since you want the company, stay in the living room as people come home, TV off, with magazines, puzzles, crafts, anything you needn't plug in. In this home, that's the inclusive move.

■ 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.

Wives face challenge of what to call themselves

By ERIN HILL PERRY
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

What's in a name? Ask Gwendolyn Malone Rhodes. She's had a lot of them. Born Gwendolyn Malone, she took her first husband's name and became Gwendolyn Smith. After they divorced, she kept her ex-husband's surname because she wanted to share a last name with her two daughters. When one of the girls asked why she hadn't changed her name back to Malone, she did just that.

When she entered her second marriage, to Dr. Robert Rhodes 17 years ago, she decided to go by her maiden name and a combination name.

At work, it's Malone. Socially, it's Malone Rhodes. "It's not clean at all," the West Bloomfield resident admits. "My travel name and my social name is Gwen Malone Rhodes. And my e-mail is Malone. My driver's license says Gwen Malone Rhodes. Social Security card is Gwen Malone."

She figures she'll straighten it all out before she retires.

When it comes to names, couples have a lot to think about. While it is still common for a woman to take her husband's last name and drop hers, these days, there are all kinds of other possibilities: The wife keeps her name and adds her husband's name; the wife hyphenates the two names, making it one long last name; the wife just keeps her original surname, or the husband adds the wife's surname to his last name.

Getting the name — or name combo — just right can have major implications for the relationship, experts say. If a woman decides to stick with her original surname, hubby might see it as a snub. Change to the husband's last name, and the woman might feel like she's lost her identity.

According to the Knot Wedding Network's 2009 Real Weddings study, which surveyed more than 21,000 U.S. couples who were married that year, 86% of brides are still taking their husband's names.

Amy Eisinger, editor for **WeddingChannel.com**, says name blending — when the couple combines their last names — is gaining popularity, however. She cites Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa as an example. He was born Antonio Villar, but combined his last name with his wife's last name, Raigosa, to get their family name. (Villaraigosa and his wife, Corina Villaraigosa, were divorced in the fall.)

"Hyphenating and blending is ultra-modern and shows equality and unity," Eisinger says.



Malone Rhodes family

Dr. Robert Rhodes and his wife, Gwendolyn Malone Rhodes, who goes by just her maiden name, Malone, in some instances.

IT'S COMPLICATED

Sharon R. Williams, 54, of Detroit has been married for 25 years; she never took the surname of her husband, Charles L. Jackson Jr.

"It was not necessarily a political statement, but a personal statement," says Williams, who is the CEO of a health care plan. "I didn't need to change my name to show that someone loved me enough to marry me and gave me their last name."

Over the years, people have questioned whether Williams and her husband are really married. Others question her commitment to her husband. Williams has learned to use humor in dealing with the inquiries: "If he had some fabulous last name like Ferrari," she'd change her name in a heartbeat.

Still, women who think it's just easier to keep their own name might be in for a surprise. Williams sure was when she had to take her marriage license to an IRS office to prove she and her husband were married.

"So, I can't be legitimately married because I didn't change my last name?" she asks. "That's when it becomes political because folks are challenging you because you aren't going along with the norm."

Jackson, 54, a restorative justice specialist, says he wanted his wife to keep her last name.

"It means something," Jackson says. "The name Sharon Williams had some meaning in the community, and I'm sure in her family. She had her own reputation."

Jackson says the person who spoke out the most about Williams not taking his name was her grandmother. He says the grandmother, now deceased, made checks out to "Sharon Jackson."

In the case of divorce, the name game gets trickier.

If the woman takes her husband's name, gets divorced and wants to go back to her original surname, she'd better

be sure to ask for it back during divorce proceedings.

"They want to know that you're not trying to change your name to escape any debts," says Regina M. Franco, a Bloomfield Hills family law attorney.

Malone Rhodes learned that the hard way. The day after her daughter asked why she hadn't changed her name, she went to a Secretary of State branch with her birth certificate and divorce decree.

When she was told that she needed to have proof that a judge said she could have her name back, she was angry.

"We kept going back and forth at the counter," Malone Rhodes recalled. "It was a Friday afternoon, very crowded, and she decided she was not going to fight with me and she processed the paperwork."

On Detroit.MomsLikeMe.com

Today's topic

At what age should kids start doing their own laundry? Here's what local moms had to say:



"Preferably the beginning of 9th grade. I think they value their clothes more and comprehend the cost of replacement should they ruin things."
—HappyMomof4girls

"Mine started doing their own sometime during their freshman year."
—Coco958

"So far, my kids sort the lights and darks, put away the majority of their clean clothes (although I do cringe a bit when I look in the dressers), and they help fold socks. I figure I'll start them out on washing towels and sheets."
—pgeds

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