

Relationships with both 'dads' best for child



CAROLYN
HAX

Dear Carolyn:

I share custody of my 3½-year-old daughter with my ex-wife, who got remarried last year. Her new husband describes himself as a "nice guy" and is overtly hoping that somehow I fail as a father so he can be "daddy."

The divorce was anything but amicable. While things have been relatively smooth for the last nine months, I still hear my daughter from time to time refer to him as "daddy." I reinforce she has only one daddy, but this is really getting old.

I think it's deplorable, and I've spoken to both my ex-wife and her husband about the issue. She has assured me that she has spoken to him, but I can't trust her. I recognize he has a parenting role in my daughter's life since she lives 50 percent of the time with them. However, I think it's extremely immature and frankly disrespectful to my daughter. I don't want to go to court again. The vampire matrimonial attorneys have sucked me dry.

What do I do? — Anonymous

Dear Anonymous: You are the one and only Daddy, yes. However, like it or not, your daughter has three parents now, two of them male.

Dickering over titles will only validate the role the other man-parent has apparently carved out for himself: nice guy, rescuer of your ex from the bad guy (aka you), protector of your daughter from on-going ex-marital rancor. Keep up the outrage and the "deplorables," and you only strengthen his hand.

And that anger, oh my — please, please do something about it.

You've been sucked dry, I get it, but from whatever scant blood supply you have remaining, please make a withdrawal to secure the services of a competent, reputable, resentment-tempering, perspective-engen-



IF HE PAYS YOUR COLLEGE TUITION, THEN YOU CAN CALL HIM DAD. TILL THEN HIS NAME IS "THAT GUY MOMMY MARRIED."

dering shrink.

As your daughter's one and only daddy, you have a much greater obligation than to protect your title and, well, ego. You need to focus on your daughter's well-being, period. During your 50 percent of the time, what you need to reinforce isn't your one-daddy worldview, but instead that you love her, listen to her, look out for her best interests. Period.

That means not undermining whatever bond is forming between her and her stepfather — painful as it may be for you to watch it happen.

There is an urgently important reason for this: If the bond with her stepfather is healthy, then having two homes where your daughter is loved and supported is the best possible outcome for her.

And if the bond with the stepfather is not healthy — for any reason, be it his ego-driven need to displace you as No. 1

man-parent, or something more sinister — then where will you be if you've already forced her to choose sides? You can't be in the position of having squandered your daughter's trust and good will over such a trifle as a name.

I understand your paternal primacy is anything but a trifle and that the name issue is symbolic of your legitimate quest for respect. But you need to sever the symbol from the goal and concentrate on the goal of being her No. 1 dad.

Dear Carolyn: Buddy 1 needs some business help, and Buddy 2 is superbly qualified to provide it. I already told 2 that I'd pass her contact information on to 1, but I haven't yet. See, 2 was embroiled in quite a sex scandal earlier this year, which was covered a little bit in the local paper. Do I tell 1 about this? If it were me, I'd want to know and make my own decisions.

He might already know, but I doubt it.

There's no worry about 2 coming on to him (he's not her type and they'd probably conduct business by e-mail and telephone anyway).

Surely you've encountered a similar situation before. What is the protocol here? — A.

Dear A: Actually, this is my first public-sex-scandal-meets-job-reference protocol question ever. But I'll do my best.

If the scandal has any bearing on the work 2 would be doing for 1, or on 1's professional reputation, then you must mention the scandal.

Otherwise, you're just spreading dirt. Surely, too, there are karmic points to be won for helping a scandal die versus helping the vile thing along.

E-mail Carolyn at tellme@washpost.com. © 2010, Washington Post Writers Group.