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“MY MOM PICKS FIGHTS WITH MY HUSBAND.”



→ **THE SITUATION:** Six years ago, Teresa* and her husband married and moved to Charlotte, N.C., more than 600 miles from her family. Now, every time her “bossy, opinionated and judgmental” mom visits, she picks fights with her son-in-law. “How can I help them find some common ground?” the 32-year-old *puertorriqueña* asks.

THE SOLUTION: “Common ground is a nice idea, but that may not happen,” says Carmela Pérez, Ph.D., a psychoanalyst with New York City-based Dynamic Psychological Services. “There’s no obligation for them to love each other, but there does need to be respect and civility.” Teresa’s first step is to talk to her mom and husband—separately. “Her mother thinks he’s a threat to the parental relationship, especially since they moved away. Making her discuss it with her son-in-law will only add to the threat,” Pérez explains. Teresa needs to reassure her husband that she’ll handle it. “Then she should enlist her mother as a ‘wife mentor,’” Pérez says. “That will bring a new aspect to their relationship, give her mother something to look forward to and show that she still loves her.”



“My mom and boyfriend are too cozy.”



→ **THE SITUATION:** Ana’s boyfriend is way too close to her mom, texting her for relationship advice and even going on family vacations at her insistence. “He wants to convince her he’s a keeper, and she feels intelligent and less self-conscious about her English around him,” explain Ana, a Linden, New Jersey-based 22-year-old whose parents are Brazilian and Portuguese. “It was great at first, but now I think if I broke up with him, she’d be mad at me! How can I make them understand how awkward this is?”

THE SOLUTION: “Getting along is great, but this is too much! It sounds like they formed a strong bond because they see themselves in each other; Mom is self-conscious, and he really needs to be liked,” Pérez says. Ana needs to reassure him that he’s already won her affection. “She should tell her mother that while she’s happy she feels comfortable with her boyfriend, she’s feeling pressured to keep the relationship going,” Pérez says. Ana should be focusing on her own relationship with her man—not her mom’s.



“ABUELA IS LAYING ON THE PRESSURE.”



→ **THE SITUATION:** Illiana has a gorgeous boyfriend who rubs her feet and makes her laugh—but he’s a dreamer with no life plan. “I just turned 30, and my *abuela* gave him a three-month deadline to ask for my hand,” says Illiana, who’s Puerto Rican and from Huntsville, Ala. “Do I marry this loving man like I’m ‘supposed’ to, or hold out for someone more ambitious? And how can I get my grandmother to relax?”

THE SOLUTION: First, Illiana must decide what she wants. “I’ve seen lots of women who married dreamers, had to support them and ended up resentful,” Pérez says. She should be frank about her concerns and ask how he plans to support a family. Whatever he says, it’s key to follow her gut. “She has to base her decision on how she feels about him right now. Who knows what the future holds?” Pérez stresses. As for Abuela, she should thank her for her wisdom and remind her that marriage is an important step and that it takes time to make the right decision. Besides, she’d probably be more upset about a divorce than a delayed wedding!



“My family won’t accept my man.”

→ **THE SITUATION:** Wendy, a Dominican from the Bronx, New York, has been dating an African American man for a year, but her family wants the 24-year-old to move on. “They don’t say anything to him, but they have misguided views about African Americans—I’ve actually had family members say they are violent and smelly,” she says. “How can I get them to accept my boyfriend?”

THE SOLUTION: “She should explain to her family that she loves him and that if they love her, they must keep an open mind and get to know him,” Pérez says. No change? “Next time, say, ‘If you’re going to talk like that, then we can’t have a conversation right now,’ and walk away,” she says. “It’s important to follow your words with action. Problematic behaviors often continue because there’s no consequence. Introduce one, and things will change.” She should also talk to her boyfriend; he probably senses that something is wrong. “It’s important to acknowledge that there’s tension and assure him she will intervene,” Pérez says. But keep hurtful details under wraps—no need to pass along negativity.

*Names have been changed to protect privacy.