



Dear Doreen



Cape Cod therapist Doreen Quinn has joined our team of contributing writers to answer your life questions. In her first column, Doreen responds to reader's concerns about parenting, child support and divorce.

Send your questions to:  
[DearDoreen@capewomenonline.com](mailto:DearDoreen@capewomenonline.com)

Dear Doreen,

My former boyfriend hasn't been paying child support for our daughter. When I press the issue, he accuses me of being an unfit mother. What should I do to get him to pay?

Brittany, Falmouth

Dear Brittany,

Since you didn't state if you have a court order for child support, I'm going to assume you don't. Child support is mandatory in Massachusetts. Contact an attorney to discuss this issue. If you cannot afford an attorney, contact legal services for advice.

I'm assuming his accusations don't have any factual data to support them. It appears he's trying to bully you so he doesn't have to pay. This is very sad and irresponsible on his part.

Please seek legal help so that both of you can move past this issue and focus on parenting your child. Remember, it's important for a child to have a relationship with both parents. Let me know how things work out.

Dear Doreen,

My adult father lives with my husband and me. He has a cat that we don't want in the house. How should we approach this problem?

Jennifer, Mashpee

Dear Jennifer,

Having a pet in the home can cause some additional work but it can also give unconditional love and

companionship. If the cat is fulfilling this role in your father's life, you may want to consider keeping the cat but setting parameters.

Honest communication between you and your father can lead to a compromise. Determine together where the cat can sleep and play in the house and set a trial period of 2-3 months.

Respecting your father's needs and at the same time stating yours opens the door for open communication. This can result in compromises where everyone's needs are met. Good Luck!

Dear Doreen,

My eldest daughter is leaving home for college in three weeks. She's been irritable, demanding and crying for the past ten days. My husband and I want her last few weeks at home to be peaceful, fun and loving. What can we do?

Sandra, Marstons Mills

Dear Sandra,

Your daughter's behavior is typical of adolescents trying to break away from their families and begin their own journeys. Many young people have difficulty transitioning from home to college, resulting in them acting out before leaving home.

The first step in diffusing a situation with an adolescent is to calmly state the truth in a loving and gentle manner. Tell her you understand how all the transitions about to occur can cause people to feel overwhelmed and anxious. Maybe share a past experience in which you felt similar feelings and how you worked through them, then step back and let her process the conversation without you pushing for her to increase communication.

Try to plan a special day or evening where you and she are able to do something together. Attend a concert, shop or simply go for ice cream. Good Luck to all of you.

Dear Doreen,

My husband and I are divorcing. We have three children, ages 12, 10 and 8. How do we tell them we are going to divorce and their father is going to live somewhere else?

Keri, Centerville

Dear Keri,

Divorce is a difficult time for everyone. Many children believe they're the reason for the divorce, so it's very important to tell them that you love them and that it's mommy's and daddy's problem.

Children need to learn about an impending divorce from both parents. Choose a time for all of you to sit down together. Tell the children their father will be living elsewhere; if you know the location, tell them. Make sure they know when their father is going to leave; date, day, etc. If you've already worked out a visitation schedule, share that with the children as well.

It's important for you and your husband to remain kind and respectful of one another, especially in the presence of your children. Children can sense tension and anger, so try to minimize these. A few days after your conversation, try to check in with each of your children individually. Children sometimes hold back their feelings, and may need individual attention from each of you to open up. I wish all of you the very best and please let me know how you're doing.

Doreen Quinn resides on Cape Cod with her family. She is actively involved in her community and specializes in helping individuals find their core self.

She earned her masters degree in social work from Boston College and has been counseling groups, individuals, families, couples and adolescents for over ten years on Cape Cod.

Doreen deals extensively with issues of substance abuse, parenting, bullying and social skills. She is a member of the Cape Cod Suicide Prevention Coalition, South Shore Independent Therapists, and National Association of Social Workers.

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