

Dealing with a critical mom health notes

From page 16

Decide whether to confront her or not about it

QUESTION:

I am an adult and my mother keeps commenting on what I wear and what my hair looks like. Her comments range from, "Are you sure you want to wear that," to, "I like your hair long, not short. Short hair makes your face look fat." I know my mother loves me but I can't stand it anymore. How can I talk to her about this without her getting mad?

Answer:

I wish I could tell you how to have a real conversation with your mother without her having any feelings but I don't think that is possible. She may get mad. She may distance herself from you. She may tell you not to be so sensitive. This will probably be hard for you since it sounds like you have hesitated to share your authentic feelings with her in the past to avoid the difficult, and maybe scary, moment that lies ahead of you with your mother.

The first principle to



understand, even if your mother doesn't, is that healthy relationships follow a pattern of rupture and repair. If a conflict or disagreement occurs, it is not the end of the world and people are not permanently wounded. In your case, you might say to your mother, "Mom, I am an adult now and I can decide what I wear and how my hair is cut. It makes me feel like you do not accept who I am when you are critical of me and I get really upset with you. Can you please stop saying that to me?"

If your mother is open to hearing about how you have experienced these comments, she might be embarrassed, hurt, etc., but she would reflect on her comments, and think

about changing how she is in the future. It wouldn't be devastating; it would just be new information. You would feel comforted by her ability to hear you and the conflict would dissipate without any further discomfort for both of you.

The difficult part for you is that your mother may not join you in the repair side of the equation and you will be left to manage her feelings of anger or distance on your own. I am hopeful that if you can trust in yourself and know that you are being healthy by telling your mom directly how you feel, you will be able to withstand the "backlash."

You may want to tell your partner or a friend what has happened so that you are not forced to deal with the feelings on your own. One of the complicating factors in these dynamics is they usually trigger some very old feelings from childhood when you likely had no choice but to stay silent in the face of your mother's critical comments. Try to remind yourself that you are not a child anymore, that you have other supports, and are not trapped in the experience because you do not live with your mother

anymore.

If you do not think you will be able to withstand the potential backlash and decide not to say anything, that is OK too. You will just want to find a way to insulate yourself the next time so that the comments don't get to you too much.

One way to do this is to say, "I don't agree mom" and then move forward. Over time she may realize that her comments are not going to change how you dress or what your hair looks like. She will learn that you are not going to engage with her in those moments.

I find that it is often the feeling of being silenced that is most painful for individuals who choose not to confront their parent in the moment. Be kind to yourself and understand that you are doing the best you can in those difficult moments. You are not simply being passive; you are making a choice to protect yourself. You are OK.

Julia Staub-French, M.A., R.C.C., is the director of clinical programs at Family Services of the North Shore. Questions? Write onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca or call 604-988-5281.

Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions: A free workshop for adults of all ages experiencing ongoing health issues, Tuesdays, until Aug. 18, 1-3:30 p.m. at Silver Harbour Centre, 144 East 22nd St., North Vancouver. Info and registration: 604-940-3568.

The Gift of Dyslexia: A lecture hosted by Dyslexia Vancouver, which offers the Davis Dyslexia Correction program to children and adults struggling with dyslexia and other learning difficulties, featuring Ron Davis, author and expert, Saturday, Aug. 22, 1:30-3:30 p.m. at The Sanctuary, 949 West 49th Ave., Vancouver. Cost: \$10/\$18. Registration recommended, 778-994-5875. Info: www.rondavislectures or www.dyslexiavancouver.com.

Summerfest — Feel Good Fridays: Lonsdale Quay is holding free health and wellness clinics and sustainability and balanced lifestyle activities until Sept. 6 at 123 Carrie Cates Ct., North Vancouver. Donations accepted for the Lions Gate Hospital Foundation. Info: 604-985-6261 or www.lonsdalequay.com.

Husbands' Only Caregiver Support Group: Husbands caring for a wife with dementia are invited to register for this group which starts Tuesday, Sept. 8 at 1 p.m. Registration and info: 604-984-8348 or ksutherland@alzheimercb.org.

B.C. Lung Association's Annual Bicycle Trek: Registration is taking place now for the 25th anniversary of this event that will take place Sept. 12 and 13. Bike two days and 200 kilometres to help raise funds in support of clean air and lung health. Registration and info: 604-731-5864 or 1-800-665-5864 or www.bc.lung.ca.

See more page 20

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