

Q social Q's

How can I get myself invited to my husband's family parties?

By Philip Galanes
The New York Times

Q: My new husband and his brother get together most weekends to play music with friends. They meet up in my brother-in-law's large basement. These get-togethers turn into daylong events, culminating in dinners at local bars or drinks at my brother-in-law's house. The problem: I'm often not invited! Since I don't play music, I feel that my sister-in-law has to invite me to hang out with her while the boys jam. But her invitations are far less frequent than the gatherings. I appreciate that she has a busy life, but she usually ends up joining the others for drinks or dinner. And I feel left out: My husband, our friends and my in-laws are sharing meals every week while I sit at home alone because my sister-in-law doesn't want to spend the day with me. Any advice for navigating this disappointing dynamic? — NEWLYWED

Ask your husband to call you once he and his brother have stowed their musical instruments. This way, you can join the after-parties without requiring your sister-in-law to babysit you all day. She has errands to run and a life to live — just like you. Put this down to a small miscommunication with your new husband and take it as a lesson going forward: Ask for what you want! We rarely get the things we don't ask for.

Art of property-line diplomacy

Q: My neighbor has a big oak tree on his property that is shading our yard to the detriment of plants and smaller trees. I have his permission to trim the branches that overhang our property line, and my landscaper will do the work. May I ask our neighbor to share the cost? — NEIGHBOR

A: Occasionally, the law diverges from our ideals of neighborliness. Under common law — the large body of law based on judicial decisions — you have both the right and the obligation to trim branches that overhang your property line. This reflects the sanctity of property in law: Not even the owner of a tree may trespass onto a neighbor's property to trim branches on the other side of the line.

So, you didn't need your neighbor's permission, and he is not required to split the landscaping bill with you. (Check your local law to be sure.) Still, I think you promoted friendly relations by letting him know what



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you intended to do. And just because he isn't required to share the cost doesn't mean he won't — if you ask him nicely.

Overextending an invitation

Q: My husband's cousin mentioned that she and her family would be visiting our city for a week over the holidays. My husband immediately offered up our guest room. He assumed it was for only her and her spouse, and that she would probably not accept. Not only do they intend to spend the entire week with us, but they also plan to bring their two adult children with them. Our guest room sleeps two. The house is undergoing renovations, and after a year of fertility challenges, I was hoping for a more restful holiday. My husband reached out to his cousin to intimate that there was not enough room, but she seemed oblivious. Is there any way out of this? (We can handle two people for three nights, but that's it.) — WIFE

A: Of course, there's a way out of this, but it requires acknowledging your husband's mistake directly — not intimating anything (whatever that entailed) or muddying the waters with tales of renovation or fertility challenges. He should say: "I'm sorry, but I misspoke. We don't have room for four. We can accommodate two people for three nights. Will that work?"

You will not come off as the heroes here. Your husband's cousin said at the outset that her family — not just she and her husband — was coming for a week, and yet he still issued a blanket invitation. The adult way out of this is to apologize.

She's setting boundaries for two

Q: I am pregnant. Well-meaning friends and relatives ask me to text them pictures of my growing belly. I have no interest in doing this, and I think people's fascination with pregnant bodies is invasive. Should I ignore these requests? Or is there a way to answer directly without giving offense? — A.

A: Last week, I watched a woman on the subway approach a pregnant stranger and ask to touch her belly. (I nearly fainted!) So, I'm pleased that you can recognize the happiness for you in these requests, as well as the fact that pregnancy does not make your body communal property. Respond: "Thanks for sharing my excitement! But I don't feel comfortable texting pictures of my body." No is a complete answer.

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