

Mother-in-law/Daughter-in-law Friction

A great deal has been written over the years about the mother/daughter dynamic. We have all seen examples of seemingly impossible stand-offs and even shoot-outs. To be fair, we have also seen the direct opposite where lifetime friendships evolve out of the trauma of necessary childhood restraints and supervision.

There often seems to be a different set of interactions that go on between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. I will drop the "in-law" portion of their description henceforth for simplification.

We sometimes see a fierce competition for the attention and affection of the guy involved. Most commonly reported seems to be the mom who thinks there is no female in the universe, (herself excepted), that is good enough for her son. Some daughters struggle for acceptance, which may or may not be forthcoming and some get hooked and take on a battle they can never win.

Then, there's the example of the mom who wants to be friends with the daughter and is forever seen to be the enemy.

What I've recently run across is a more complex example of the seemingly eternal struggle. This involved a son and mom who had never worked out their own conflicts. Put simply, she had been grossly overprotective and he had never gotten over finding out that she had feet of clay. The daughter had a long-standing war with her own mother, who expected her to assume a conventional position of lifetime service which she resented and refused to deliver. When these two married, an interesting pattern resulted...where they agreed to ignore her mother who appeared to be demanding eternal attention from a victim posture while they mutually agreed to hate his mother as evil incarnate. Thus both moms were locked out.

We can get stuck in stereotypes and in the belief that our particular situation is untenable. That's seldom true. What we can do about it, all of us, no matter what our roles are in these situations, is to see that we are responsible for our own feelings, reactions and conduct. Blaming is perhaps the most serious offense of all.

If we hit a brick wall and can't communicate beyond the prejudices of the other person or people involved, we can still look within and clean up our own act. In addition, we can refuse to permanently close any door that is slammed in our face, so to speak. No one has a crystal ball and no one knows what may transpire in the future to alter the whole thing.

A last possibility is to look more closely at the relationships that abound and seem to thrive without any serious adversarial components at all. Perhaps it's just the luck of the draw or maybe it's two people who are above average in their own growth and development. However, there's always the possibility that we might find role models who could teach us a thing or two. What a novel concept!

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About the Author

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